

**DRAFT**

**WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT  
UNIFIED STATE PLAN**

**CONNECTICUT PYS 2024-2027**

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## I. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### A. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE

This is a Unified State Plan.

### B. PLAN INTRODUCTION OR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State of Connecticut has opted to submit a Unified State Plan. The plan encompassing the six core programs covered by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) – Adult Program, Dislocated Worker Program, Youth Program, Wagner-Peyser Act Program, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program, and Vocational Rehabilitation Program – includes details about the efforts of the Governor’s Workforce Council and Chief Workforce Officer to the Connecticut Unified State Plan and also includes reference to the linkages for various Federal and State funded education and training, workforce development grants, and programs.

Governor Lamont has stated his goal to ensure our state workforce system is designed to meet the needs of the 21st century. Toward that end, the Governor signed Executive Order No. 4 on October 29, 2019, which directed the creation of the Governor’s Workforce Council (GWC), formerly known as the Connecticut Employment and Training Commission and designated as the WIOA-mandated state workforce board. In 2021, the GWC was codified in state law under PL 21-2 and the number of council members was expanded to include additional representation from community-based organizations and other sectors (see full list of membership composition located in Section III (b)(3)(B)). This codification also included the creation of the Office of Workforce Strategy, to oversee the work of the GWC, and established the Chief Workforce Officer as the Department Head to the Agency.

The GWC is responsible for partnering with the business community and addressing barriers amongst state government agencies so Connecticut can have the most aligned, high-quality, and equitable workforce development system in the country. The GWC includes top executives from key industries, as well as leaders of nonprofits, unions, the legislature, and educational institutions.

#### **The Governor’s Workforce Council**

The GWC is emblematic of our administration’s approach of bringing the public and private sectors together to drive our state’s economic growth. Strategic goals of the GWC include:

- Establishing an equitable and aligned workforce system that creates a foundation for an inclusive talent environment;
- Attracting and inspiring a diverse range of students, workers, and businesses by integrating the expertise of the public, private and nonprofit sectors, and anticipating and preparing for workforce needs across all industries;
- strengthening the bridge from secondary to post-secondary education;
- reducing barriers so that all individuals can receive the education, training and supports to achieve meaningful careers; and
- measuring data-informed outcomes and making data-driven decisions.

The GWC coordinates among and liaises with stakeholders in the workforce system, including businesses, state agencies, quasi-public and independent entities, boards, councils, and commissions, public and private education and training institutions, workforce development boards, nonprofit institutions and labor unions. The first meeting of the GWC was held on November 21, 2019. Full Council meetings are held quarterly with Committee work proceeding between meetings.

#### **The Office of Workforce Strategy**

The supporting agency, the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) was established in 2019 and fully

codified in 2021 to provide staff to the Council. OWS operationalizes the GWC to:

- Serve as the primary advisor to the Governor and the administration on workforce development policy
- 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
- 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
- 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
- Provide staff to the Governor's Workforce Council, Connecticut's WIOA-mandated state workforce board
- Research national and state workforce development policy best practices to help bring continuous innovation to Connecticut
- Partner with employers, educators, government, and community organizations to implement the strategic initiatives outlined in the Governor's Workforce Council's strategic plan
- Partner across state agencies and the private sector to help advise on and coordinate existing workforce development initiatives and programs

See Section III (a) for detailed role and functions.

As promised by the inaugural Chair of the GWC, the Workforce Strategic Plan was released on October 28, 2020, one year from Governor Lamont's Executive order. The Plan details a coordinated, statewide strategy for building an equitable, inclusive, and innovative workforce that meets the needs of the current economic environment. This Plan was a collaborative effort and solicited feedback and recommendations from industry representatives, educators, philanthropic and community-based organizations, and other key groups. The original Plan recommends strategies in four key areas: business leadership, education and training in support of career pathways, equity and access, and data.

The initial Council Committees established in 2020 were charged with advancing initiatives in the areas of:

- Business Leadership, addressing skills-based hiring, quality jobs, and CampusCT (retaining college graduates)
- Equity & Access – addressing persistent barriers that undermine access to sustainable work and training opportunities
- Education and Career Pathways, addressing Pathways Policy & Development (High School to Post Secondary, including areas of Dual Credit/Dual Enrollment, Business Leadership Partnerships, Career Exploration & Advising, Teacher Professional Development), Adult Education, and Work-based Learning
- Data and Performance, addressing Credential Registry; jobs.ct.gov; Dashboards & Standard Evaluation Framework; CTHires Enhancements; P20WIN Workforce data queries

In the spirit of continuous evaluation and improvement, and to ensure that the Strategic Plan

remains “living”, the original Committees were expanded to include additional initiatives that were identified during the first year of implementation and through lessons learned. Currently underway, the Chief Workforce Officer and the GWC Committees have drafted the Workforce Strategic Plan set for release in mid-2024. The Strategic Plan has been organized across a set of overarching, foundational and strategic pillars, with associated GWC committees aligned to them to guide and advance the work:

#### OVERARCHING PILLAR

- Workforce System Alignment – charged with developing a coordinated workforce development system that brings key stakeholders across public agencies, as well as business and nonprofits, together to effectively align resources and expertise, measure outcomes, assess what works and scale those practices that enable all residents of Connecticut to access high-quality jobs.

#### FOUNDATIONAL PILLARS

- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Access — charged with focusing on strategies to enable marginalized communities, including re-entry population, veterans, people with disabilities, youth, and BIPOC, to have equitable access to high-quality jobs, and advancing efforts to remove barriers to participating in education, training and work by addressing areas that include childcare and early childhood education; transportation; addressing “benefits cliffs”; and implementing AJC Navigator Pilots.
- Data and Accountability – ensuring that data guides workforce development strategy and serves as the basis for all decision making on workforce development programming including planning, implementation, and overall evaluation by providing centralized guidance and best practices on how data should be used.

#### STRATEGIC PILLARS

- Education and Career Pathways – addressing education to career pathways policy and development (high school to post-secondary, including areas of dual credit/dual enrollment, industry partnerships, career exploration and advising, teacher professional development), adult education, and work-based learning, and ensuring equitable re-engagement supports and flexible career pathways on-ramps for high-risk youth.
- Industry Leadership (formerly Business Leadership) – addressing the development of high-quality career pathways and sector-based training programs, including skills-based hiring, good jobs, and supporting Regional Sector Partnerships (RSPs, including new RSPs in Architecture, Construction and Engineering.
- Sector-based Training – addressing short-term training across in-demand industry sectors, incumbent worker training, SNAP Employment and Training, and aligning current and future workforce development funding sources to scale best practice models, with a focus on those that offer a robust set of supports including childcare, transportation, stipends, housing, etc.

An Executive Committee, comprised of chairs of each of the 6 committees that represent the Pillars above, as well as leadership from OWS and two representatives from education partners will support the work of the committees and their charges.

#### **Investing In America – Investments in Connecticut**

With unprecedented amounts of federal funding available to states through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), and the Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors (CHIPS) Act, it is vital that Connecticut’s workforce ecosystem work together to strategically secure funding and maximize its impact. With grants addressing infrastructure improvements in bus and rail transportation, highways and bridges, traffic control, facilities and clean energy, air, and water, as well as universal access to broadband, there will be a great need for a trained and ready workforce to accomplish the work. Therefore, it is vital that the

agencies overseeing these projects are working in close collaboration with the workforce system and are aligned in their workforce strategy. The following represent ways that Connecticut is utilizing funding as a result of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law:

#### CT BILT

Connecticut established the Connecticut Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (CT BILT) team led by Department of Revenue Services Commissioner Mark Boughton, who was named by Governor Lamont as his Senior Advisor on Infrastructure. This team tracks grant opportunities and brings agencies together to work on proposals and coordinate state strategy. State agencies including the Office of Workforce Strategy, the Office of Policy and Management, and the Departments of Administrative Services, Transportation, Energy and Environmental Protection, Health, and Economic and Community Development meet biweekly in a technical meeting to discuss coordination, opportunities, and challenges including workforce needs.

#### CT Clean Economy Council

The Clean Economy Council, created through Executive Order 21-3 advises on workforce in clean energy, including the pursuit, strategy, and implementation of federal funds. Chaired by representatives from the Department of Economic and Community Development and Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, the Council is staffed by the Office of Workforce Strategy with a membership of stakeholders in the clean energy and workforce space. The Council has held in-person sector-based events to gather stakeholders and identify workforce needs.

A Clean Energy Workforce Needs Assessment is currently being managed through the Council. Through the process of applying for and being awarded federal funding, the Office of Workforce Strategy and Department of Energy and Environmental Protection have identified a need for a clean energy workforce roadmap. While having successfully collaborated and applied for funding, the Council would greatly benefit from a deeper understanding of employment needs, emerging technologies, and training programs necessary to fill current and future gaps. The results of the Needs Assessment will help Connecticut to be more strategic in investing in new workforce training programs or supplementing existing ones, and it will enable us to continue strengthening our partnerships.

#### National Governors Association and Connecticut Transportation Careers

Last spring the National Governors Association came to Connecticut to attend a workshop with state stakeholders including the Office of Workforce Strategy, Department of Transportation, Department of Labor, Office of Apprenticeship Training, CT Building Trades Training Institute and others. The theme “Leveraging Transportation Careers in Connecticut” provided the opportunity to share successful training programs across state agencies and other entities and outlined ways that agencies and stakeholders can work together under new federal infrastructure funding. Cross-agency partnerships have been created and will continue to be vital to the success of our programs and workforce funding.

#### CHIPS Workforce Development Plan

The Department of Economic and Community Development in coordination with The Office of Workforce Strategy and other stakeholders created a CHIPS Workforce Development Plan. The plan synthesizes the strengths of our workforce ecosystem including the Governor’s Workforce Council, the Regional Workforce Development Boards, and our educated and highly skilled workforce.

The plan outlines several ways the state can support companies in meeting its workforce needs:

- WIOA programs are an excellent opportunity to provide companies with a trained and career-ready workforce, with training available through CT State Community College spanning 12 campuses statewide offering a variety of certificate programs in introductory, precision, and advanced manufacturing and machine technology, cybersecurity, and robotics and mechatronics.

- Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative, a nationally recognized program designed and administered by the Eastern Workforce Investment Board provides no-cost training and support to address the hiring needs of manufacturers throughout the state.
- Career ConneCT, administered by the Office of Workforce Strategy, provides no-cost training and support for unemployed and underemployed individuals to obtain entry and mid-level positions in manufacturing, clean/green energy, bioscience, health, and IT.
- CT's 14 Regional Sector Partnerships is an option for workplace hiring needs in high demand industries including IT, Manufacturing, Healthcare, Green Energy and Infrastructure, Transportation, and Bioscience, further supported by Connecticut's Good Jobs Challenge \$23.9m grant award, "Strengthening Sectoral Partnerships Initiative."

In addition, Connecticut is host to a wealth of strong programs in technical high schools, and public and private universities that support CHIPS employment needs. These initiatives are ready to be utilized and have the demonstrated ability to support CHIPS workforce development needs in a variety of sectors.

#### CT Digital Equity Plan

The CT Department of Administrative Services' Commission for Educational Technology released the state's draft digital equity plan, entitled "Connecticut: Everyone Connected" in December 2023. The five-year strategy, funded by the federal *Internet for All Initiative* as part of the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, will help ensure that all Connecticut residents can benefit from life in the digital world for learning, career advancement, telehealth, and leveraging state services. The plan emphasizes the needs of traditionally disenfranchised groups, including residents at or below 150% of the poverty line, racial and ethnic minorities, aging populations, those incarcerated or returning citizens, individuals with disabilities or language barriers, those living in rural areas, and veterans. Goals of the plan include:

- Developing and promoting digital skills and technical support programs that directly serve residents;
- Ensuring residents have options for getting online that are affordable and meet their needs; and
- Expanding digital government services at the state and local levels.

The report can be found at [www.ct.gov/digitalequity](http://www.ct.gov/digitalequity)

#### **Economic Development Strategy**

Key components of Governor Lamont's vision to transform the state's economic development strategy include aggressive business recruitment, collaborative work across agencies to better support existing businesses and onboard new ones, as well as a strategic and long-term economic policy focus.

In this regard, DECD works in close partnership with the nonprofit AdvanceCT. AdvanceCT functions as the outward-facing recruitment arm on behalf of the state, and DECD will continue to support, promote, and advocate for existing businesses while also serving as the central resource to help new businesses navigate state and local government to minimize lag time, enhance services, and expedite relocation. Both entities work closely with Connecticut Innovations, Inc. (CI), the state's primary vehicle for supporting and financing start-up companies. DECD Commissioner-designate Daniel O'Keefe, nominated by Governor Lamont in November 2023, will ensure tight alignment between AdvanceCT, CI, and DECD. DECD and AdvanceCT remain strong partners of the GWC, and work closely with the GWC and OWS to support the workforce strategies critical to economic development.

**Manufacturing Initiatives.** In recognition of the vital role manufacturing plays in the state's economy, the Governor appointed Chief Manufacturing Officer Paul Lavoie in 2022 to oversee efforts to grow the state's manufacturing sector. This position operates under the umbrella of

DECD and seeks better coordination over multiple agencies and the private sector, assuring that training and education is available to meet job demands, maintaining supply chains, drive innovation, provide a regulatory process that protects safety and the environment but is not redundant or unnecessarily burdensome, and establishing Connecticut as welcoming to such industries, recognizing that all these are vital components for growth. To further advance manufacturing, in 2015, the state established a \$130 million Manufacturing Innovation Fund (MIF) to invest in the growth of the manufacturing sector.

On the private sector side, the seven major state manufacturing associations formed the Connecticut Manufacturers' Collaborative (CMC) to focus on enactment of policies to advance manufacturing in the state. The Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA) is the convener of the CMC.

**Opportunity zones** are another facet of the Governor's vision for economic development. The federal Opportunity Zones program was designed to incentivize public and private stakeholders to work together to rebuild American cities. Eligible investors who make qualified investments within those zones may be eligible for significant capital gains tax benefits. Seventy-two urban and suburban areas across twenty-seven municipalities in Connecticut have been federally designated as Opportunity Zones. Connecticut's state government has enhanced the federal program's benefits with state incentives and is eager to leverage this program to encourage investments in Connecticut.

**CT innovation** hubs continue to grow in the state, including incubators, accelerators, co-working spaces and maker spaces of all types. These include:

- The Borough496 incubator in Hamden, CT offers below-market rent, mentoring, connections to professional and other services to entrepreneurs. It's also an example of adaptive reuse of old buildings – in this case, the long-shuttered Newhall School.
- In Fairfield, CT Sacred Heart University's new iHub, a partnership with Verizon, offers entrepreneurs access to university students, staff and services
- The Refinery is a business accelerator that builds mentor networks, and provides entrepreneurship education, grant programs, coaching, mentorship and advisory services for women-owned tech companies.
- BioCT Innovation Commons, located in Groton, a new incubator providing commercial-grade laboratories, offices, co-working and meeting spaces for start-up and growing companies, as well as mentoring and business advising.
- District in New Haven, is an innovative office and co-op facility capable of offering 50 to 50,000 sq. feet of space and is home to AdvanceCT and Connecticut Innovations.

**CampusCT** is a statewide initiative set by the GWC and led by AdvanceCT to retain college students in the state by connecting students to meaningful career and lifestyle opportunities. Through partnerships with Connecticut employers, students can explore company brands, cultures and open roles, and gain direct insights from hiring managers on professional development topics. CampusCT also promotes Connecticut's world-class food, cities, national parks and beaches, sporting events and live music.

The State is investing in Connecticut's future by positioning the state as a leader in effective workforce development efforts. This begins with supporting towns in their effort to provide every person with a high-quality education that lays the foundation for a lifetime of success, continues as people move through our excellent state college and university system, and culminates in our agencies' collaborative approach to scaling the programs that have proven most successful in preparing the people of Connecticut with the skills needed for our businesses to thrive in a 21st-century economy.

The State invests over \$200 million of state, federal, and philanthropic funds in workforce



initiatives beyond the funding it receives through WIOA. These funds are distributed across nine departments.

For the FY24/FY25 Biennium, significant dollars continue to be dedicated towards workforce development activities. The latest budget allocated the following notable dollars:

**FY24-25 Budget, General Fund Appropriations for the State Budget**

*In addition to funds supporting the Department of Education, the Office of Higher Education and a number of other departments, central to the Workforce Development plan are funds that have been appropriated to the Department of Labor and the Department of Economic and Community Development in state General Funds:*

**For the Department of Labor:**

Description	FY24	FY25
Workforce Investment	35,339,550	35,339,550
Job Funnels Projects	712,774	712,857
Connecticut's Youth Employment	5,267,892	10,268,488
Jobs First Employment Services	13,145,177	13,153,107
Apprenticeship Program	573,510	580,431
Connecticut Career Resource Network	145,025	146,775
Opportunities for Long Term Unemployed	4,620,756	4,621,184
Second Chance Initiative	326,756	327,038
Cradle To Career	100,000	100,000
New Haven Jobs Funnel	750,000	750,000
Healthcare Apprenticeship Initiative	500,000	500,000
Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative	4,623,476	4,624,271

**DECD:**

Description	FY24	FY25
CCAT-CT Manufacturing Supply Chain	1,585,000	2,585,000
Manufacturing Growth Initiative	166,717	169,780
CONNSTEP	500,000	500,000
*Office of Workforce Strategy (for Administrative Purposes Only)	1,218,864	1,234,379

\*In 2023, PL23-204, Sec. 70 moved the Office of Workforce Strategy from the Office of the Governor to the Department of Economic and Community Development for *administrative*

*purposes only* (APO). The Office of Workforce Strategy is an independent agency with the Chief Workforce Officer serving as the agency head. DECD performs the business, human resources, and IT functions on behalf of the Office of Workforce Strategy.

For the Biennium of FY24 and FY25, the biennium budget codified authorizing and adjusting Bonds of the state for capital improvements, transportation, and other purposes.

The following bond funds have been authorized:

- Section 2(m)(3) Advanced manufacturing and emerging technology programs, not exceeding \$4,000,000 in FY 24 and \$3,000,000 in FY 25.
- Section 13(c) (3) For the Connecticut Manufacturing Innovation Fund established by section 32-7o of the general statutes, not exceeding \$15,000,000 both FY;

With the signing of the **American Rescue Plan**, the CT legislature has made significant commitments to support and provide residents with access to workforce development opportunities. Of the millions of dollars appropriated to rebuilding Connecticut, commitments were disbursed for FY22 and FY23 to several agencies such as the Office of Workforce Strategy, Departments of Labor, Economic and Community Development, Education, Corrections, Social Services and Children and Families, as well as to the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities, to implement a wide range of statewide or local workforce initiatives. (PL21-2, Section 306, pursuant to the provisions of section 602 of Subtitle M of Title IX of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, P.L. 117-2, as amended from time to time. The CT legislature continued to appropriate ARPA funds for new or continued workforce projects for FY24 and FY25. Many of these projects, such as the Governor’s Workforce Initiatives (“Career ConneCT” as described in II.(a)(2)) will continue through FY25.

## II. STRATEGIC ELEMENTS

### (a). ECONOMIC, WORKFORCE, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES ANALYSIS

#### (1). ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

The Office of Workforce Strategy has partnered with the Connecticut Department of Labor’s Labor Market Information Division to produce this section which analyzes the State’s current economic environment and workforce to inform the plan.

#### **(A) Economic Analysis**

Connecticut’s economy has experienced strong growth since the end of the COVID recession during the first half of 2020. From February to April of that year, seasonally adjusted employment fell by 17%, a drop of 289,100 jobs. The rest of 2020 was marked by strong job growth. By December 2020, the state had recovered 60% of the jobs lost during the recession. This employment rebound continued through the end of 2023, . By December 2023 the economy had recovered 99.4% of the jobs lost during the COVID shutdown with the private sector 100.5% recovered. Payroll jobs increased by 22,700 in 2023 -- adding to the 26,800 2022 gain. Other than the big rebound right after the pandemic, this is the fastest two-year growth rate since 1999. The two-year growth was broad-based across a range of industries from Health Care to manufacturing. All six of the state’s Labor Market Areas grew over the two-year period with the fastest two-year growth (5.4%) in the Southeast (Norwich-New London). The New Haven and Bridgeport areas added the most jobs in the two-year period (12,900 and 11,200 respectively). The slowest growth (1.3%) was in the Hartford Labor Market Area which increased by 7,600 jobs over two years.

Connecticut’s unemployment rate was at or below 4% throughout 2023 with an average of 3.7% for the year. Among the Workforce Development Areas, the highest averaged unemployment

rate in 2023 was 4.0% in the Southwest Area while the lowest was in the South Central Area at 3.5%.

Nearly all towns saw their unemployment rate drop throughout 2023. The towns with the highest annual average unemployment rates in 2023 were Waterbury and Hartford, both at 5.8% and both down significantly from 2022 (Hartford down 0.7% and Waterbury down 0.5%) Waterbury's rate was comparable to its 2019 (pre-pandemic) rate while Hartford was significantly below.

Only four towns (out of 169) saw unemployment rate increases in 2023: New Canaan, Weston, Darien, and Canaan. Even after the increases, all four had unemployment rates below 4.0% (between 3.3% and 3.8%).

The number of job openings remained high, averaging 93,000 per month in 2023 according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS/JOLTS). The number of openings exceeded the number unemployed in only one month between July 2001 and October 2021 but openings have now exceeded the number unemployed in every month since. In December 2023 the gap was 22,000 more openings than unemployed.

Both a cause and a consequence of the high level of openings is that number of workers who quit their jobs (most to take other jobs). An average of 32,500 workers quit their job each month in 2023 not far below the 36,000 per month pace set in 2022.

#### **i. Existing Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations.**

In 2023 the Health Care and Social Assistance resumed its traditional spot as the sector with the most job growth. Employment in ambulatory care has accelerated after the end of the pandemic shutdowns and the level of employment is above where it would have been if pre-pandemic trends had continued. Employment in ambulatory health care has reached an all-time high. Hospital employment achieved employment levels not seen in over a decade. Nursing home employment saw positive growth in 2023 after years of decline. The decline accelerated due to the pandemic but some of that sharp drop was reversed in 2023.

The second largest sector in the Connecticut economy is Educational Services (public and private). The pandemic caused a sharp employment decline. Employment has rebounded over the past two years and has returned to its stable trend.

The third largest sector in the Connecticut economy is Retail Trade. Retail has been in decline due to the increased popularity of online shopping. Retail had a sharp decline at the beginning of the pandemic and then a quick rebound. Employment is back to its long-run (declining) trend. However, the sector remains large (more than 160,000 jobs) and remains an important source of employment for those seeking entry-level jobs.

The fourth largest sector in the Connecticut economy is manufacturing. Total employment had a small step back (-700) in 2023 after adding 4,300 jobs in 2022. Even with recent hiring, the age profile of the manufacturing workforce is still older than the labor force as a whole. Despite hiring more than 10,000 new workers per quarter, total employment stopped increasing in 2023 due to retirements. Replacing retiring skilled, experienced workers remains the top challenge for the manufacturing sector.

Within the important Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services sector, Management and Consulting Services, Other Professional and Technical Services, and Architectural & Engineering Services added the most jobs in both 2022 and 2023.

Regionally, manufacturing is the largest sector in the Eastern workforce area with manufacturing adding more than 2,000 jobs over the past two years. Manufacturing is the second largest sector (after health care) in North Central workforce area but manufacturing

growth has been slower than in Eastern. Health Care and Retail are the two largest sectors in the Northwest workforce area with manufacturing third. Manufacturing added the second most jobs (after Accommodation and Food Services) in the Northwest area over the past two years. Health Care and Education are by far the largest two sectors in the South Central workforce area. Accommodation & Food Services, Education, and Transportation & Warehousing have added the most jobs in the past two years. Finance & Insurance is the fifth largest sector in the Southwest workforce area (after Health Care, Retail, Education, and Accommodation and Food Services). While this sector has been losing jobs overall, Other Financial Investment Activities and Insurance Agencies, Brokerages, & Support have been adding jobs in the Southwest.

## **ii. Emerging Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations.**

The events of recent years have highlighted the importance of Bioscience, one of Connecticut's emerging industry clusters. The immediate need for pandemic mitigation resulted in a global mobilization that rapidly produced vaccines and increased medical equipment production. Bioscience contains a broad cross-section of service industries and goods producing industries such as pharmaceutical, chemical, and medical device manufacturing. In 2019, the state had over a thousand Bioscience establishments that employed over 23,000 workers. This doesn't account for the total impact of Bioscience on overall employment given spillover effects on other sectors such as Education and Health Care and it doesn't account for the total labor supply of available workers given that many employed in other forms of manufacturing or research & development have compatible occupational skills that would be relevant to an employer looking to expand in the state.

Among the eight industries that comprise Connecticut's bioscience employment, roughly half of employment is in the service sector and half is in the good producing sector of the economy. In 2019, the largest two industries, Research & Development in Sciences (32%) and Medical Equipment & Supplies Manufacturing (28%) account for about half of Bioscience employment in the state. Research & Development in Sciences reached 10,000 employment in 2023 led by growth in the South Central workforce area followed by Southwest. Employment in Medical Equipment and Supplies Manufacturing approach 7,000 in 2023. While South Central and Southwest had the largest employment the largest gains were in the Eastern and Northwest workforce area.

## **iii. Employers Employment Needs**

While the number of job openings has come down from the extraordinary levels of a year ago, they remain above pre-pandemic levels and, importantly, above the number of unemployed. An analysis of the 75,000 December 2023 job postings from Help Wanted Online show that employers are seeking a wide range of knowledge, skills, credential, and licenses. In the large and growing health care sector, the largest demand is for Registered Nurses with a majority of job postings in this occupation currently seeking RNs with a Bachelor's Degree even though an RN license is obtainable with an Associate's Degree. Personal Care Aides and Home Health Aides require less education and training. Within the growing manufacturing sector, hiring is occurring at every education level.

Overall, 48% of job postings the mention an educational requirement seek an employee with a Bachelor's Degree or more, 10% require an Associate's Degree and 42% require a high school diploma or GED. The top skills mentioned in job postings are Communication, Initiative and Leadership, Personal Attributes, Customer Service, Business Management, Business Operations, and Critical Thinking & Problem Solving. The top specialized skills are Nursing, Merchandising, Project Management, Marketing, and Auditing. The top software skills are Microsoft Office (Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, Word), LESS, SQL (Programming Language), and Python.

Registered Nurse is the occupation with the most job postings in each of the five workforce areas and most areas have the same top occupations although the order may differ. In the Eastern area Registered Nurses are followed by Retail Salespersons, Home Health & Personal Care Aides,

Food & Counter Workers, Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers, and Nursing Assistants. In the North Central area, Registered Nurses are followed by Retail Salespersons, Supervisors of Retail Salespersons, Wholesale & Manufacturing Sales Representatives, Software Developers, and Managers. In the Northwest the occupations with the most job postings are Registered Nurses, Retail Salespersons, Home Health & Personal Care Aides, Supervisors of Retail Salespersons, Nursing Assistants, and Wholesale & Manufacturing Sales Representatives. In the South Central area, the top occupations are Registered Nurses, Retail Salespersons, Home Health & Personal Care Aides, Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers, Wholesale & Manufacturing Sales Representatives, and Fast Food & Counter Workers. In the Southwest area the occupations with the most postings are Registered Nurses, Retail Salespersons, Wholesale & Manufacturing Sales Representatives, Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers, Home Health & Personal Care Aides, and Food & Counter Workers.

The various entities, partners and stakeholders comprising Connecticut's extensive workforce development system have planned and implemented a broad array of innovative initiatives addressing Connecticut's workforce development priorities.

## **(B) Workforce Analysis**

### **i. Employment and Unemployment**

Overall unemployment rates were at historic lows prior to the pandemic recession. Since then, beginning in March 2020, COVID-19 employment shutdowns resulted in unprecedented short-term unemployment increases. As the lockdowns commenced, US and State unemployment rates shifted from 4.4% (US) and 3.8% (CT) to respective peaks of 14.7% for the US in April 2020 and 11.8% in May and June for Connecticut. In the almost four years since those peaks, the US has had sharp declines, down to 3.7% as of December 2023, while Connecticut was 3.8% by December 2023 seasonally adjusted. .

Connecticut unemployment rates by age and demographic groups are available annually through 2023. Statewide annual average unemployment rates by age cohort show that for age groups over age 35 (35-44, 45-54, 54-64, and 65+) the unemployment rate was under 3.0% in 2023. For younger workers, the unemployment rates were higher and differed by gender. Men between 25 and 34 had a 4.9% unemployment rate compared to 4.0% for women. Men aged 20 to 24 had a 10.5% unemployment rate compared to 5.7% for women in that age category. And for young men aged 16-19 to the unemployment rate was 20.6% compared to 5.6% for women aged 16-19.

Available unemployment rates by race/ethnic group show that unemployment rates for white workers was 3.6% in 2023 compared to 5.1% for Black workers and 5.5% for Hispanic workers. Connecticut's annual average labor force participation rate (LFPR) peaked in 2008 at 69 percent, a level not seen since the early 1990s. The aging of the population has contributed to a decline. In 2023 the Labor Force Participation Rate was 63.8% for all workers (based on the CPS Demecon). It was 62.9% for the white population, 68.8% for the Black population, and 69.9% for the Hispanic population. Black and Hispanic labor force participation exceeds pre-pandemic levels.

### **Changing Demographic Composition of Connecticut's Labor Force**

Connecticut's labor force is becoming more diverse as employment by white non-Hispanic workers has declined while other groups have increased. The Quarterly Workforce Indicators (QWI) allow for detailed analysis of industry employment by various demographic characteristics and employment measures. Long Term Trends: The racial and ethnic composition of Connecticut employment has made some notable shifts over the past two decades. The U.S. Census Bureau's Quarterly Workforce Indicators (QWI) allow for a detailed view of the composition of employment in the state.

### **ii. Labor Market Trends**

In 2023, total employment as measured by the Current Employment Statistics was at (private sector) or near (total employment) an all-time high. However, the composition of those employed has changed. Employment by white non-Hispanic workers peaked at just over 1.3 million in 2020 but was down to below 1.1 million in 2023 even after the rebound from the COVID shutdown. At the same time, employment of Hispanics has doubled from 125,000 to 250,000 while employment of Black workers has increased from 140,000 to 200,000. Employment of Asian, Others, and those who identify with two or more races has increased from under 50,000 to nearly 120,000. In 2022, the latest year for which Census data is available, Connecticut had more people moving into Connecticut from other states than moved from Connecticut to other states according to the U.S. Census. Importantly, 26,000 people reported living in another country in the prior year and were living in Connecticut in 2022 according to the American Community Survey.

Connecticut has largely recovered the 289,000 jobs lost during the COVID shutdown. However, the recovery has not been even across industries. Compared to February 2020 (the last month before the COVID shutdown) Connecticut increased employment in the Transportation and Warehousing Sector by more than 10,000 jobs with Wholesale Trade an additional 4,600 jobs above pre-pandemic levels. This is largely a result of the changing patterns of consumer spending including the growth of online shopping and delivery services. At the same time, Retail Trade is the sector with largest losses since February 2020 (although the losses in Retail are smaller than the gains in Transportation and Warehousing). Retail remains a large sector with lots of hiring (due to turnover) and the projections are that the contraction is largely over.

Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services is up 6,600 jobs since February 2020. This sector includes Management, Scientific, and Consulting Services which has seen strong growth in recent years as well as Scientific Research and Development Services, a key component of the emerging Bioscience cluster. Many in-demand and growing technology jobs are also in this sector.

Educational Services is above pre-pandemic levels but growth is projected to be muted in coming years due to demographics. The low birth rate in recent years will mean a smaller school-aged population. However, teachers remain among the occupations with the largest number of projected openings due to the need to replace teachers who are retiring or leaving the profession for other occupations.

Arts, Entertainment & Recreation, Construction, and Health Care & Social Assistance are all above pre-pandemic levels. The Arts, Entertainment & Recreation sector has a wide range of occupations from highly skilled artists to entry-level jobs at fitness centers. The Construction sector is projected to continue to add jobs as the federal infrastructure investments continue to roll out and the state seems poised to address the need for more housing. Health Care and Social Assistance are back to pre-pandemic growth trends with demand for Registered Nurses and other health care occupations particularly high.

While manufacturing is still below pre-pandemic employment statewide, it has been growing strongly in some areas (particularly the Eastern area) and is hiring in all areas to replace retiring workers. Accommodation and Food Services is also below pre-pandemic levels with Food Services (restaurants) fully recovered by Accommodations lagging. Accommodations may be permanently smaller due to the replacement of some business travel with online, virtual, or hybrid meetings.

Employment in the Finance and Insurance sector is below pre-pandemic levels and the projections are for continued contraction due to technological improvements and business consolidations. However, some industries in the sector are expanding and there are hundreds of projected annual openings in the finance occupations (even in occupations that are shrinking slightly) due to the need to replace retiring workers.

### **iii. Education and Skill Levels of the Workforce**

The educational attainment of Connecticut's overall workforce is higher than corresponding rates for the U.S. but slightly below New England's. In 2019, available census data show that 5.8 percent of the Connecticut labor force aged 25-64 had less than a high school diploma, whereas that level was 8.2% in the U.S. and 5.4% in New England. Connecticut's labor force share with a high school diploma is 24.7%, which is higher than the US and New England, areas with respective rates of 23.8% and 23.3%. The labor force rate for Some College or Associate's Degree, a level of attainment often associated with middle-skill jobs was 24.9% in Connecticut, 29.6% in the US, and 24.6% in New England. The highest attainment level, Bachelor's Degree or Higher has 44.5% of Connecticut's labor force within that group. In the U.S. 38.4% of its labor force has that degree of attainment and New England has 46.7%.

This broad overview of the state in comparison to its New England region and the U.S. overall helps contextualize its labor market. Connecticut has comparatively more workers with a Bachelor's Degree or higher than the U.S., fewer workers with some college or an Associate's Degree, and at the lower end of the attainment scale, fewer workers without a high school diploma. These broad labor market trends impact specific industry and occupational labor markets, as employers seeking workers with a Bachelor's or more will have a larger share of the workforce to supply their needs, and correspondingly those seeking workers with less academic credentials will have more difficulty finding people to hire. Continued training for workers with less than a Bachelor's will help increase the supply of workers with the credentials necessary to elevate their employment to higher paying middle skilled jobs.

Within Connecticut, current occupational employment estimates are categorized by minimum educational, work experience, and on the job training requirements. Of the categorized occupations, in 2021, 22% of Connecticut employment worked in occupations whose minimum requirements didn't include a formal educational credential, 37% of employment worked in occupations that required a high school diploma, 7% worked in occupations requiring more than a diploma but less than an Associate's degree, 2% of employment required an Associate's Degree, 27% required a Bachelor's, and 5% required a Master's or more.

The most common occupations among major educational thresholds are as follows:

- No Educational Credential: Cashiers: Employment 37,320, Annual Median Wage: \$30,143
- High School Diploma: Customer Service Representative: Employment 30,140, Annual Median Wage: \$43,952
- Associate's: Preschool Teachers: Employment 6,380 , Annual Median Wage: \$36,678
- Bachelor's: Registered Nurses: Employment 34,290, Annual Median Wage: \$98,869
- Masters or Professional Degree: Lawyers: Employment 8,380, Annual Median Wage: \$152,370

The above most common occupations by educational attainment illustrates the advantages and importance of getting more of Connecticut's lower-credentialed workforce additional training to improve their employment outcomes over the long term.

**(C) Comparison of Economic and Workforce Analytical Conclusion. Describe areas of opportunity for meeting hiring, education and skills needs identified in the economy compared to the assets available in the labor force in the state.**

In the years since the start of the pandemic, job openings as reported in the Bureau of Labor Statistics Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (BLS JOLTS) and job postings as reported in The Conference Board's Help Wanted OnLine (HWOL) database were at record highs.

While the number of openings have come down after peaking in early 2022, they are still above pre-pandemic levels. In addition, there is evidence that the slowdown in job growth in some industries is as much due to difficulty in filling open positions as it is to slowing labor demand.

These levels of openings and job postings indicate that employers have unmet demand in Connecticut and are looking to hire.

In January 2024, across all job postings, the most commonly cited skills included broadly applicable skills such as Communication, Initiative & Leadership, Personal Attributes, Scheduling, Customer Service, Business Management, Business Operations, and Critical Thinking and Problem Solving. The most common software skills include Microsoft Office programs such as Excel, PowerPoint, Access, and Word. Multiple programming languages were also among the most commonly cited software skills, including SQL, Python, and Java. Experience with Application Programming Interface (API) and Amazon Web Services were other skills commonly included in job postings found in the HWOL database. Having a valid driver's license was also a common requirement in job ads, which suggests that lacking one may shut out jobseekers from employment opportunities. Across all job postings in January 2024, 53% of job ads did not have a minimum educational requirement noted, 22% required a high school diploma or GED, 6% required an Associate's Degree, and 25% required a Bachelor's Degree or more.

The occupations in January 2024 with the most ads include Registered Nurses, Retail Salespersons, Home Health and Personal Care Aides, Wholesale and Manufacturing Sales Representatives, Fast Food and Counter Workers, and Customer Service Representatives. These occupations represent an array of career paths, require varied skills, and are found in a variety of industries.

The five industries with the most job ads in January 2024 include Health Care & Social Assistance, Retail Trade, Manufacturing, Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services, and Accommodation and Food Services. These industries are large shares of employment in Connecticut and commonly have the most job postings.

Within **Health Care & Social Assistance**, the most common skills include Nursing & Patient Care, Communication, and General Medicine, and Medical Records ability. The top software skill among job ads was Epic EMR followed by Microsoft Office programs, Zoom, and Teams. The two latter skills suggest that telehealth and remote work may be common within job postings in the industry. Common certifications within Health Care job ads include Registered Nurse (RN), Basic Life Support (BLS) Certification, CPR Certification, Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA), Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW). The most common occupations within industry job ads are Registered Nurses, Home Health & Personal Care Aides, Nursing Assistants, and Licensed Practical & Vocational Nurses. Within Health Care, 32% of job ads had no minimum educational requirement listed, 23% required a High School Diploma or GED, 15% required an Associate's Degree, and 30% required a Bachelor's Degree or more.

**Retail Trade** is one of the largest industries in the state economy and typically has a large share of job postings. The most common occupational postings within this industry are Retail Salespersons, Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers, Stockers & Order Fillers, Customer Service Representatives, Pharmacy Technicians, and Cashiers. This distribution of occupational job ads in Retail Trade is reflective of the employers that had the most postings in January 2024, which include CVS Health, Walgreens Boots Alliance, and Walmart. The top skills noted within industry job ads are Merchandising, Selling Techniques, Cash Register ability, and Product Knowledge. Given that most of the job postings within this industry are for occupations that often do not require an advanced degree, 55% of job postings within this industry did not have a minimum educational requirement noted, 27% required a High School Diploma or GED, 3% required an Associate's Degree, and 15% required a Bachelor's or more.

**Manufacturing** is a larger share of the Connecticut economy than the U.S. economy overall. Much of this manufacturing is centered around Transportation Equipment Manufacturing, specifically aerospace products and shipbuilding. In January 2024, the occupations with the most Manufacturing job postings were Wholesale and Manufacturing Sales Representatives,



Industrial Engineers, Computer Occupations, Software Developers, Managers, and Mechanical Engineers. This occupational array suggests that the industry is seeking workers with a high degree of technical and computer skills, in addition to a need for manufacturing sales representatives. The most common skills within industry job postings were Project Management, Marketing, Process Improvement, Auditing, and Data Analysis. Software skills referenced in industry job ads include typical Microsoft Office programs, SAP, Python, MATLAB, SQL, SolidWorks, and Power BI. Many of these software skills are not exclusive to Manufacturing employment, which suggests that workers from other industries have some of the necessary qualifications to work in the industry (and vice versa). Within Manufacturing job postings, 24% had no specified educational attainment requirement, 24% required High School Diploma or a GED, 4% required an Associate's Degree, and 48% required a Bachelor's or More.

The **Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services** industry performs an array of activities that require a high degree of expertise and training. Some of the services provided include legal advice, accounting, payroll services, specialized design and engineering work, computer services, and specialized design services. The most common occupations within industry job postings include Software Developers, Wholesale & Manufacturing Sales Representatives, Civil Engineers, Accountants, and Management Analysts. The most common skills within job postings for this industry include Project Management, Marketing, Auditing, and Business Development. The top software skills among job postings were Microsoft Office programs, HyperText Markup Language (HTML), SQL, Python, Autocad, and Salesforce. The required minimum educational attainment within this industry is typically higher than others given the technical and scientific nature of the work, 58% of job postings required a Bachelor's Degree or more, 31% required a High School Diploma or Associate's Degree, and 11% had no educational requirement noted in the job posting.

Within **Accommodation & Food Services**, the most common skills are Restaurant Operation, Food Preparation, Food Safety & Sanitation, Cash Handling, and Cooking. The top software skills among job ads were Microsoft Office programs, property management software, and JIRA. Common certifications within Accommodation & Food Services are First Aid Cert., CPR Cert., ServSafe Cert., Food Handler's Card, and Food Safety Certifications. Within Accommodation & Food Services, 71% of job ads had no minimum educational requirement listed, 19% required a High School Diploma or GED, 2% required an Associate's Degree, and 8% required a Bachelor's Degree or more.

The assortment of skill and educational requirements found in current job ads help suggest that employers have skills gap in certain industries for workers with lower educational attainment requirements and also those in higher skilled industries. This affords the Connecticut workforce with employment opportunities at all levels of training, education, and experience as employers seek both entry level workers and those with skills that relate to fields such as Healthcare, Manufacturing, and Professional, Scientific, & Technical Service.

## (2) WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION, AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES ANALYSIS

### (A) **The State's Workforce Development Activities**

This section outlines strategies and activities that the GWC is seeking to align, connect, and improve to meet its goal of an aligned high-quality, and equitable workforce development system

#### ***Responding to COVID***

With the onset of COVID, GWC pivoted with the rest of the state in 2020 to put in place a number of emergency efforts to address the immediate workforce needs brought on by the pandemic and provide job training, including online training, a customized job portal and job fairs, and

childcare programs. The state continued efforts to address the broad workforce disruption brought about by the pandemic by investing federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars in the following workforce development projects:

***Career ConneCT***

In 2022, OWS launched its flagship initiative called Career ConneCT, a \$70M dollar investment funded with American Rescue Plan Act dollars to implement a comprehensive short-term training program to make an immediate impact on those most impacted by the pandemic. Career ConneCT offers an opportunity for individuals to reskill, upskill and enter demand driven fields. OWS issued a competitive, grant-based, request for proposals and received more than \$250 million in applications to support the training of approximately 6,000 residents. OWS selected 19 programs to fund targeting six industry sectors. OWS plans to braid additional funds, such as CT Bond dollars, to continue to augment and sustain the program.

The equity lens is an embedded philosophy in each of the 19 Career ConneCT programs. The overarching goal is to reach and serve historically underserved and marginalized populations including BIPOC, People with Disabilities, Re-Entry, Youth, and Veterans.

Career ConneCT features include:

- Participants apply through a statewide recruitment portal.
- Extensive marketing to underserved and marginalized communities
- Participant pre-assessment in skills, abilities, & interests
- Short-term certificate programs across six industry sectors developed to prepare participants for in-demand occupations
- Full supportive services to remove barriers to success, such as but not limited to transportation, childcare, housing, stipends, etc.

Participants complete training with supports and earn an industry recognized credentials. Providers have industry commitments to hire and provide job placement after training is completed. As of 12/31/23, 1,817 have completed training, 1,217 have been placed in employment, and 2,368 credentials have been earned. Participant outcomes will be tracked up to 12 quarters post- completion.

***CT Health Horizons:*** With \$35M in unallocated state ARPA funds, the state launched CT Health Horizons, with the goal of increasing the nursing and social work pipeline, with a focus on diversifying the workforce. Connecticut State Colleges & Universities (CSCU) is the fiscal sponsor and program manager, working with UConn and The Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC); OWS is providing strategic oversight and capacity support. Grants are under way:

- Tuition Support: to incentivize low-income and minority students to enter accelerated and cost-effective nursing and social work programs.
- Faculty Support: to expand seat capacity and train an influx of nursing and social work students.
- Innovative Programs: to promote employer-driven programs to support entrance into careers in nursing and social work

***Implementing the GWC Strategic Plan***

The Office of Workforce Strategy supports the GWC to implement components of its Vision and Goals detailed in Section (2) (b). These include:

- Increasing the number of Regional Sector Partnerships (RSPs) to 14 across the state representing 4 Manufacturing RSPs, 2 IT / Tech Enabled, 1 Bioscience, 4 Healthcare RSPs and implementing two new RSPs: Architecture, Construction and Engineering (“ACE”) and Transportation, Distribution & Logistics (“TDL”). The GWC Industry

Leadership Committee will continue its employer recruitment efforts, with the support of AdvanceCT to expand the partnerships

- Launching the *Strengthening Sectoral Partnership Initiative* through the EDA's Good Jobs Challenge grant (detailed below).
- Supporting implementation of CT Health Horizons, a \$35m ARPA-funded initiative launched in September 2023, to increase and diversify the nursing and social work pipeline.
- Working with the P20 WIN Board a Request (#0042) to study the impact of workforce training and education on economic outcomes. The requested study proposes to 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. OWS is currently working with OPM DAPA and DOL's Research Department to gather the requisite information from partner agencies to perform the analysis.
- Collaborating with Tech Talent Accelerator, a \$2 million investment of DECD state-bonded, Tech Talent Funds, authorized by CGS 32-7p, to help close the "skills gap" by expanding education for emerging and in-demand fields such as cybersecurity, virtual modeling, software development, and digital analytics. The Business Higher Education Forum (BHEF) and the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) are managing the initiative by aligning community college public, and private university coursework with the skills demands needed. The partnerships are:
  - Developing and/or implementing short-term (6-12 week) postsecondary credential and certificate programs providing in-demand skills that are aligned with entry-level, technology-enabled jobs.
  - Embedding high-demand IRCs developed by global technology leaders (e.g., Google, Amazon) and industry-validated KSAs into existing postsecondary credential or degree programs to support graduates' work readiness.
- Round 1 grants include the University of Bridgeport, University of New Haven; University of St. Joseph; University of Hartford; Mitchell College; Quinnipiac University; Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU). Round 2 grants include UConn-Stamford; Fairfield University; Connecticut College; Southern CT State University; Charter Oak State College; Albertus Magnus, plus Booster Grants to University of Bridgeport, University of New Haven, University of St. Joseph, University of Hartford, Mitchell College, Quinnipiac University
- Supporting the Connecticut Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care, which was established by Governor Lamont through an Executive Order in 2023. This panel was tasked with developing a 5-year strategic plan for a childcare system that benefits families, providers, and Connecticut's economy. The final report from the Blue Ribbon Panel, which was submitted to the Governor's office on December 8, 2023, and incorporated extensive feedback from workgroups, experts, panel members, providers, parents, businesses, and advocates, provides a vision for Connecticut's child care infrastructure that will improve access to high-quality care for tens of thousands of families through efforts aimed at affordability, stabilizing and expanding child care businesses, and improving the quality of programs that support family needs and optimal child development in the early years.

Work in progress includes:

- Basic Skills Remediation Pilot Programs for Connecticut residents who have a high school diploma or equivalent and are in need of access to no-cost basic skills remediation in

order to pursue occupational training programs.

- Design for a zero-interest, state-sponsored “Pay-it-Forward” or “Career Accelerator” program that will allow individuals, who face financial barriers to training, to participate in training in high-demand fields in Connecticut with financial assistance through an Income Share Agreement.
- Research project on transportation, including a landscape analysis of existing transportation demand, capacities, gaps; analysis of state-funded options to be scaled; creation of 4-5 car-based options with costs, efficiencies, potential for scale, achievable outcomes; and financial analysis of options, including potential financing sources and risk analysis.
- Benefit Cliffs Study to identify where policy changes at either state or federal level may open economic mobility options for families while supporting employers to fill skill gaps.

### ***Good Jobs Challenge***

In 2022, OWS was awarded \$23.9 million for its “*Strengthening Sectoral Partnerships Initiatives*” (SSPI) proposal, submitted to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration under the Good Jobs Challenge grant. SSPI progresses the GWC’s strategic plan to implement Regional Sector Partnerships by 1) strengthening unique RSPs in each region and the RSP network overall, and 2) training and placing 2,000 individuals, particularly historically underserved populations, areas, and communities, in quality, in-demand jobs on career pathways in the three priority sectors of Manufacturing, Information Technology, and Healthcare.

The EDA funds leverage significant Connecticut investments and supports the participating RSPs in three phases: 1) System development (statewide and regional capacity and systems); 2) program design (employer engagement, curriculum development, training capacity); and 3) Program implementation (recruitment, assessment, remediation, supportive services, training, and job placement.

### ***Connecticut Workforce Summit***

The Connecticut Workforce Summit is an annual statewide convening of key stakeholders from industry, education, community-based organizations and the public sector, working collaboratively to create a skilled and diverse workforce that meets the current and future needs of Connecticut’s businesses. The inaugural Summit in 2023, “*Leveraging Public and Private Partnerships,*” focused on how to collectively strengthen, enrich and expand public-private ecosystems that ensure that all individuals, especially those from historically underserved communities, have access to the training, education and supports they need to work in family-sustaining jobs in growth sectors of our economy. The Summit culminated in a set of actions that participants committed to implementing over the next year+ to maximize the impact and sustainability of Connecticut’s workforce development system.

The 2024 Workforce Summit, “*Discovering Hidden Talent*” will be held on April 16. The goals of the Workforce Summits are to:

- Reinforce the power of systems-building in enabling impact and sustainability within the workforce development system
- Provide dynamic information and tools that empower participants to work with greater urgency and empowers them with new strategies to narrow the opportunity gap
- Secure commitment around a set of measurable actions steps that all participants will take and report on during the next Workforce Summit
- Showcase partnerships implementing national best practices such as collaboratively designing curriculum, providing work-based learning opportunities for youth and adults, promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and access, and building pathways to employment

- and career advancement.
- Promote GWC/OWS key programs and accomplishments to build its reputation as the central hub for workforce development policy and programs in Connecticut.

### ***Key Workforce Legislation***

Several key pieces of legislation related to workforce development were passed in 2023:

- Additional members added to the Governor’s Workforce Council (PA 23-93) to include (1) an expert in residential construction, (2) a representative from a regional vocational-technical school, and (3) a representative from a regional agricultural science and technology school. All members have been appointed.
- Career Accelerator (PA 23-75) amends CGS 4-124mm to update the requirements of the OWS Career Accelerator Program. OWS has procured a consultant to design and operationalize the program. A RFP was issued in late November 2023 and OWS is in the process of finalizing contracting details with the winning bid.
- Human Services Pipeline (PA 23-137) charges OWS with the development of a Human Services Pipeline to train direct service professionals. As there was no funding attached to implementation, OWS has submitted an agency proposal to the Office of the Governor (OTG) and the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) to amend the language (proposal approved).
- Green Jobs Pipeline (PA 23-61) charges OWS with the development of a Green Jobs Pipeline to understand the key jobs associated with the green technology industry, the identifiable certificate programs, and a marketing/outreach strategy to recruit individuals to the green technology industry. As there was no funding attached to implementation, OWS has submitted an agency proposal to OTG/OPM to amend the language (proposal approved).
- Nursing Workforce Report (PA 23-97) – Charges OWS with convening a working group and developing a report to identify barriers to the recruitment and retention of nurses. OWS has convened the working group during Fall 2023 and is in the process of finalizing the report.
- Other notable legislation or workforce development activities impact an equitable workforce:
  - PA 23-16 directed the OPM and the Department of Administrative Services to develop and establish policies and procedures concerning the development, procurement, implementation, utilization and ongoing assessment of systems that employ Artificial Intelligence (AI) and are in use by state agencies. Policy AI-01, issued February 1, 2024, includes 11 AI Guiding Principles including:
    - State agencies shall use AI in the service of their core missions to serve customers, residents, visitors, and industry
    - The AI used produces accurate and verifiable information; that the AI used by state agencies does not adversely affect the privacy rights of users and the tools comply with applicable laws, regulations, and policies concerning the privacy rights of users
    - AI is used with equity and fairness, directing state agencies to use AI in a human-centered and equitable manner, testing for and protecting against bias and disparate impact so that its use does not favor or disadvantage any demographic group over others
    - State agencies ensure transparency and accountability in the design, development, procurement, deployment and ongoing monitoring of AI in a manner that respects and strengthens public trust

Additional guiding principles address education around state-level decision makers and staff, accountability of decisions, adapting to shifting risks and opportunities, alignment with emerging AI standards, ensuring personnel are trained in safe use and skills are enriched through its use, and the AI Advisory Board leads the development and implementation of standards, procedures and policies to safeguard and secure data provided to the State against unauthorized uses and intrusions and is implemented in a way that avoids bias, discrimination and disparate impact.

This policy applies to all AI software, hardware, services and appliances. It applies to developed, procured and embedded AI and covers all state agencies, consultants and contractors performing work for the State of Connecticut, all vendors and third-party stakeholders providing services offered by state agencies, which would include workforce development programs and services.

### **Connecticut Department of Labor Activities**

CTDOL is responsible for a number of workforce development activities which are detailed here.

#### ***Apprenticeship CT Initiative***

With the support of the General Assembly and the Bond Commission, to date, \$15 million dollars have been allocated for ACI to CT-DOL. The initial \$5million were allocated in December 2018 with awards to two regional partnerships (Northwest WIB Partnership \$1.25M and South Central Workforce Alliance \$3.45M) in April 2019. Both regions implemented manufacturing programs administered by CTDOL under the Apprenticeship Connecticut Initiative. In September 2019, an additional \$10M award was approved by the Bond Commission with awards in March 2020 to each of the five regional partnerships to meet their respective needs in manufacturing, and other industry training. Awards were made as follows: Capital Workforce Partnership (CWP), \$2.2M; Eastern Workforce Investment Board Partnership, (EWIB)\$3M; Workplace Inc. Partnership, (Workplace)\$2.2M; Northwest WIB Partnership (NRWIB)\$1.5M; and Workforce Alliance Partnership,(WA) \$500K). Administered by the Office of Apprenticeship Training, the four-year initiative implements sustainable workforce pipeline training programs to train qualified entry-level workers for job placement with manufacturers and employers in industries experiencing work force shortages. While the Covid-19 pandemic impacted and challenged the start of the regional programs, currently all regions are steadily progressing in various stages of executing and meeting program deliverables.

#### ***Registered Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship***

The Office of Apprenticeship Training (OAT) administers Connecticut's Registered Apprenticeship (RA) system, which is supported by the state's general fund, federal funding, and industry support from registration fees. Registered Apprenticeship is a proven solution for training and retaining talent and offers individuals the opportunity of "learning while earning." Registered Apprenticeship also provides a structured training strategy that combines on-the-job training with related technical instruction.

OAT provides registration, monitoring, technical assistance, and consulting services for the administration of Registered Apprenticeship agreements per state and federal statutes, regulations, and standards. The office also qualifies employers for tax credits, works with the Department of Education, Department of Consumer Protection, and other state agencies, performs outreach to veterans, employer groups, unions, and many community-based organizations to promote Registered Apprenticeship and Registered Pre-Apprenticeship throughout Connecticut.

Outreach by CTDOL/OAT has increased apprenticeship in all areas. GWC, with its significant business stakeholder list, also supports the Registered Apprenticeship model. Currently, nearly 1,700 active employer-sponsors and over 6,600 registered apprentices

are enrolled in the program. In addition, over 1200 apprentices completed their apprenticeship training while nearly 3000 new apprentices were registered in the program last year – a significant increase over previous year’s total.

CTDOL/OAT intends to add an additional 1250 apprentices in the healthcare sector over the next three years due to being awarded a competitive federal grant. As CTDOL/OAT focuses on new industry sectors, through industry partnerships, the goal will be to augment Registered Apprenticeships such as has been successful in the manufacturing and construction sectors.

Systemic modifications, such as streamlining the Apprentice Sponsorship registration and compliance paperwork, assisting in creating a more user friendly, self-service system, have been instituted. For example, Registered Apprenticeship (RA) sponsors and Related Technical Instructors (RTI) may request to have their programs listed on the state’s Eligible Training and Providers List available on the CTDOL website. Annually, employers are sent a letter informing how they may utilize WIOA funding opportunities to support related instruction, OJT and supportive services.

#### Registered Apprenticeship and Non-Traditional Industries –

Various Registered Apprenticeship programs have grown outside of the traditional industries as more industries require skilled workers and trainings tailored to specific occupations.

As healthcare represents the largest employment segment in Connecticut, the CTDOL OAT has identified healthcare as a high demand industry in need of a qualified, diverse workforce and the focus of many initiatives.

Built upon the success of the Yale Healthcare networks nurse residency apprenticeship program, the CTDOL OAT developed and is implementing a new Registered Apprentice Program (RAP) for Unlicensed Assistive Personnel (UAP). UAP refers to individuals who perform various clinical and nonclinical jobs that augment nursing care. This includes Patient Care Associates, Clinical Technicians, Emergency Department Technicians, Ambulatory Care Associates and Patient Care Technicians who provide direct and indirect patient care activities under the supervision of a Registered Nurse. For this initiative, we use the Patient Care Associate’s and Patient Care Technicians (PCA’s/PCT’s) as an analogous term. This initiative will be more than a program; it will be a statewide strategy with regional impact. Federal funding will support a high growth, employer driven, healthcare workforce development program utilizing Registered Apprenticeship (RA) increasing apprenticeship opportunities to women, veterans, underserved and underrepresented populations for Patient Care Associates / Patient Care Technician careers. The grant provides the funding necessary for CTDOL OAT’s comprehensive partnership with Yale New Haven Health Systems 5 system hospitals and 119 Medical Centers around the state to design, build, and implement a new Registered Apprenticeship program for PCA’s/PCT’s and will serve a minimum of 1,250 individuals over the 4-year life of the SAEI grant . The increased demand for PCA’s/PCT’s has become immensely evident due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Developing a formalized Registered Apprenticeship program is the solution to overcoming this occupations worker shortage. This funding will allow for the YNHH System to build the RAP occupation focused technical education and skill sets, instill more confidence as the skill sets are developed, ensure better team communication, and provide support to the new Registered Apprentice PCA’s/PCT’s. This results in more efficient patient care models that will alleviate the growing nursing care demands. The results of the new Registered Apprenticeship program will produce proficient, efficient, high quality, highly skilled, confident, PCA/PCT while reducing turnover rates throughout the system hospitals. When an employee, invested in through mentored On the Job Training and Related Technical Instruction availed by an apprenticeship, return on investment is not only a financial gain but also increase employee retention and dedication to an organization is a result. This will be a model program potentially demonstrating to other healthcare providers/hospital systems the value of creating/upskilling workers that provide

direct patient support as an integral part of the healthcare team utilizing Registered Apprenticeship for workforce development. This new RAP will require a High School Diploma or the equivalent GED and a CNA Certification. As a result, these minimum requirements will present opportunities for many marginalized individuals that are typically unemployed, underserved and under-represented to apply for this new RAP and a viable career. Additionally, issued upon completion, apprentices are issued a nationally recognized, Registered Apprenticeship Program Completion Credential. The YNHH System Hospitals hire over 400 PCA's/PCT's annually. This annual average openings for these positions are expected to remain steady and even increase. As the annual job postings for these positions has been 400 annually, the CTDOL OAT SAEEI will likely exceed the proposed 1,250 number under this grant.

The skills gap has been proven to be nothing more than a training gap. Providing employer designed training for careers in healthcare to the unemployed, underserved, under-represented citizens will improve not only the economy but increase diversity, equity and inclusion opportunities. As more individuals are hired and enrolled into the new Registered Apprenticeship program, they move off Unemployment Insurance benefits or from a low wage job into a promising career path. Our workforce partners will collaborate with us and serve as a catalyst to enroll youth, women, people of color, veterans, formerly incarcerated individuals, individuals with disabilities and underrepresented populations into the various Registered Apprenticeship program. The American Job Centers staff will also be able to refer job seekers to the YNHH healthcare training opportunities and the new PCA/PCT RAP. We have commitments in place for aligning the Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and Community Based Organizations (CBO's) healthcare training programs to provide referrals of their successful training program participants to the new RAP at the YNHH (5) System Hospitals. The CTDOL also partners with the Opportunities Industrialization Center's (OIC's), a Non-Profit organization. The OIC's Mission is: "To provide quality education and training services that will enable economically disadvantaged and unemployed people of all races and backgrounds become productive, more fulfilled members of society." The OIC's also provide skills training in healthcare including PCA/PCT training. The CTDOL has an established relationship with the OIC's as they have been providing services to our communities and partnering with the CTDOL under state funded support of their programs. This will be leveraged and aligned with our workforce partners and the YNHH System under the SAEEI federal grant. As the CTDOL OAT has partnered with the state WDBs, the OIC's, AJC's, the CT NAACP and our educational partners for the CT SAEEI grant application, these organizations have a broad base of knowledge and experience in providing training programs and supportive services to our most vulnerable citizens. They will provide referrals or candidates from their healthcare training programs for the new SAEEI Registered Apprentice Program job openings to the (5) YNHH System Hospitals. They will also provide supportive services, where needed, that are available under their WIOA, JFES, ACI, state and federal funding sources.

Registered Apprenticeships have been implemented and are also being considered for expansion throughout the corrections system for Service Guide Dog Training, Barbering and Hairdressing apprenticeships. The goal of apprenticeships within the correctional facilities is intended to offer an opportunity to build work skillsets, job experience, potential licensure and earn an industry recognized credential that may lead to an apprenticed career or other career opportunity upon return to society.

Additional industry led considerations for Registered Apprenticeship include Childcare development apprenticeships as well as educator pathways utilizing apprenticeships. Through these efforts, CT will be poised to enhance the state's economy and growth while expanding registered apprenticeships which will support middle to high skilled jobs.

#### Apprenticeship Education Pathway

CTDOL/OAT has formalized the Apprenticeship Education pathway to move individuals from multiple entry points through their educational and apprenticeships programs culminating in a credentialed career and a degree.



[Apprenticeship & Educational Pathways Image accessible online via URL:  
<https://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/progsupt/appren/Apprenticeship%20&%20Educational%20Pathways%20Map.pdf>

### CTDOL/OAT Approved Pre-Apprenticeship

Quality pre-apprenticeship programs are an integral piece of a pathway for employers and students. A student may earn on-the-job credits toward a registered apprenticeship if employed, on a part time basis, after school, or as part of a Work Based Learning release program that may be established by the school and an apprenticeship employer sponsor. Pre-apprentices can carry up to 2,000 hours of on-the-job experience upon graduation into their registered apprenticeship program similar to how an Advanced Placement (AP) program is designed and recognized.

There are increasing amounts of careers that do not require a college degree yet require a certificate or credential inclusive or exclusive of post-secondary education. Career Technical Education (CTE), enhanced in high schools with industry recognized credentials, has recently been utilized as a workforce development pipeline.

CTDOL/OAT has partnered with the CT State Department of Education (SDE) to begin statewide strategic planning for CTE Perkins V programming implementation. Various plans will encompass policy considerations and the creation of Industry Councils at the local school district level for CTE credentialing, career exploration, career pathway development, business and industry led curricula alignment, Work Based Learning (WBL) partnerships and articulation agreements with post-secondary institutions for college credits.

CTDOL/OAT, in partnership with SDE, has expanded CTE under Perkins V, thus increasing Perkins V Pre-apprenticeship and Apprenticeship opportunities. These include work-based learning and the development of industry recognized credentials. CTDOL/OAT has partnered with nearly 30 high schools and community colleges to credential their CTE courses and link them to the pre-apprenticeship program. Students enrolled at those schools now have the ability to enhance their theoretical knowledge with hands-on skill development. Additionally, through relationships built at these schools, CTDOL/OAT has been able to present the benefit of these credentials to school boards and encourage stable funding for Career Technical Education moving forward. Some new, exciting pre-apprenticeships include:

**Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative** - focuses on high school students in addressing the hiring needs of Electric Boat, members of the East Advanced Manufacturing Alliance (EAMA), and other manufacturers.

**Adult Education programs** have been expanded in the Bristol and Vernon regional area as an elective to their course offerings in the traditional and also the plastics manufacturing sector.

### **Jobs First Employment Services (JFES):**

The Connecticut Department of Labor's (CTDOL) Welfare to Work unit administers the Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) program, which serves recipients of Temporary Family Assistance (TFA). TFA is Connecticut's cash assistance program for low-income families or pregnant women using federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding. TFA eligibility is administered by the Connecticut Department of Social Services (CTDSS). The CTDOL administers the JFES program in partnership with the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the five Workforce Development Boards (WDBs). The WDBs operate as intermediaries that subcontract with other organizations to provide services to JFES participants at American Job Centers (AJCs) located throughout the state. Services include job search assistance, vocational education, adult basic education, unsubsidized employment, subsidized employment, case management, community service and other support services such as in-home assessments, case management and transportation benefits. All JFES participants are eligible to receive childcare subsidies

through the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (CTOEC). The ultimate goal of the JFES program is to enable participants, through employment, to become independent from cash assistance and be self-sufficient.

The Jobs First Employment Services program (JFES) has implemented a number of initiatives since the last CT WIOA state plan was submitted.

### **Rebounding from the Pandemic**

First, at the height of the pandemic from March 2020 through May 10, 2023, JFES participants were not mandated to participate in employment services, however, 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. On May 11, 2023, the Public Health Emergency (PHE) was lifted by Governor Ned Lamont. For JFES participants, this meant that they would now be required to participate in JFES employment activities each week or face a possible sanction from DSS that could result in a reduction of their TFA benefits.

In the months leading up to the end of the PHE on May 11, 2023, CTDOL, CTDSS and the five WDBs collaborated closely on developing a plan to reach out to all of the participants who became disconnected from their JFES case managers during COVID. On May 11, 2023, JFES case managers across the state launched a comprehensive outreach effort to re-connect with the JFES participants who chose not to participate in Employment services activities during COVID. This outreach effort involved making multiple phone calls, emails and text messages to all of these participants.

The JFES program has competencies that support statewide initiatives in a number of ways:

- 2Gen Approach
  - The CTDOL Commissioner and the JFES Unit Director have been very involved in the state's 2Gen Initiative, serving on both the Workforce and the Benefit Cliffs committees as well as the 2 Gen Interagency Council. As a result, the CTDOL JFES unit continues to look at the entire JFES program through the 2Gen lens. In the summer of 2022, the JFES program sponsored a seven part workshop training series on the topic of Family Centered Coaching for all JFES case managers, WDB JFES Administrative staff as well as the DOL JFES unit.
  - In the Summer of 2022, the CTDOL JFES unit implemented a new policy that covered the transportation costs for JFES participants both to and from any part-time or full-time job, for as long as the client is receiving TFA benefits. This policy helps to address the Benefit Cliff issue and should be an incentive for clients who are considering whether or not to accept employment.
- Family Centered Coaching
  - The JFES programs utilizes Family Centered Coaching, an approach puts the client in the driver's seat where the client identifies the goals and challenges for themselves and their families. It focuses on the whole family unit rather than just the individual themselves. It also takes into account that families need different things at different times to move forward.
  - This approach launched a workgroup that focuses on delivering all programmatic services in this manner, as opposed to a compliance-driven mindset and system of years past.
- Financial Literacy Workshops
  - JFES has partnered with the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS) to

provide the “Money Matters” financial literacy workshop to all JFES participants within 90 days of being granted Temporary Family Assistance (TFA), Connecticut’s cash assistance program. The workshops are facilitated by CAHS volunteers and are held in all of the American Job Centers (AJCs) across the state.

- The goal of the workshops is to help JFES participants take steps toward financial empowerment. An additional three months of one-on-one financial coaching is offered to all JFES participants. While financial empowerment includes the concept of financial literacy, the main focus is to build the skills needed to create a budget, manage money and make “smart” financial decisions. CAHS works to empower and equip CT residents to become financially stable and financially capable so they can build a secure future.
- **Supporting Refugees**
  - In September 2022, CTDOL partnered with DSS and the Refugee Resettlement agency in New Haven, the Integrated Refugee and Integration Services agency (IRIS) to develop a new customer flow process and forms that make it less bureaucratic for Refugees to connect to JFES services by increasing the collaboration between the agencies involved in supporting the Refugees and streamlining the paperwork. This new process also includes services to Refugees who are being served primarily by sponsors.
  - In 2022, CTDOL partnered with IRIS and CAHS to provide a series of Financial Literacy workshops to Afghan refugees that were offered in the languages of English, Pashto and Dari.
- **Non-Custodial Parent Support**
  - In November 2022, CTDOL, the DSS Office of Child Support Services, and the Judicial Department’s Office of Child Support Enforcement re-launched the Golden Ticket program which had been suspended during Covid due to the new virtual work environment and closure of the AJCs.
  - **Non-Custodial Parent Program**
    - In June 2021, CTDOL, DSS Child Support Services and Judicial’s Support Enforcement Division launched a Non -Custodial Parent pilot program in the Hartford area. The target audience would be adults who were connected to these two agencies as a result of having child support obligations and who were unemployed or underemployed. This is a group that has historically struggled to connect to services at the American Job Centers (AJCs) around the state.
    - To pursue the program, CTDOL contracted with Capital Workforce Partners to provide the one on one case management services. The program was very successful and in the end there were a total of 156 total referrals, 70 enrollees, 26 clients who obtained or improved their employment and 12 who completed fork-lift operator or deck-building training. All twelve obtained their industry certification.

### **Looking ahead**

The JFES program is planning to launch a Parent Leadership Council in the next 18 months which would consist of DOL JFES team members, a representative of each of the five WDBs or their contractors, the State TANF Administrator from DSS and approximately eight parents who are either current participants in the JFES program or recent exiters. The idea is to give parents a voice in policies that the DOL JFES team is contemplating in order to determine if these policies

are Family Centered and whether parents feel these policies would be impactful. We will also solicit feedback on parents on how we can more effectively engage parents into the program and keep them engaged.

### ***State-Wide Initiatives***

Since the end of the Dislocated Worker Opioid Emergency Grant, Connecticut Department of Labor has continued to fund the Peer Recovery Navigators with lived experience in recovery (many of whom started as Apprentices) by utilizing dollars from the Rapid Response funding stream. Peer Navigators are trained at the minimum level of Certified Counselors in Training or Peer Recovery Coaches, and work to identify individuals in the occupations most associated with abuse and provide them with referrals to remove barriers, provide supportive services, obtain counseling and treatment and return participants to their former employment or employment which is more suited to their recovery efforts. These navigators work at the American Job Centers and their hubs and in the communities they serve to provide the support services needed to obtain and continue in occupations that provide a living wage. In addition, Peer Navigators work on the Employer Recovery Friendly Initiative. All Peer Recovery Navigators are enrolled in CT's Certified Alcohol and Drug Counseling Apprenticeship Program.

CT joins the growing number of states committed to providing employers with training on "Recovery Friendly Workplaces". Recovery Friendly Workplaces (RFWs) support their communities by recognizing recovery from substance use disorder as strength and by being willing to work intentionally with people in recovery. RFWs encourage a healthy and safe environment where employers, employees, and communities can collaborate to create positive change and eliminate barriers for those impacted by addiction. Through its Business Service Unit and with the assistance of Peer Navigators, American Job Center reach out to employers in the state of CT who wish to be designated by the Governor as "Recovery Friendly". Employers wishing to be designated as Recovery Friendly must attend an orientation, complete a short training program, commit to a recovery friendly work environment and be subject to an annual review. Employers designated as Recovery Friendly receive recognition by the Governor, a distinctive sign to display regarding their designation, be advertised as a Recovery Friendly Workplace and receive valuable referral options for those affected by substance abuse and mental health issues.

This work began under the NDWG since the award in October 2019 and has continued a collaboration in leveraging existing resources with new initiatives. The workforce system continues to provide workforce services including training individuals to support those affected by substance use disorders and retraining individuals directly affected by the crises. Braiding existing resources with its partners the CT Department of Public Health and the CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services a toolkit was developed to assist employers with the process. The working group of cross-agency representation and one-stop staff continues to meet on a quarterly basis to market the program to employers, coordinate public outreach, share best practices and resources.

### **Connecticut Workforce Development Council**

The Connecticut Workforce Development Council coordinates activities and advocacy across the five Workforce Development Boards and facilitates joint projects across the boards like the current "Statewide Accessible Workforce Services (SAWS)" grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. Initiatives of each board are detailed in this section.

### **Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board (EWIB)**

#### ***Virtual Services***

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, EWIB has shifted to a hybrid service delivery

model to make many American Job Center services accessible to customers in-person at the three Centers and virtually. Workshops offered virtually include: CTHires Resume Builder, How to Apply Online, Email for Job Seekers, Preparing for a Virtual Interview/Job Fair, Skill up CT Metrix Learning, and Networking with LinkedIn, among others.

### ***Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative***

EWIB's award-winning Eastern CT Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI) continues to flourish thanks to a longstanding partnership among employers, education and training providers, EWIB, and others. The program is designed to raise the baseline of our labor force's competencies to align with skills that are in-demand by manufacturers. The core element of the MPI is high-rigor, skills training classes with curriculum designed by the employers in concert with academia across 11 trades, including welding, machining, electrical, pipe fitting, sheet metal, design & drafting, and planning. Since its inception in 2016, the MPI has placed over 4,000 individuals in jobs. The MPI's success is largely attributable to its strong sector partnership of 40+ stakeholders, including the Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance Regional Sector Partnership (*EAMA RSP*) whose original partners were involved in documenting employer skill needs and ensuring that training programs responded to those needs.

During the 2024 fiscal year (7/1/23-6/30/24), EWIB expects the MPI to conduct ~94 classes and train more than 1,100 people, a record pace since the program was launched. This reflects increases in demand from employers who request classes based on hiring needs and success reaching unemployed/underemployed residents who may have interest in training and pursuing a career in manufacturing. Because of this success, the MPI has been recognized nationally as a sector-based initiative that creates a "win-win" for both jobseekers and employers.

### ***Youth Pipeline Initiatives***

The Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (YMPI) is an extension of the Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI) described above. The YMPI offers manufacturing job skills training as an early on-ramp to a manufacturing career pathway for high school students who are considering entering the job market instead of college after graduation. The YMPI is currently offered at 10 regional comprehensive high schools and EWIB is working closely with several other schools who expect to implement the program in the upcoming academic year. Since inception, over 500 students have participated in YMPI program instruction. Successful outcomes for YMPI students include direct employment, continued training in the adult MPI, and college enrollment. EWIB partners with ReadyCT to support continued growth and development of the YMPI through expanded professional development for YMPI instructors in partnership with CT State Quinebaug Valley and Three Rivers and an enhanced career readiness curriculum to develop the employability skills most desired by area employers. Additionally, the YPMI has grown career exploration opportunities for YMPI students as EWIB and partners produced the largest manufacturing career expo in the region that convened over 25 employers and 600 students. Additional YMPI expansions include virtual reality manufacturing training and supporting the launch of the EASTCONN Mobile Manufacturing Lab for career exploration for students in high school and earlier grades.

EWIB also coordinates a Youth Healthcare Pipeline Initiative (YHPI) modeled after the YMPI. The YHPI operates in 14 comprehensive high schools in Eastern Connecticut during the 2023-24 academic year. Participating schools offer seniors opportunities to enroll in cohort-based Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) and Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) training leading to state certification. ReadyCT supports EWIB to expand the YHPI to additional occupations and school districts.

### ***Summer Youth Employment Program***

EWIB's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) is delivered by EASTCONN, in partnership

with New London Youth Affairs and Norwich Human Services, across the 41 towns in the region. The program provides valuable job experience and skills to youth while paying their wages. In the 2023-24 program year, the SYEP served over 525 eligible youth. More than a summer job, the program is a training opportunity for youth to learn skills that employers are seeking, plan their career pathway, and learn about in-demand jobs in manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, and environmental sciences. Additionally, participants receive case management and support services such as bus passes and work clothing. The SYEP partners with over 120 participating businesses including Lyman Allan Museum, Garde Arts Center, Mansfield Discovery Depot, Mystic Seaport, Backus Hospital, Dodd Stadium, Killingly Childcare Program, GROW Windham, ACCESS Agency, local municipalities, recreation departments, chambers of commerce, schools, and more. Job functions include human service assistants, clerical, library aides, health aides, maintenance, customer service, and landscaping. Participants are offered a variety of workshops throughout the program, including Financial Literacy, Labor Market Information, Youth Labor Laws, Career Decision Making, Equity, Mental Health and Wellness, Interpersonal Skills, Problem Solving Skills, Time Management Skills, Entrepreneurial Education, and Drivers' Education Preparation. The program was financially supported by the Connecticut Departments of Labor, Children & Families, Aging & Disability Services/Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, philanthropic foundations, and various town and private sources.

### **The WorkPlace- Southwestern Connecticut's Workforce Development Board**

#### ***Southwestern Connecticut Health CareRx Academy (HCA)***

The Southwestern Connecticut Health CareRx Academy (HCA) provides healthcare employers with qualified candidates in medical support occupations. The Academy helps save the cost of finding qualified workers with proper occupational and work-readiness training.

The HCA provides tuition assistance and support to help participants obtain a career in the growing healthcare field. The WorkPlace's Health CareRx Academy is a broad partnership of healthcare providers, educators, trainers, and community-based organizations in Southwestern Connecticut. Designed with input from employers, the HCA's mission is to meet the current and evolving workforce needs of healthcare employers. The HCA provides occupational training, work readiness, and other supports to individuals who desire to begin or advance a career in healthcare. All training by HCA leads to a certificate or degree and prepares individuals to pass a state or national licensing exam.

The HCA provides tuition assistance and other supports to help people build a career. Participants have access to career readiness and personal growth classes and seminars. Upon completion, participants can move into occupational skills training in a variety of healthcare related fields. Program participants residing in Southwestern Connecticut receiving TANF, meeting program requirements, impacted by a layoff or position elimination may also be eligible for comprehensive support services and access to internship opportunities and job placement assistance.

#### ***Apprenticeships***

ApprenticeshipWorks is creating a pipeline of skilled and qualified labor combining on-the-job training and related classroom instruction for high school students and adults. ApprenticeshipWorks provides training to address the shortage of skilled workers in the manufacturing and healthcare sectors and prepares workers to enter apprenticeships and employment. Apprenticeships combine a full-time job with training—and prepare workers to enter in-demand careers. Trainees receive access to career coaching and exploration, workforce readiness training, resume, interview, and job search assistance, occupational training, and certifications as well as supportive services at no-cost.

Components of a registered apprenticeship include:

- Work-based learning, structured on-the-job training from an experienced mentor for a

minimum of 2,000 hours.

- Related instruction on technical and academic competencies that apply to the job.
- Paid employment with wage progression, apprentices receive a reduced wage during on-the-job training which increases as their skills advance.
- National occupational credential from the CT Office of Apprenticeship Training.

### ***Incumbent Worker Training***

The WorkPlace also offers the Connecticut Workforce and High-Tech Industry Skills Partnership (CT WHISP) Grant which provides funding and other resources to advanced manufacturers in Southwest Connecticut who provide Incumbent Worker Training (IWT). IWT supports current employees in obtaining industry-based skills or credentials that lead to career advancement and income mobility. Training must relate to the manufacturing sector.

#### **Benefits To Employers**

- Receive a reimbursement (up to \$2,000) for each eligible employee to offset skills-based training costs
- Increase competitive edge by upskilling your workforce from entry-level to mid- or high-level positions
- Process improvement that contributes to business productivity
- Build and maintain a quality workforce
- Employee retention and layoff aversion

### ***Platform to Employment***

The Platform to Employment (P2E) program was created by The WorkPlace to assist the long-term unemployed return to work while addressing employers' needs to recruit skilled workers. P2E provides businesses a risk-free opportunity to evaluate and consider hiring qualified participants in a work experience program. P2E supports individuals who have exhausted their unemployment benefits and remain unemployed.

Participants engage in a structured preparatory program including skills assessment, career readiness workshops, employee assistance services, coaching and other supports. Upon completion, participants are helped to find open positions at local companies. Placements occur on a trial basis and subsidized over an eight-week period. The expectation is that a company satisfied with a candidate's performance will offer a full-time job.

P2E acclimated very well to operating remotely due to COVID-19 and continued to meet the demand to support the state's long-term unemployed. They have found participants to be engaged and comfortable in this new learning environment and our success metrics continued to match results achieved before the pandemic.

They have a wide-ranging recruitment strategy, including social media, referrals of past participants, the AJC's, referrals from legislators, targeted messaging using Constant Contact, libraries, churches, outplacement agencies, partner agencies through other WorkPlace programs, non-profits, and Community Action Agencies. The P2E Team has been consistent and steadfast with building community-based relationships to grow the applicant pool.

The Connecticut General Assembly continues to fund P2E on a statewide basis with classes held virtually due to the pandemic. P2E's success is unparalleled. Nearly 80% of Connecticut participants who complete the preparatory program take the next step into a paid work experience with local companies. Of this population, nearly 90% have successfully moved to employer payrolls with average annual earning at placement more than \$50,000.

Platform to Employment Re-Entry, modeled after the success of P2E is also offered on a statewide basis. This program has demonstrated remarkable success reducing unemployment and recidivism rates among the re-entry population. Like P2E, Platform to Employment Re-Entry provides formerly incarcerated individuals with work readiness and career development training. The core of the training focuses on life skills and professional development training to enhance confidence and improve employment opportunities. Other supports include resources to address barriers to employment such as transportation and childcare.

### ***Senior Community Service Employment Program***

A Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) funded by the U.S. Department of Labor under Title V of the Older Americans Act enables the provision of job skills training to low-income individuals, age 55 and older. SCSEP participants are placed in temporary training assignments where they receive valuable on-the-job work experience and training needed to gain meaningful employment. Participants work 20 hours a week at training sites and are paid minimum wage.

Program goals include:

- Assisting participants in acquiring marketable jobs skills.
- Participating in community service assignments to learn new skills in on-the-job training.
- Assisting in developing job search skills and tools including résumé development.
- Connecting participants to supportive services as needed.
- Helping participants secure meaningful unsubsidized employment.
- Changing stereotypes about older workers.

The WorkPlace branded the SCSEP program as *MaturityWorks* which provides services to over 800 Connecticut residents experiencing limited employment prospects and having on average nearly 3 significant barriers to employment. Barriers to employment include, lacking a substantial employment history, basic skills, and/or English-language proficiency, lacking a high school diploma or the equivalent or experiencing mental and physical impairments, homelessness, or persistent unemployment.

Through *MaturityWorks* job seekers can be placed in a wide variety of positions with local host agencies. A host agency is typically a non-profit, community-based organization, or municipal government agency. These positions are training assignments designed to offer skills and experience needed to obtain future employment, but at the same time provide no-cost support for the local organizations. Host agencies are instrumental to presenting a realistic work environment and the opportunity to gain knowledge and feedback that will help job seekers become successful.

### ***Mortgage Crisis Job Training Program***

The Mortgage Crisis Job Training Program helps homeowners who are two or more months behind in their mortgage gain the skills they need to be able to earn more money to become financially stable by providing employment assistance. Services include:

- Job Training Scholarships
- Financial Literacy
- Housing Counseling
- Referrals to other needed services



The Mortgage Crisis Job Training Program staff work in partnership with housing counselors and other support agencies to help improve a client's financial standing with lenders. The program has expanded outreach to include display advertising, PSAs, and digital media.

Community partners such as food banks and chambers of commerce play a significant role in sharing program information. Partnerships with the American Job Centers across the state, Connecticut's Foreclosure Mediation Program and the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority.

### **Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board (NRWIB)**

#### **The mission of NRWIB:**

The Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board is committed to integrating a range of social services, job training programs, and supportive measures to address the needs of individuals eligible for job training/placement programming. Leveraging funding from State, Federal, and local sources, our mission is to establish a cohesive network of opportunities for Northwest Connecticut's most at-risk communities. We prioritize identifying and enhancing both new and existing programs to maximize outcomes for our clients. We emphasize that clients have multiple pathways available to them, empowering them to choose their path to future success. Our mission extends beyond providing opportunities; we are committed to providing the personnel and resources necessary for our clients' success. Clients are paired with dedicated career navigators and job developers who guide and support them throughout their journey. We recognize and address skill gaps by offering tailored upskilling in areas such as math or English. Through personalized coaching and organizational management, we empower our clients to successfully complete training courses and seamlessly reintegrate into the workforce, equipped with the tools and confidence needed for long-term success. Furthermore, we collaborate extensively with partners and employers across the region to co-create these opportunities, fostering symbiotic relationships that drive positive change and innovation in pivotal industries such as Manufacturing, Healthcare, Information Technology, Transportation and beyond. Contained herein are detailed descriptions of many of these services, showcasing the variety of pathways and opportunities available to jobseekers and employers alike.

### **Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board (NRWIB) Regional Sector Partnerships**

**(RSP):** RSP initiatives continue to work to develop workforce pipeline programs to train qualified entry-level workers for job placement with manufacturers, healthcare and construction (Architecture, Engineering & Construction) agencies in the state that are experiencing sustained workforce shortages. The NRWIB convenes program partners, confirms expected job vacancies, and provides access to job-related training. Industry professionals and company representatives supporting the Regional Sector Partnerships have met throughout the quarter on a variety of "action teams," designed to develop goals, initiatives, and deliverables for the Northwest Region.

**Northwest Manufacturing RSP (NM-RSP):** Launched in February 2021, industry champions have continued to meet, and have formulated working groups known as "action teams," dedicated to addressing four identified priorities in the region: Develop a "Metal Finishing" Workforce Pipeline Curriculum/Program; Align Regional Educational and Training Offerings with Employer Demands; Simplify Access to Available Resources (B2B, Peer Networking, Local, State, Federal); and Reduce Transportation Barriers.

On November 6th, 2023, a Request for Proposal was released to the public, with input from industry partners, seeking a vendor capable of developing evidence-based, researched, and reviewed curriculum and instructional materials in the Manufacturing sector. The submissions received in response to this RFP were carefully reviewed and scored, a vendor was chosen, and a contract was awarded. The chosen vendor has begun work alongside manufacturing industry

partners' help to complete and implement the "Metal Finishing" Workforce Pipeline Curriculum/Program.

Primary areas of focus have been to identify Federal, State and Local resources available to employers in the region, and to consolidate these resources in a one-stop-shop for manufacturers. As such, the NRWIB has contracted funds through the Good Jobs Challenge grant to support the NM-RSP and has subsequently issued contracts for the development of a website as a response to identified employer needs.

**Northwest Healthcare RSP:** Launched in January 2022, industry champions have continued to meet, and have formulated working groups known as "action teams," dedicated to addressing three identified priorities in the region: Building early awareness of healthcare professions; Creating experiences to explore healthcare career options; and Expanding the healthcare educational and talent pipeline, specifically CNA training and career pathways.

Since launch, the NH-RSP has coordinated a variety of opportunities to engage local high school students prior to graduation and to encourage them to seek out Healthcare career pathways and opportunities. This has included virtual demonstrations of various healthcare roles and responsibilities inside patient-care environments and the provision of intern and shadowing opportunities for qualified students at local healthcare facilities. Additionally, industry members of the RSP have consolidated the goals of various action teams beyond just youth outreach. The NRWIB has subsequently contracted, similar to the NM-RSP, for the development of a regional RSP website and for curriculum development for existing and potentially additional healthcare training opportunities to be provided through the local community college system or other qualified providers.

The "Building Early Awareness of Healthcare Professions," action team of the Healthcare Regional Sector Partnership has launched a speakers' bureau to create interest, inspire, and expose students to various healthcare professionals, that will foster a culture of care, compassion, and excellence in healthcare, and to help students make informed decisions when choosing their career pathways in high school and beyond. The speakers have consisted of Registered Nurses, LPNs, Radiology Technicians, Behavioral Services Leaders, Community Outreach Coordinators, and Human Resources Directors. The first round of speakers visited Crosby and Wilby high schools in Waterbury on November 14th, 2023. The second round visited Danbury High School, Henry Abbott Technical High School, and Torrington High School in January, 2024. This action team plans for the speaker's panel to expand into other high schools in the region throughout the year.

In performance of their goals, the Regional Sector Partnerships will seek to ensure that an increased number of young people come to understand the world of opportunities within the manufacturing and healthcare industries; while also retaining graduates from local programs and attracting additional talent to the region. Additionally, the RSPs intend to focus on improving local buyer-supplier connections, fostering growth in specific markets, which are "core" to the Northwest Connecticut region, and the utilization and sharing of emerging technologies which can lead to greater efficiencies across the industries as a whole.

**Architecture, Engineering & Construction (AEC):** On January 23, 2024, leaders from the region's Architecture, Engineering, and Construction industries met in-person as an official launch of NRWIB's AEC RSP to identify opportunities and actions needed to promote the growth of their sector. This approach is modeled after our increasingly successful efforts with our Healthcare and Manufacturing Regional Sector Partnerships which are achieving real results for businesses and jobseekers. At the launch meeting, business leaders discussed pain points within the Architecture, Engineering, and Construction sector, and touched on priorities for potential action to expand the industry talent pipeline.

### **Northwest Construction Careers Initiative (NCCI)**

The Northwest Construction Careers Initiative (NCCI) continues to offer residents of the Northwest region a coordinated system of outreach, recruitment, assessment, case management, and placement for career opportunities in the construction building trades. NCCI, now in its 20<sup>th</sup> year, works in partnership with the local trade unions and private sector companies to encourage apprenticeship in the construction trades. The system brings together community-based organizations, direct-service providers such as the American Job Center in Waterbury, the local school system, the building trades and other community groups to achieve specific goals. Qualified participants are offered job training opportunities for various credentials, including OSHA 10, OSHA 30, and Hazwoper certificates, as well as CORE Curriculum encompassing HVAC, Plumbing, and Electrical skills. Additionally, job placement assistance is provided to facilitate successful entry into the workforce. NCCI stands as a gateway for individuals seeking rewarding careers in the construction industry, equipping them with the necessary skills and support for success in their chosen field.

NCCI also administers the City of Waterbury's Good Job Ordinance, a local hire ordinance that requires publicly funded construction contractors and construction-related projects to employ a certain percentage of Waterbury residents on project crews. The NRWIB provides a fee for service function to the City of Waterbury serving as the administrator for its Section 3 HUD programs.

### **Business Services Development**

The NRWIB is an aggressive partner in the American Job Center- Northwest's Business Services Team (BST). Partners within the BST have established connections with employers of varying sectors throughout the Northwest Region. These partnerships are leveraged to secure employment opportunities for participants. In certain instances, partner employers have committed to give special hiring consideration to those candidates who have achieved these credentials.

Additionally, the NRWIB employs through its subcontractor, Career Resources Inc., a number of "Job Developers" who are primarily focused on developing relationships with employers throughout the NW CT region. These job developers collaborate with one another to foster a regional employers "database" which tracks outreach to employers within the most in-demand industries and identifies corresponding jobs available within the region. These relationships subsequently result in opportunities for NRWIB trainees to proceed from a specialized industry training directly into job placement, facilitated by NRWIB staff.

### **WIOA - Community Projects Supplemental Grant**

In addition to regularly funded WIOA programming available to Adult, Dislocated, and Disabled individuals, the NRWIB was recently awarded \$650,000 of supplemental WIOA funding to offset reductions experience throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Currently, the NRWIB is serving more than 80 participants through these supplemental funds and expects to continue utilizing these funds to support further enrollments and job placements through the end of 2024. Services include job training, placement, issuance of supportive services, and in certain circumstances placements into On-The-Job training opportunities. This programming has been instrumental in serving the wide-range of WIOA qualified applicants who seek services through the American Job Center.

### **Ticket to Work**

The NRWIB is a Social Security-approved Ticket to Work "Employment Network". Ticket to Work is a free and voluntary program offered by Social Security that assists people age 18 through 64 who receive Social Security disability benefits and who are interested in returning

to work or working for the first time. By participating, a person who is interested in working receives support throughout their journey to financial independence.

Ticket to Work helps persons who receive SSI or SSDI benefits to obtain vocational counseling, training, job readiness, job referrals and other employment support services, free of charge.

Services that NRWIB and the American Job Center can provide to Ticket holders include:

- career counseling
- résumé development and interview preparation
- a wide variety of employment workshops
- referrals to additional services and supports
- job matching and job development
- SSA disability benefits advisement referral
- job accommodations instruction and assistance
- possibility of training through WIOA funds, based on eligibility
- follow-up supports and retention services after employment

### **Apprenticeship Connecticut Initiative**

This program focuses on addressing the shortage of skilled workers in the manufacturing sector. A regional partnership comprises the following entities: Manufacturing Alliance Service Corporation, CT State Community College – Northwestern and Naugatuck Valley, CT Technical High Schools, Torrington High School, Danbury High School, New Milford High School, and Waterbury high schools along with sixteen employers throughout the northwest workforce region and several business associations and Chambers of Commerce. The project provides separate training programs by creating pipelines for 11th or 12th grade students and individuals 18 years of age or older who are not currently enrolled in 11th or 12th grade.

Training programs available include (but are not limited to):

- Introduction to Manufacturing (7 weeks)
- Introduction to Machinist (30 weeks)
- Fundamentals of Manufacturing Technology
- Engineering Drawing Specifications (8 weeks)
- Manufacturing Process/Precision Machining (8 weeks)]
- Introduction to Plastics ( 8 weeks)
- Master Cam

Qualified participants stand to benefit from a range of supportive services, including provisions like work uniforms, bus passes, and gas cards, alongside a stipend, job training scholarships in the form of Individual Training Accounts, job placement assistance, and on-the-job training. Upon completion, individuals exit the program equipped with valuable competencies for their professional journey.

### **Digital Literacy – Northstar Assessment / Remediation**

The Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board utilizes Northstar digital literacy to assess and remediate basic digital literacy skills. additionally, one on one digital literacy tutoring is available to individuals struggling with the online component.: Digital Literacy Orientation, Windows (File) Explorer, Computer Basics, Internet Explorer, Word I, Word II, Word III, Excel I, Excel II, Excel III, PowerPoint I and PowerPoint II Are just a few of the offerings.

### **Work Readiness Boot Camp**

The NRWIB worked closely with the State of CT Bureau of Rehabilitation Services to develop a work readiness boot camp. This workshop is designed to enhance opportunities by providing participants with the proper skills needed to gain employment. This is a dynamic and interactive workshop which encourages the participant to break out of their shell and connect with their

classmates and instructor. The topics discussed during training include: first impressions, work expectations and ethics, the value of prioritizing and managing time, appropriate attire, interpersonal skills and many more. This workshop is offered on a monthly basis and all participants must be referred by their career navigator and/or case manager.

**Reentry Council and Collaborative**

The NRWIB actively participates on the Greater Waterbury Reentry Council, Northwest CT Reentry Council and Greater Danbury Reentry Collaborative. As Connecticut’s prison population continues to decline, reentry supports become an integral part of one’s successful reintegration back into the lives of their children, families and communities. Reentry is complex as it touches on every aspect of a person’s life. Once an individual is released from prison, challenges can arise with finding assistance around basic needs, housing, employment, mental health and substance abuse supports, and other necessary resources. Identifying resources in a timely fashion is critical to one’s overall success. The Reentry Strategy creates a recommended framework to guide comprehensive and coordinated policy development and service delivery systems for people transitioning from jail or prison to communities throughout the state, with the goals of reducing recidivism, improving public safety, saving and more efficiently using taxpayer dollars, and assisting people to return to and stay home.

**Peer Recovery Navigator Program:**

The Peer Recovery Navigator Program aims to assist individuals dealing with addiction by providing job training opportunities in the recovery field or other areas listed on the Eligible Training Providers List. Additionally, the program seeks to encourage businesses to adopt recovery-friendly policies and sign an initiative. Notably, no referral is required for enrollment in the program. Eligibility criteria include being 18 years or older, residing in the Northwest Region (e.g., Waterbury, Danbury, Torrington), and either being a U.S. citizen or holding a Permanent Residency Green Card. Applicants must also meet requirements for basic math and reading skills testing (CASAS), Selective Service registration (for men over 18), and registration on CTHires. Additionally, specific documentation such as a Social Security Card and Birth Certificate is necessary, and income eligibility applies for WIOA Adult participation.

Qualified participants may benefit from various program offerings, including career counseling, referrals to resources and agencies, supportive services (such as work uniforms, bus passes, and gas cards), stipends based on certain factors, and job training opportunities for credentials listed on the Eligible Training Providers List. However, job placement assistance, On the Job Training (OJT), Subsidized Work Experience (SWE), and Transitional Work Experience (TWE) are not currently provided.

Upon completion of the program, participants are expected to acquire competencies relevant to their training. Funding for the program is provided by the U.S. Department of Labor and Rapid Response monies, with the grant scheduled to end on June 30, 2025.

**ADS WBLE Program**

The ADS (Dept. of Aging & Disabilities) Work Based Learning Experience (WBLE) Program seeks to empower students aged 16 through 22 with disabilities by facilitating temporary work experiences and support resources. Administered in the Northwest Region encompassing areas like Waterbury, Danbury, and Torrington, the program requires a referral from the Dept. of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) for eligibility. While a high school diploma or GED is not mandatory, participants must be engaged in either high school or a transition program. The program provides various benefits to qualified individuals, including career counseling, referrals to resources and agencies, supportive services like work uniforms and transportation assistance,

a stipend, job placement assistance, and on-the-job supports. Upon completion, participants gain valuable competencies for their future endeavors.

**Brownfields EPA:**

The Brownfields (E.P.A.) Job Training Program serves as a pivotal opportunity for individuals seeking job training in lead and asbestos abatement, along with other environmental remediation endeavors. Moreover, the program fulfills the needs of regional employers by supplying them with skilled brownfields workers. Qualified participants stand to benefit from job training in various credentials such as lead and asbestos abatement, Hazwoper, and OSHA 30, alongside job placement assistance. Upon completion, individuals acquire the necessary competencies for successful entry into the field.

Funded by the U.S. Department of Environmental Protection, the program's grant funding is set to conclude on March 31, 2028, with the final year focusing solely on job placement efforts. This program presents a unique opportunity for individuals to gain valuable skills and contribute to environmental remediation efforts in their community.

**CT WHISP**

The CTWHISP Program (Connecticut Workforce High-tech Industry Skills Partnership) is a comprehensive initiative geared towards providing individuals with Individual Training Accounts in the IT field, along with job development resources. Additionally, the program extends support through Incumbent Worker Training (IWT).

Qualified participants gain access to career counseling, referrals to resources and agencies, supportive services like work uniforms and transportation assistance, job training for credentials such as COMP TIA, job training scholarships through Individual Training Accounts, and job placement assistance. Moreover, incumbent workers have the opportunity to receive specialized training to enhance their skills.

This initiative serves as a valuable resource for individuals seeking to advance their careers in high-tech industries, providing them with the necessary tools and support for success.

**Project Longevity:**

Project Longevity is a program designed to offer trauma-informed care and case management services to individuals referred by Project Longevity-Waterbury. The primary goal is to act as a conduit between individuals affected by gun violence and their communities, connecting them with healthcare and social services within the Greater Waterbury area. The Care Coordinator facilitates enrollment in self-selected job training programs and collaborates with job development staff to assist with job placement. Qualified participants may access various program benefits, including career counseling, referrals to resources and agencies, supportive services (such as work uniforms, bus passes, and gas cards), job training for credentials under WIOA, job training scholarships (Individual Training Accounts), and job placement assistance.

Upon completion of the program, participants are expected to acquire competencies relevant to their training. Funding for the program is provided by the Connecticut Justice Education Center.

**CareerConneCT**

The Career ConneCT program provides an array of training opportunities aimed at skilling, reskilling, and upskilling individuals in burgeoning industries. With offerings in CDL Training, GREEN Training, Manufacturing, IT, and Healthcare, the program caters to a wide range of

interests and needs, allowing job seekers to earn industry-recognized credentials in just 4 to 24 weeks.

Open to individuals 18 or older residing in Connecticut, the NRWIB ensures its ability to reach marginalized populations for recruitment on a region-wide level by leveraging its partnerships with local youth service providers, school governance councils, adult education providers, CT Dept. of Labor representatives, Latino-based organizations, and community action agencies- to name a few. This multi-pronged approach is designed to create multiple touchpoints, increasing the likelihood that potential candidates will gain awareness of the opportunity to participate in the program.

Participants are paired with an engaged and enthusiastic career navigator who guides them through their journey of selecting a training program that matches the individual with their career goals. Participants receive access to job readiness skills, resume writing assistance, interview strategy workshops and a wide-range of support services to ensure their highest probability of securing gainful and meaningful employment opportunities upon completion of their job training.

### **Workforce Alliance: South Central Workforce Development Board**

#### **CareerConneCT**

CareerConneCT is a statewide program offering short-term certificate programming in Information Technology, Transportation (CDL Certification), Healthcare, Manufacturing, Infrastructure Construction and Green Jobs. Participants complete 5-to-26-week training programs at no cost. While matriculating, they are eligible to receive supportive services including job placement assistance and post program support.

#### **ARPA Youth**

Funding through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) has been granted to serve youth and their families in the region. Workforce Alliance has developed two initiatives. The first is the establishment of a new *Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI)*, where participants will gain leadership skills, an increased understanding of public policies and practical knowledge of how social change occurs. The second initiative is a partnership with CVS and the Southern CT Sickle Cell Anemia Association to support a cohort of 50 youth who have been affected by sickle cell anemia in the exploration of opportunities in the pharmacy sector. Individuals who participate in ARPA funded activities will be provided wrap around supports, stipends and Individual Training Accounts for individuals seeking post-secondary education.

#### **CT Statewide Accessible Workforce Services (SAWS) Initiative - Workforce Alliance**

Funding through a statewide WIOA National Dislocated Worker Grant was granted to the state's five Workforce Boards to expand equitable access to Connecticut's public workforce for dislocated workers and other populations experiencing disparities in wages and education. The statewide elements of SAWS are:

1. Real-time Customer Service Gatekeeping: A chat feature on each WDB website provides automated responses to standard customer questions and trained Chat Specialists to answer all other questions, make referrals to programs and services, and assist with program registration.
2. Online learning- The ACI SkillUp CT program provides online learning and career exploration opportunities.
3. Website language Accessibility Features- Translation capabilities and other accessibility features on each WDB website improves the user interface and enhance the user experience for non-English speaking customers and individuals with disabilities.
4. Outreach to marginalized communities- Outreach campaigns to increase awareness of workforce system services among marginalized populations with all levels of digital

literacy and access.

**GET IT! (Growing Equitable Training in Information Technology)**

GET IT! is a US Department of Labor Community Project Fund for 36 months starting June 1, 2023 to address two objectives: 1) a programing gap in South Central CT Information Technology pipeline to engage entry level workers; and 2) to implement sustainable strategies that engage disconnected youth 18-24 into IT and STEM-related career pathways that result in equitable economic opportunities. At least 200 youth will participate in “Digital Awareness Days,” and 100 will enroll in training programs while the other 100 will be referred to other programs in the American Job Center.

**Good Jobs Challenge – South Central Manufacturing Regional Sector Partnership**

As a convener of a Regional Sector Partnership, Workforce Alliance has been funded by the CT Office of Workforce Strategy’s Strengthening Sectorial Partnerships Initiative through a Good Jobs Challenge grant from the US Economic Development Administration. Workforce Alliance convenes the South-Central Regional Sector Partnership in partnership with the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce and the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce, which will expand our successful Skill Up for Manufacturing Program via a partnership with the Manufacturing and Technical Community Hub (MATCH). MATCH will build new training facilities in two low-income, majority-minority communities to significantly reduce transportation barriers for community members.

**Capital Workforce Partners: North Central Workforce Development Board**

***Career ConneCT***

Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) is a subrecipient of the CT Office of Workforce Strategy’s Career ConneCT grant. CWP was awarded \$9MM to lead Career ConneCT initiatives in the CDL and Information Technology industries. Additionally, CWP is a subrecipient of other Connecticut WDBs for green, manufacturing and Healthcare. Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) is committed to serving up to 850 participants statewide in the following sectors, CDL, IT, Green, manufacturing, and Healthcare.

The CareerConneCT training programs are designed to provide support to individuals in need of reskilling, upskilling, or next-skilling, including supporting individuals in accessing and participating in short term training programs that result in an industry-recognized credential and entry into employment in a high-quality career pathway in the IT, Manufacturing, CDL, Green and Healthcare industry sectors. Career ConneCT participants may also receive a skills inventory, case management, and job placement support, as well as supportive services such as transportation, childcare, housing, food, technology, benefits counseling, stipends, and/or other services needed to attend job training and care for your family during training.

***Good Jobs Challenge***

CWP is a subrecipient of the CT Office of Workforce Strategy’s \$24MM EDA Good Jobs Challenge grant award. CWP’s sub-award focuses on two Regional Sector Partnerships (RSP) co-convened by CWP in the North Central Region – IT/Tech and Healthcare. In the North Central Region, CWP’s outcomes include 113 individuals to be trained in IT/Tech and 143 in Healthcare – with emphasis on RSP-informed training and upskilling options. The project includes additional resources to develop curriculum, market/brand RSPs, and provide staff support to increase RSP membership and engagement.

***Basic Skills Remediation***

CWP has been awarded a grant from the CT Office of Workforce Strategy to pilot a basic skills remediation pilot, in partnership with the Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board, several Adult Education providers, and the CT Department of Education. This pilot will serve individuals that have attained a high school diploma, GED, or equivalent but who are still not



yet determined to be ready to enter postsecondary occupational credentialing programs. The pilot will implement contextualized training that emphasizes literacy, numeracy, work readiness, and digital literacy, with a target of 240 individuals to be served.

### ***SAWS***

The CT Statewide Accessible Workforce Services (CT SAWS) grant is in partnership with Workforce Alliance. SAWS is a comprehensive statewide initiative designed for Workforce Development Boards to expand their access to our public workforce. The program encompasses various key components to address the diverse needs of its target populations, including historically marginalized communities, Dislocated Workers affected by COVID, long term unemployed and UI (including PUA) exhaustees. To effectively reach these populations SAWS incorporates key strategies, such as our Live Chat platform, social media campaigns to reach marginalized communities, and website language accessibility features. SAWS also provides access to free online training and career preparation through SkillUp CT (Metrix Learning). Individuals utilize the Live Chat on CWP's website can connect to a Live Chat Specialist to receive information connected to CWP and American Job Center programs. SAWS was effective through 9/30/23 but received a no-cost extension through 6/30/24, with a focus on developing social media campaigns to connect with marginalized communities, expanding our reach to inform of the array of services available through social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook. Through SAWS, within the North Central region we've been able to assign over 2,000 licenses for Metrix Learning resulting in over 2,400 course completions. We've also connected with over 13,000 through our Live Chat to connect with services.

### ***Connecticut Recovers Opioid Grant***

Capital Workforce Partners, in partnership with the Connecticut Department of Labor, was awarded another Connecticut Recovery in the Workplace/Opioid 2.0 Grant in March 2023. This grant funds a position for a Substance Abuse/Peer Navigator in the AJC. The Peer Navigator supports individuals who have been affected by the opioid crisis address barriers to employment and assists them to navigate systems and access training and employment services. In addition, the Peer Navigator will work with the regions RBHAO to certify employers as a "Recovery Friendly Workplace" and assist with eliminating barriers for those employees and potential employees impacted by addiction.

### ***H-1B CT-WHISP***

The H-1B Connecticut Workforce & High-Tech Industry Skills Partnership (CT-WHISP) Grant Program is a four-year, \$10 million grant to invest in training for key sectors of the U.S. Economy running from February 2021 – January 2025. Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) is one of the nineteen Grant recipients, who will focus on upskilling the current workforce and training the workforce of the future for critical industries such as IT and advanced manufacturing. This grant is in partnership with the other four workforce boards in Connecticut and is targeted to serve 2086 individuals statewide and 440 in the North Central Region. Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) in partnership with the American Job Center (AJC) network, regional IT and manufacturing employers and regional IT and manufacturing training providers are using innovative training strategies and training delivery methods to provide individuals in our communities with the skills necessary to succeed in middle and high-skilled H-1B occupations. Training models include a broad range of virtual/hybrid/classroom skills training, on-the-job training, and incumbent worker training. To date, we have served 1285 individuals statewide: 373 participants enrolled in skills training, 781 participants have been enrolled in incumbent worker training and 131 have enrolled in on-the-job training.

### ***Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Second Chance Pilot – BEST Chance***

In 2016 the State of Connecticut chose Capital Workforce Partners as the lead organization to implement the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) Second Chance Pilot as a contextualized learning pilot program in Hartford County to reduce unemployment and

recidivism rates among soon to be released offenders and former-offenders in Connecticut. The goal is to help returning citizens compete in today's labor market by providing relevant training and support to gain good jobs. Specifically, program goals included:

- Completion of basic, occupational, and advanced training
- Increased earnings and employment
- Reduction of recidivism
- Placement and Retention of employment
- The BEST Chance Program is based on the I-BEST, an evidence-based model designed to provide vocational education combined with contextualized adult basic education, through a partnership of a dozen organizations supporting this comprehensive program.

### ***Jobs Funnel***

The Jobs Funnel was launched as a pilot in Hartford to provide qualified workers opportunities to pursue careers in the construction trades. Jobs Funnels programs now operate in two local workforce areas – north central and northwest – under the aegis of the respective regional WDBs.

Jobs Funnel services include outreach/recruitment, assessment, case management, pre-employment training, job placement, and retention support services. Since its inception, the funnel initiatives have helped to place more than 4,488 individuals in a variety of construction- related jobs, in both union and non-union settings, and in apprenticeships. The average hourly starting wage for participants who have completed the Jobs Funnel training is approximately \$17-21. The Jobs Funnels are an example of innovative public-private partnerships involving employers, labor, community-based organizations, state and local agencies, non-profits and local funders to address shared objectives.

### ***Free to Succeed***

Free to Succeed provides career advancement planning, employment services, support, and job retention to former offenders for a 24-month period. The program is staffed by two full-time Retention Specialists, located at the Hartford AJC and the AJC satellite at Hartford Public Library. WIOA is leveraged to provide job training and placement services. Individuals are referred to Free to Succeed after gaining employment.

### ***Ticket to Work***

Social Security's Ticket to Work program offers Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries with disabilities the opportunity to explore work while safeguarding their benefits and healthcare through various work incentives. The Ticket to Work program supports and encourages workers with disabilities on the journey to financial independence and self-sufficiency.

### ***Hartford Working Cities Challenge (HWC)***

CWP is a partner with Hartford's Working Cities initiative, which is a focused, concentrated, and urgent effort that tackles two economic challenges facing Hartford: poverty and the need for an educated workforce to attract and retain employers to the city and the region. The Hartford Working Cities is a partner with the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative, and supports youth leadership development, career pathways support and providing outreach to the community for employment and training opportunities. The Working Cities Initiative has been a core partner of the Hartford Career Navigation System work supporting higher quality, real time youth referrals to services between youth agencies. As challenges increased for disconnected youth during and after the pandemic, connecting youth to quality career pathways with support services is a critical youth workforce strategy.

### ***East Hartford Working Cities Challenge (EHC)***

Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) is an active partner in *East Hartford CONNects (EHC)*. EHC represents East Hartford's initiative as one of five municipalities participating in the

Connecticut Working Cities Challenge, organized by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. EHC's purpose is to assist East Hartford residents with career development and educational resources and to foster community engagement. The initiative's staff works with residents who are searching for a new job or need assistance navigating available resources in the community.

### ***Adult Literacy***

Capital Workforce Partners, working with 35-40 adult education providers and workforce development representatives in the north central region is collaborating to support the Capital Area Adult Literacy Network, focusing on workforce development programs and adult education providers accentuating efforts to strengthen coordination between workforce development and adult education. The group is focused on several priorities:

- Providing feedback and insights to CWP and workforce development initiatives to support improvements for services and referrals to/from the American Job Center (AJC) and also supports new piloted adult education/work-readiness preparation services at AJC sites.
- Supporting Adult Education and Contextualized Training initiatives led by Capital Workforce in close partnership with the adult education providers in North Central Connecticut and other industry, education, and community stakeholders. Projects focus on demand-driven, credential-based training opportunities to North Central Connecticut in close alignment to industry and business needs. Initiatives also drive equity by improving access to further training and employment opportunities for adult learners, including ESL students and other special populations.
- CWP convenes quarterly meetings of the American Job Center lead staff with the Adult Education providers to enhance coordination and communications.
- A 'community of learning' focused on sharing best practices, networking and communications focuses on special topics of benefit to improve adult education and workforce development services and strategies.
- Additional enhancements to strengthen the system were further noted.
- Doing more to braid CTE/Academic Programs with workforce development programs at the local site level (strategic program development)
- Support efforts for adult education to better link with the comprehensive workforce development system.
- IET Programs: need to be able to think through how adult education and contextualized IET options can be brought to scale
- Pre-readiness boot camps for adult education
- Working with AJCs and Adult Education Programs to have an integrated communications packet of services
- Updating the array of intake/assessments to be systemized – to reduce duplication and redundancy; create common forms.

In early 2024, CWP working with the Capital Area Adult Literacy Network, State Department of Education, and the CT Office of Workforce Strategy received a \$1.6 million CareerConneCT grant to develop a contextualized adult education remediation program for individuals with high school diplomas that needed additional basic academic skills support, occupational sector training and work-readiness skills. The NW Regional Investment Board is also a co-partner in this initiative. The goal is that these successful pilots, combined with an evaluation, will lead to systemic change broadening adult education programming for contextualized training to a greater scale for individuals with high school diplomas who need basic academic skills supports.

## **YOUTH**

### ***Summer Youth Employment Program***

The purpose of SYELP is to expose and connect youth to career pathways through 120 hours paid work-based learning in order to build a talent pipeline that meets employer needs. The program's intent is to provide youth with career competency development and work readiness training combined with real-world experiences aligned to their interests. Work Based Learning supports and supplements academic learning and promotes development of transferable skills that will serve participants well as they transition into the professional world. SYELP is structured in Tiers.

*1. Project Based Learning - Tier I*

**Purpose:** Programming designed to provide project-based learning and career exploration opportunities. Tier I programming provides basic, developmentally appropriate career exposure activities, introduction to employability skills, and academic reinforcement in a cohort-model setting.

**Target Population:** Youth with limited or no work experience, assessed as not ready for the workplace. Youth are typically 14-15 years old or otherwise assessed as needing Tier I services.

*2. Career Preparation- Tier II*

**Purpose:** to provide youth with career competency development in a work setting with supportive employer and a caring adult supervisor who acts as a coach to guide their development and prepare them for internships and/or employment with private businesses.

**Target population:** Youth with limited work experience, assessed as not fully ready for the workplace. Youth are typically 15-17 years old or are otherwise assessed as needing Tier II services.

*3. Career Bridging- Tier III*

**Purpose:** to provide youth with career competency development through real-world work experiences that offer exposure to career paths within a business and industry aligned with their interests.

**Target Population:** Youth who have work and/or internship experience and who have been assessed as work ready. Youth are typically 16-24 years old or are otherwise assessed as ready for and needing Tier III services.

***Bloomfield Dual Track Pilot Program***

Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) and Bloomfield High School will partner to deliver a pilot dual track programming to 20-30 Bloomfield High School 12th Grade students in the Fall of 2024. Students who participate in this program will complete CNA training, including clinical worksite experiences, alongside their regular course of 12th grade study and will be on track to graduate in the Spring of 2025 with both a High School Diploma and a CNA license. CNA training will be offered by an accredited training provider during the school day as a credited-bearing elective which youth can add to their academic schedule.

Youth enrolled within the CNA training elective will receive exposure to the health care sector, 60 hours of classroom-based instruction, 40 hours of hands-on experience through clinicals, and supports such as CNA professional attire and costs of CNA licensing. Program graduates will be well equipped to enter unsubsidized employment in a high-demand occupation and/or pursue further postsecondary training. This project, launched as a pilot, directly advances state and regional goals for increasing students' postsecondary and career readiness through integrated dual track training frameworks and will demonstrate a replicable and scalable model for addressing talent pipeline shortages in the healthcare sector and other priority areas. This model of training allows students to complete not only with a high school diploma but with CNA certification/license as well, which will allow them to make sustainable wages upon graduation.

In addition to CNA training, students will receive case management and career advising services from a Youth Career Navigator, hired specifically to support the Dual Track CNA Training Program. Upon completion of the program all students will be referred to the Summer Youth Employment & Learning Program to receive healthcare internship opportunities within the

SYELP framework which will further the student's health care career exploration experience. Youth who cannot, or who opt not to participate in SYELP will be enrolled in post-secondary education, advanced sector-based training facilitated by the public workforce system, and/or will enter permanent unsubsidized employment post-graduation.

CWP co-convenes the Capital Area Healthcare Partnership and works with several healthcare employer partners who have made commitments to hire graduates of our training programs. CNA positions are among the most in-demand occupations in the North Central Region, with numerous initiatives underway to build out further nursing and other health sector career pathways.

### ***Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative***

Capital Workforce Partners is the backbone organization for the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative (HOYC), a collective action effort to improve the life outcomes for the almost 8000 Opportunity Youth (OY), ages 16-26 in Hartford who do not have a high school degree or who have a diploma but are not in school or working; in addition to at-risk youth in-school with significant early warning indicators. HOYC complements the One Stop system and WOIA Youth programming facilitated by Capital Workforce Partners to increase access and supports for Opportunity Youth.

HOYC OY strategies emphasize empowering youth leaders, enhancing and expanding effective career pathways, using Results-Based Accountability to inform decision-making, assess progress, and improve methods of evaluation, and engaging in policy and systems alignment to scale up and sustain this work. HOYC engages membership, establishing commitments to: (a) a common agenda for OY programming, (b) shared measurement, (c) mutually reinforcing activities, and (d) continuous communication.

Currently, the group is engaged in an action planning process to determine priorities and strategies for the next several years. Impacts of the pandemic, such as increases in chronic absenteeism, have heightened the imperative for Opportunity Youth stakeholders to partner with school districts and establish OY prevention strategies for at-risk youth. HOYC's planning process will clarify specific strategies and a continuum of service delivery for both at-risk and disconnected youth and young adults.

### ***Hartford Work Based Learning Network***

The Hartford Work Based Learning Network (WBLN) is comprised of twenty-five organizations who are dedicated to helping Hartford school-aged youth develop critical hard and soft workplace skills necessary for post-secondary education and/or career. The WBLN evaluates WBL program participants on 12 competencies. These competencies range from general professional skills to problem solving/critical thinking skills to teamwork/collaboration skills. The competencies help assess areas where youth show strong skillsets and areas where students need to improve. The Network is CWP's primary venue for building local provider capacity to design and implement high-quality Work-Based Learning programming that aligns to regional standards and assessment criteria.

In addition to the competencies, the Network has also developed WBL rubrics for providers and employers (e.g., internship worksites) to evaluate youth development along the competencies. The Network has also developed a website to centralize WBL resources for regional stakeholders.

### ***Hartford Career Navigation Systems Development***

In response to an identified, systemic need for coordination of and navigation to employment and training resources, and in-line with a commitment to eliminating the duplication of projects and services through increased collaboration, The Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative (HOYC) has established a Career Navigation Systems Development Initiative. The Career

Navigation Systems Development Initiative, a city-wide effort spearheaded by the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative (HOYC) Employment Training and Career Pathway Committee, is set to provide a streamlined system of services for workforce development and career opportunities for Opportunity Youth (OY) and young adults in Hartford aged 14-29. Born in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the initiative focuses on the thousands of Opportunity Youth and Disconnected Young Adults in Hartford, aiming to provide them with a clear path forward.

The initiative is driven by five key strategies designed to create a comprehensive and supportive ecosystem for the city's youth to improve interagency coordination and referrals between agencies. The five strategies include: 1) Establishing a Community of Practice for career navigation staff; 2) Developing a virtual directory of services and resources; 3) Enhancing local data infrastructure to track referrals and outcomes; 4) Creating/Branding Career Navigation Hubs; and 5) Formalizing agency partnerships through MOUs and data sharing agreements.

## **Partnerships**

### ***Capital Area Healthcare Partnership (CAHP)***

The Capital Area Healthcare Partnership is a regional sector partnership that brings together healthcare providers to collaborate on tackling shared challenges. This partnership is being driven by healthcare leaders from across acute, post-acute, primary care, long-term care, home health, behavioral health, and other providers. Capital Workforce Partners and the Connecticut Health Council are the co-convenors, working in coordination with other economic development, workforce and education organizations at the region and state levels. The partnership's mission is to increase the stability of the healthcare industry as a critical economic driver and to improve outcomes through collaborative strategies.

The partnership's leadership team is comprised of executive leaders from Bristol Hospital, Hartford Healthcare, iCare, Intercommunity Healthcare, New Horizons, Inc., Oak Hill, and Wheeler Clinic. The leadership team's goal is to ensure the partnership is focused on the right priorities and achieving desired outcomes. The team meets to plan the agenda for each quarterly partnership meeting and as needed to discuss the partnership's direction.

The bulk of the work done through the partnership is driven by action teams. The goal of the Policy Action team is to unify and strengthen the voice of healthcare providers. The team focuses on advocating for public policies that improve the stability of the healthcare industry, patient care, and access to quality healthcare jobs. The goal of the Action Team called Building the Healthcare Workforce of Tomorrow is to educate, engage, and actualize Connecticut youth and adults regarding healthcare opportunities, careers, and career pathways.

The partnership was launched in December of 2022 and has grown to 28 healthcare organizations and is supported by 31 public partners.

*CAHP receives funding from Workforce Solutions, a funders' collaborative.*

### ***Advanced Manufacturing Employer Partnership (AMEP)***

The Advanced Manufacturing Employers Partnership (AMEP) is an employer led consortium that supports initiatives to grow and enhance the manufacturing talent pipeline for aerospace and other manufacturers in North and Central Connecticut. It is a prime venue for manufacturing employers to come together to share ideas, express challenges, and influence workforce development initiatives. AMEP has a core focus on the manufacturing talent needs of advanced manufacturing employers, primarily aerospace in support of the supply chain of small-medium size manufacturers centered around Pratt and Whitney.

Each quarterly meeting brings together speakers on current topics such as apprenticeship, manufacturing innovation, and workforce forecasting. Participating employers have first-hand

access to state and federal programs that offer financial support aimed at helping businesses succeed and grow.

*AMEP receives funding from Workforce Solutions, a funders' collaborative and is convened by the Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology (CCAT).*

***Capital Area Tech Partnership (CATP)***

Launched in 2021, this regional sector partnership brings together business leaders from the Connecticut capital region's technology companies to tackle common challenges that impact the growth and resiliency of the IT sector. It is supported by a collaborative team of public partners representing education, workforce development and economic development organizations and co-convened by Capital Workforce Partners and Metro Hartford Alliance.

The CATP convenes workgroups and quarterly meetings in an ongoing network to address pressing issues together, including workforce and talent development, networking opportunities, and policy topics that warrant an elevated sector voice. CATP is the Tech Regional Sector Partnership for Connecticut's capital region, launched with the support of the Governor's Workforce Council. Regional partnerships are modeled after nationally recognized Next Gen Sector Partnerships, which are active in 18 states around the country.

The CATP steering committee includes representatives from CGI, HCL Technologies, and Stanley Black and Decker.

***Capital Area Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics Partnership (CATDLP)***

The Capital Area Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics Sector Partnership was launched in 2022 and brings together businesses from the industry to address common challenges and strengthen the economic viability of the TDL industry in the region. This partnership is business-led, with a steering committee comprised of representatives from Lily Transportation, DATTCO, Dominos, Bozzuto's, and S&S Worldwide. It is convened by Capital Workforce Partners working in coordination with other economic development, workforce, and education organizations at the regional and state levels.

Through this partnership business leaders are working to advance TDL business priorities in the following areas:

- **Industry Promotion and Career Awareness:** Advancing strategies to connect underrepresented groups to career opportunities, including women and youth, while addressing stigmas commonly associated with work in these industries.
- **Workforce Development:** Creating opportunities and resources for training new staff and upskilling existing workers to take on leadership roles.
- **Policy:** Elevating the voice of TDL with policymakers, reducing barriers to effective operations and increasing the stability of the industry as an economic driver.

*CATDLP receives funding from Workforce Solutions, a funders' collaborative.*

***Jobs Funnel Advisory Committee***

Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) convenes the Jobs Funnel Advisory Committee. The Jobs Funnel Advisory Committee oversees the development and implementation of partnership opportunities with key stakeholders to lead efforts in all regional Jobs Funnel activities. This includes strategies for jobseekers' training and placement in the construction industry sector. The committee's guidance will ensure that the North Central Region's Jobs Funnel initiatives enhance and develop a workforce which is equipped with the necessary skills to enter and

advance in the state's construction and related green industry sector.

***Relocation of the Hartford American Job Center***

Capital Workforce Partners and the Department of Labor are relocating the Hartford American Job Center to 60 Weston Street. A systems-building approach will be taken to create a customer-centered and customer-driven service delivery model. This model will seek to provide seamless delivery of services to its job seekers through enhanced coordination of services amongst all partner organizations that will be housed in the new American Job Center. The new location is modern and welcoming while providing the highest level of support to job seekers in the North Central region. BRS and CWP will pursue opportunities for co-location, or part-time co-location in order to facilitate access to AJC services and increase cross-referrals. . CWP will continue to seek out additional partners for co-location at this comprehensive site with end goal of being a true One Stop shop for job seekers in the North Central region.

**Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE)**

CSDE continues to support Integrated Education and Training (IET) projects using Title II, WIOA funds. CSDE conducted a new competition in April 2021 in which four adult education providers applied for and were awarded funding to offer training programs which aligned with their local workforce development boards' identified industry sectors. Certification programs include manufacturing, various health occupations and auto technicians. These projects, entitled Program Enhancement Projects (PEP), are being conducted through two Regional Education Service Centers: (CREC and EASTCONN), and New London Adult Education,. The total funding for the projects is \$110,000 with the promise to support a minimum of 42 participants. CSDE will continue to offer the IET program in its next program year.

**State Board of Education – Academic Office, Teaching and Learning Unit**

In September 2018, the CSDE met with the CTDOL to discuss Connecticut long-term industry and occupational projection data. In November 2018, the Assistant Director of Research and Information in the Office of Research and Information at the CT-DOL matched Connecticut industry and occupational data and projections to the National Career Clusters Framework. The CSDE examined each of the five WDBs occupational areas of growth and utilized an article published by the CT-DOL and the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (CDECD) pertaining to Connecticut's long-term industry and occupational projections for 2016–2026. Through a triangulation of these data, and knowing the data are most complete for industries having payroll employment covered by unemployment insurance, top clusters for Connecticut emerged.

In February 2019, the CSDE convened a core Perkins V leadership group consisting of key stakeholders to: analyze Connecticut Workforce Needs, establish Program Career Clusters and Pathways, and inform the CTE Transition and State Plans.

After consideration of the Perkins V leadership group analysis, stakeholder feedback, and the National Forum on Educational Statistics (NCES) and the School Courses for the Exchange of Data (SCED) coding system, the approved Perkins V Connecticut Career Clusters that will drive the pathways and programs or programs of study (POS) to be supported, developed or improved at the State and local levels are:

- Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources;
- Architecture and Construction;
- Business Management and Administration;
- Family and Consumer Sciences;
- Finance;



- Health Science;
- Hospitality and Tourism;
- Information Technology;
- Manufacturing;
- Marketing;
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics; and
- Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics.

### ***CT Perkins State Plan***

At present CT is functioning under OCTAE option 2: state determined performance levels revisions pursuant to section 113(b)(3)(A)(iii) of Perkins V. While CTE in CT continues to evolve to meet both emerging and long-standing challenges OCTAE option 2 continues to use work-based learning experiences as CT's metric for the state determined performance levels. WBL experiences are one of the three areas of emphasis that Perkins V is designed around. CT continues to support local eligible recipients in the other two areas of emphasis of dual credit articulations and industry recognized credentials.

The Perkins V Leadership Work Group will reconvene in December 2024 preparatory to drafting a new CT Perkins State Plan which will cover 2025-29.

During the current time period CT has worked to expand opportunities based on a vision which includes foundational commitments such as equity, quality programs and instructors, meaningful partnerships, actionable data and continuous improvement and collaboration (AdvanceCTE: CTE Without Limits). This is congruent with the CT State Board Of Education's 5-year plan: Every student prepared for learning, life and work beyond school.

Current initiatives include the CT Pathways System Institute, CT Science Center Teacher STEM Externship, The Connecticut Center for Advanced Technologies outreach programming, and the Institute for Real World Education and Curriculum Advancement.

Upon reconvening the Perkins V Leadership Work Group a major consideration will be integrating the updated National Career Clusters Framework which will bridge the gap between education and work, organize CTE models that empower each learner to explore, decide on and prepare for dynamic and evolving careers.

The current national career clusters framework is over 20 years old and no longer adequately reflects current world of work and its potential future. Advance CTE is updating the framework to better act as a common language and bridge between education and work. Advance CTE expects a modernized framework to have different career clusters from the existing framework. Any changes, such as the potential consolidation, adding of new career clusters or renaming of existing career clusters, would come as a result of recommendations from industry representatives and aggregate stakeholder feedback, supported by labor market research. The new frameworks and all appropriate associated assets will be finalized and made public by the end of 2024.

### ***Partnering in CTE***

In Connecticut, the five regional WDBs are geographically aligned to the six RESCs across the state. The CSDE partnered with CTDOL and the Perkins V Leadership Workgroup to create a map that shows WDB/RESC alignment. Local eligible recipients use the *Partners in Careers Map* to aid in the completion of their Local Needs Assessment (CLNA) and required biennial update. The CSDE has an ongoing relationship with the Office of Research at CTDOL which informs decision making on high-skill, high-wage and in-demand industry sectors and

occupations and collaborates as part of the CT Learns and Works subcommittee to provide professional learning for a variety of stakeholders.

In addition, the Connecticut State Board of Education developed the Comprehensive Plan for Education 2023-28, which CSDE has formally adopted, that sets forth the state's vision for education and identifies four critical strategic priorities to help meet the challenge of effectively preparing each Connecticut student for learning, life, and work beyond the classroom. The four priorities include:

- All learners are supported, including those with high needs, and have equitable access to education regardless of background or advantage, as well as access to great teachers and leaders, and a diverse educational workforce
- Learning spaces are safe, compassionate, and culturally responsive and are designed to support the academic, physical, and social-emotional well-being of all learners, including those with a disability, learners experiencing food and housing insecurities, learners coming from low-income families, and those who identify as LGBTQ+
- Elevate Connecticut's curriculum frameworks to provide support for the development of rigorous, engaging instruction and the reliable assessment of universally required skills for life beyond school and a lifelong love of learning
- Create opportunities for all students to explore multiple career pathways through coordinated and rigorous programs that are developed in partnership with institutions of higher education and local/regional employers, and that align with economic opportunity and advance students in careers of their choice.

Connecticut's vision for education and workforce development demands schools, districts, and community colleges design rigorous pathways and programs of study from a perspective of bold innovation that fosters deep and long-lasting changes.

Furthermore, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Perkins V goals align to Title IV, Part B in which 21st Century School programs can partner with in-demand fields of the local workforce or build career competencies and career readiness. This funding may provide workforce development boards with additional opportunities to collaborate and leverage resources for in-school youth services. Continued coordination with these programs will help to unify CSDE guidance.

The CSDE collaborates with outside agencies in order to braid funding, ensure cohesiveness among programs, and educate the whole child from PreK-12.

### **University of Connecticut**

The Next Generation Connecticut is a state initiative to significantly expand educational opportunities, research and innovation in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines at the University of Connecticut. The broad objective is to leverage UConn's strengths and resources to help build Connecticut's future workforce, create jobs and invigorate the state economy. The cornerstone of the effort is a major increase in student enrollment, faculty expansion, development of facilities for enhanced STEM research and teaching, and expansion of critical programs at UConn's Hartford and Stamford campuses.

The initiative represents one of the most ambitious state investments in economic development, higher education and research, fueling Connecticut's economy with new technologies, training highly skilled graduates, creating new companies, patents, licenses and high-wage jobs. Components include: hiring research and teaching faculty in STEM disciplines; building research facilities for materials science, physics, biology, engineering, cognitive science, genomics and related disciplines; constructing teaching laboratories; creating a STEM Honors program to attract high achieving undergraduate students; upgrading aging

infrastructure; expanding Stamford degree programs; providing student housing in Stamford; and relocating the Greater Hartford campus to downtown Hartford. This aggressive investment hopes to dramatically increase UConn STEM research and graduates, producing innovations and inventions contributing directly to sustainable economic growth in Connecticut, with high-wage jobs for a STEM-skilled and educated workforce. Since 2016, the initiative completed 10 major projects, including the completion of the state-of-the-art STEM Research Center Science 1 facility, home to the Institute of Materials Science that officially opened in Storrs in June 2023.

### **Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS)**

The Connecticut Technical Education and Career System's (CTECS) mission is to prepare trade-bound students to meet the skilled workforce needs in Connecticut through exemplary trade and academic programming.

CTECS operates 17 diploma-granting technical high schools, one technical education center and two airframe mechanic and aircraft maintenance programs. The school system provides a direct employment pipeline for approximately 11,500 grade 9-12 students and 3,5000 adult learners. CTECS offers a rich system of career and technical education (CTE) opportunities in 31 in-demand career areas. Our educational settings mirror the best from Connecticut businesses and industry. Our learners learn in highly professional and technically current environments that will prepare them for the workforce of today and tomorrow. CTECS high school graduates earn a Connecticut high school diploma, CTE certificate in their field of study and multiple industry recognized credentials.

The historical connection between what CTECS offers and the needs of industry partners is well established. Executive Director Dr. Ellen Solek, CTECS Central Office leadership, school principals and faculty, are all actively engaged in a wide range of partnerships and collaboration with employers, post-secondary institutions, K-12 schools, workforce agencies and others. Ultimately, our school system not only benefits industry, but benefits Connecticut's economic health. Of note:

- Nearly half of CTECS' 18 schools operate 2 to 3 shifts each day –
  - High school day program
  - The Career Academy (An after-school program in partnership with regional high schools with plans to expand to other regions in the state)
  - Evening college programs for technical credit, as well as seven CTECS schools offering CT-DOL approved CTECS Apprenticeship Coursework, online and in person.
  - 9 locations have technical college partnerships that make use of CTECS' manufacturing facilities in the evening. Partnerships include MXCC, NVCC, Three Rivers, Housatonic, Gateway, Northwestern, QVCC and Tunxis.
- Of approximately 4,800 apprentices in the state in the trade areas offered by CTECS (i.e. excluding firefighters, etc.) 1,600 are CTECS graduates and 3,000 attend adult education evening programming.
- Over 600 companies participate in the Work-based Learning program, which allows employers to hire student workers who are often eligible for full-time employment after graduation.
- Over 200 employers participate in Program Advisory Committees (PACs) that inform program alignment to industry trends.
- Graduates are eligible for full-hour credit in related instruction requirements towards their occupational license. This equates up to 720 hours in licensed trades (ex. S2, E2, SM2, P2). Upon graduation, this is up to 1,500 hours towards apprenticeship.

CTECS Strategic Operating Plan is central to accomplishing the system's mission. It outlines what CTECS wants to achieve, how to achieve it, and how success will be measured. The plan is organized around four overarching goals:

1. **School Environment and Safety:** Provide a welcoming environment that is safe, equitable and supportive of students' development in productive citizens with the skills necessary for success.
2. **Trade and Academic Programming:** Develop programming, career pathways, and experiential opportunities, aligned to industry needs, that cultivate workforce-ready students.
3. **Student Recruitment and Access:** Target promotional efforts to attract students with true trade interest and expand trade and academic learning opportunities for Connecticut residents.
4. **Talent Management:** Recruit and hire a diverse, highly qualified CTECS workforce and provide opportunities for ongoing training and leadership.

The Strategic Operating Plan reaffirms CTECS' commitment to its mission of preparing students for successful careers and supporting Connecticut businesses and industries. Going forward these efforts and partnerships will become increasingly important elements of the state's broad workforce development strategy, particularly in occupations in critical industries demanding specific technical skills.

### **United States Department of Labor Job Corps**

Job Corps is a national, federally funded educational and vocational training program administered by USDOL, that helps low income youth (ages 16-24) gain workplace skills, train for high-demand occupations, and become independent and self-sufficient. With centers in Hartford and New Haven, more than 400 students enroll each year to earn a high school diploma or GED, learn a trade, obtain third party certifications and receive assistance finding a job. Staff of the CTDOL Business Engagement Unit support both Connecticut Job Corps centers by participating on their Workforce Councils, and promote and provide a variety of services to the program and students such as referrals and job placement services, labor market information, information on internship opportunities and participation in job fairs.

### **Connecticut P20-WIN**

P20 WIN is Connecticut's state longitudinal data system and is the mechanism by which data are shared across multiple agencies. P20 WIN data resides with the agency that collects that data until a data request has been approved. The system has been operational since 2014 and is codified in the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10a-57g. P20 WIN informs sound policies and practice through secure sharing of longitudinal data across participating agencies to ensure that individuals successfully navigate supportive services and educational pathways into the workforce.

P20 WIN is used to answer policy questions, fulfill federal and state reporting requirements; support program review; inform school districts of postsecondary outcomes; provide employment and wage outcome data; and support research and analysis on a variety of topics.

#### ***Participating Agencies***

P20 WIN has a membership of 15 state agencies, institutions of higher education, and nonprofits, including: the Office of Early Childhood (OEC), the State Department of Education (SDE), the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU), the University of Connecticut (UCONN), the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC), the Department of Labor (DOL), the Department of Social Services (DSS), the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Office of Higher Education (OHE), the Connecticut Coalition to End Homeless (CCEH), the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS), the Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division (JBCSSD), the Department of Correction (DOC), and the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS).

#### ***Governance***

The P20 WIN governance structure is composed of an Executive Board and a Data Governing Board. These entities are responsible for the development and implementation of the necessary policies and procedures for a multi-agency data sharing system to address broad policy questions and state needs.

P20 WIN is administered by the Office of Policy and Management (OPM), which provides program management to support the continued operation and improvement as a resource for the participating agencies and the State. The Department of Labor is the Data Integration Hub for P20 WIN and conducts all data matching for approved data requests for the participating agencies.

### ***Research Priorities***

The P20 WIN Learning Agenda reflects the priority issues and burning questions for the State of Connecticut and P20 WIN participating agencies. The Learning Agenda is updated annually to highlight topics and questions that are used to prioritize and inform data requests to P20 WIN:

- College and Career Success
- Student Readiness
- Financial Aid
- Workforce Training
- Overcoming Barriers to Success

Through the P20 WIN system, reporting is in development to analyze workforce training program outcomes and explore the education, training and career pathways of Connecticut residents. Agencies participating in this analysis include the Department of Labor, the Department of Education, and the CT Technical Education and Career System. The report is required for the Chief Workforce Officer under C.G.S. Sec. 10a-57g(e) and will include reporting on adult education, technical high schools, postsecondary programs and all participants enrolled in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Wagner-Peyser, Jobs for Veterans' State Grants (JVSG), Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), Jobs First Employment Services (JFES), Best Chance, State Youth Employment Programs, and Registered Apprenticeships.

The preceding discussion of Connecticut's workforce development activities addresses an inventory of selected noteworthy initiatives, programs, and services responsive to the goals that serve as the focus for this Unified State Plan. The process of developing Connecticut's Unified State Plan included review of the Strengths, Weaknesses and Opportunities.

## **(B) The Strengths and Weaknesses of Workforce Development Activities**

### ***Strengths***

The Governor's Workforce Council (GWC) brings together many of the most influential leaders in Connecticut's workforce ecosystem to concurrently address business and workforce needs. The GWC shares a commitment to eliminating administrative and statutory barriers to success wherever possible and supports Connecticut's efforts to improve outcomes for its workers, students, and businesses by creating a comprehensive vision and strategy for growing the economy through innovative, accessible, and easily navigable workforce programs.

Connecticut brings distinct strengths to this mission of workforce development. It has one of the most educated workforces in the country, ranking among the top five states. It is home to innovative, globally leading companies in aerospace, advanced manufacturing, insurance and financial services. It is among the top 10 states in research with commercial potential, particularly in bioscience. And it is consistently recognized as one of the best places to live in the country. At the same time, the state also has the second highest income disparity in the United States, as measured by a 2019 survey from the US Census Bureau. We must capitalize on our strengths while planning carefully and seeking to elevate the best of what we have to offer.

The work of the GWC, with the support of OWS and partners has accelerated Connecticut's progress in transforming its workforce system into a demand-driven model where business skill needs drive workforce development strategies and programs. The state plan incorporates the key elements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in all of its foundational and strategic pillars, including Systems Alignment; Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access; Data and Performance; Education and Career Pathways, Sector-Based Training, and Industry Leadership. Outlined throughout this plan are numerous examples of workforce programs that strive to address the essential components of a comprehensive approach to career pathways responsive to employer needs and focused on good career opportunities.

Connecticut's workforce development efforts are supported and encouraged by the strong relationships among executive leadership in key State agencies and key administrative and program staff in each organization. State, regional and local partners have a demonstrable track record of successful collaboration on applying for and winning significant national competitive grant awards that address strategic priorities, developing innovative partnerships responsive to employer priorities, and effective sharing of information and best practices.

The leadership role of the local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) – collaborating with OWS, CTDOL, ADS, CSDE, public and private education partners, other key State agencies and numerous local partners and stakeholders – is a key asset in Connecticut's ability to develop innovative strategies, programs and services responsive to the needs of jobseekers, workers and employers. The WDBs and their partners have developed numerous effective programs, shared successful efforts and adjusted strategies as results dictate.

Connecticut also has an extensive network of committed, mission-driven, and effective community-based organizations and non-profit service providers delivering effective workforce programs and services accessible to key target populations. Connecticut has an active philanthropic sector that is increasingly engaged in supporting workforce development-related initiatives, including local community foundations, local United Ways and corporate foundations.

Examples of outstanding collaborations and initiatives contributing to the strength of workforce development activities include:

- **Governor's Workforce Council** is chaired by the Chief Workforce Officer and the Office of the Governor and brings together all of the key agencies that have responsibilities for workforce, including the Office of Workforce Strategy, the Department of Labor, the State Department of Education, the Office of Higher Education, the Department of Administrative Services, the Department of Economic and Community Development among others. The Council is responsible for collaborating on workforce strategy to ensure efficacy and impact across all programs and funding.
- **Regional Sector Partnerships** 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 has doubled in the state 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 and Construction (1, in development). The GWC will continue to promote and support these partnerships through its Industry Leadership Committee.
- **Career ConneCT** is a \$70 million grant investment allocated to OWS through ARPA and is currently focused on providing short-term, industry-aligned certificates to unemployed or underemployed individuals. Launched in late 2021, this program is on track to train 6,000 of these individuals for quality jobs in growing industries, including healthcare, IT and manufacturing. OWS awarded 19 grants to Workforce Development Boards and community-based organizations who are responsible for providing individuals with the

training and support, such as transportation, housing, and childcare, needed to complete training and attain meaningful employment. The Workforce Development Boards, with the support from OWS have developed the [Career ConneCT portal](#) as an entry point for broad recruitment. Data collection and reporting for the program is integrated into CTHires, and to ensure Career ConneCT reaches individuals in all areas of the state, OWS implemented a comprehensive marketing/media campaign in English and Spanish.

- Through the federal Economic Development Administration, Connecticut received a \$23.9 million **Good Jobs Challenge** grant – the largest award in the nation – to build collaborative skills training systems and programs, prioritizing efforts to reach historically underserved populations. The project, “*Strengthening Sectoral Partnerships Initiative*” supports the efforts of 10 Regional Sector Partnerships (RSPs) to train and place over 2,000 people in quality, in-demand jobs in healthcare, manufacturing, and information technology, in partnership with the Workforce Development Boards and business organizations that convene the RSPs and support partners in education and community-based organizations.
- **The Eastern CT Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI)** exemplifies the strengths of the state’s workforce system. The MPI is an evidence-based, demand-driven workforce pipeline model developed by the Eastern CT Workforce Investment Board (EWIB) and its partners. In eight years, the regional MPI partnership has placed more than 4,000 people in living-wage jobs by: a) leveraging existing workforce development, industry, education and training, economic development, and apprenticeship systems and resources; b) using a demand-driven approach that responds directly to the documented needs of sectors with pressing workforce needs; and c) leveraging the MPI’s assessment, customized training, and job placement model, which quickly prepares and immediately places more than 90% of workers (most of whom lack relevant industry experience) in jobs that offer a living wage and career pathway.
- The CT Department of Housing’s **Unite CT Workforce Rental Assistance Program**, directs \$30m in COVID relief funds to provide up to three months of rental assistance for qualifying tenants that are participating in Connecticut workforce training programs, including WIOA and Career ConneCT. Eligible individuals may apply for additional assistance, up to a maximum of \$15,000 or 12 months of rental assistance.
- Transportation consistently ranks as one of the two biggest barriers to enrolling in and completing postsecondary education for low-income Connecticut residents. The Connecticut Department of Transportation’s **U-Pass CT program** allows students enrolled in programs at most Connecticut state universities and community college and at all UConn campuses to ride buses and trains on most public transit systems for free. With the strong urging of GWC, this program was expanded to cover students enrolled in non-credit-bearing programs, leverages the existing public transit and U-Pass CT infrastructure.
- **Connecticut Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care**, which was established by Governor Lamont through an Executive Order in 2023, was tasked with developing a 5-year strategic plan for a child care system that benefits families, providers, and Connecticut’s economy. The final report, submitted to the Governor’s office on December 8, 2023, incorporated extensive feedback from workgroups, experts, panel members, providers, parents, businesses, and advocates. It provides a vision for Connecticut’s child care infrastructure that will improve access to high-quality care for tens of thousands of families through efforts aimed at affordability, stabilizing and expanding child care businesses, and improving the quality of programs that support family needs and optimal child development in the early years.
- **Jobs.ct.gov**: As part of the state’s journey toward an all-digital state government, the state launched a new jobs portal to assist Connecticut residents – and those seeking to become Connecticut residents – in their job search. Through jobs.ct.gov, jobseekers can access powerful job search tools, tips and resources to help land a job, free and low-cost training and certification opportunities, and employers have access to resources to help

hire, train and retain talent.

## Weaknesses

- **Sustaining Workforce Programs.** In addition to the many impactful regional and statewide initiatives described in Section II.(a)(2)(A), Connecticut also has more than \$90m currently invested in workforce training programs through Career ConneCT and the Good Jobs Challenge with American Rescue Plan Act funding. Career ConneCT's program design, modeled after the nationally-recognized Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative includes targeted outreach, an innovative recruitment portal, broadened eligibility, specialized case management, expansive supportive services, and 19 training programs informed by in-demand industry sectors. The Good Jobs Challenge supports 10 Regional Sector Partnerships which will train individuals for quality, in-demand careers. Together, these programs will serve 8,000 individuals in the state.
  - Identifying and applying for sources of funding, including federal, state or other grants, or pursuing opportunities for state general fund investments to sustain current levels of funding for these programs will be a priority for OWS and its partners.

**Participant Challenges.** A large proportion of Connecticut's potential workforce face significant challenges to success in the labor market, including:

- Low literacy levels of many prospective participants in workforce programs. The Workforce Alliance, the South Central Workforce Development Board, tracked intake literacy assessments of all jobseekers coming into their American Job Center, over a 14 year period. Among the 14,000+ jobseekers tested, over 60% did not have the literacy level required to enroll in WIOA skills training programs (ninth grade reading). The registration process for Career ConneCT requires applicants to complete a 16-question skills assessment. Of the ~8,800 people that took the assessment between July 2023 to February 2024, ~ 2,200 or 25% did not pass. Twenty percent (20%) of adults with a high school diploma or equivalency require remedial education but do not have access to free adult basic education programs, leaving those who are financially vulnerable unable to acquire the basic skills that are foundational to participation in many training programs that lead to meaningful jobs.
  - When participants in adult, youth and dislocated worker or Career ConneCT programs have low literacy levels are offered remediation services and referrals to Adult Education to improve reading, math, and language skills. CTDOL WIOA Administration is encouraging training programs only assess skills required on the job as requirements for entry. This modifies prior practices where standardized tests such as a CASAS score was a barrier to entry in a training program and focuses on job skills instead. Standardized tests also have a history rooted in racial discrimination, so with an awareness of that past history, WIOA Administration does not want to repeat any obstacles that would create a similar racially disparate outcome, and access/entry to training is one of them. Jobs that require specific reading, math or language scores can utilize standardized tests, but standardized tests do not measure potential and can be impediments to otherwise successful participant participation in a training program and on the job. The Career ConneCT 16 question assessment is intended to "meet participants where they are," providing a baseline for programs operators to provide participants with the remediation and supports they need to be successful in their programs.
  - In 2024, with support from OWS, Capital Workforce Partners and Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board are conducting Basic Skills



Remediation Pilot Programs for adults with have a high school diploma or equivalent and are in need of access to no-cost basic skills remediation in order to pursue occupational training programs in manufacturing, green jobs, IT and CDL. The pilots will uncover best practice models and approaches to basic skills remediation that can be replicated to benefit more individuals throughout the state.

- Lack of work-readiness (“soft”) skills which, often together with low literacy, limits prospects for career advancement and tax the capabilities of programs with limited resources.
  - Whenever literacy or a lack of “soft” skills contribute to a participant’s barriers to employment, the workforce regions address needs in a variety of ways. In addition to case management, referrals to educational partners and in-house tutors, there are also a variety of workshops designed to increase work-readiness skills. Many workshops are available within the American Job Centers and some are accessible online. For example, Metrix Online Learning, an accessible online learning platform offered to many participants, has courses in Customer Service and other soft skills to increase knowledge and practical skillsets on the job that are not measured in the same way as traditional OJT hard skills. Career ConneCT includes work readiness/soft skills training as a required component of every program, which may also include specialized case management to provide additional work-readiness support.
- Digital equity. Not all participants have access to devices, internet connection, and have the skills needed to be able to search and find needed information on services, apply for and take advantage of the many programs and benefits available in the state. Digital skills are necessary to obtain employment, and are often needed in most occupations to be successful.
  - The CT Department of Administrative Services’ Commission for Educational Technology released the state’s draft digital equity plan, entitled “Connecticut: Everyone Connected” in December 2023. The five-year strategy, funded by the federal *Internet for All Initiative* as part of the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, will help ensure that all Connecticut residents can benefit from life in the digital world for learning, career advancement, telehealth, and leveraging state services. The plan emphasizes the needs of traditionally disenfranchised groups, including residents at or below 150% of the poverty line, racial and ethnic minorities, aging populations, those incarcerated or returning citizens, individuals with disabilities or language barriers, those living in rural areas, and veterans. Goals of the plan include:
    - Developing and promoting digital skills and technical support programs that directly serve residents;
    - Ensuring residents have options for getting online that are affordable and meet their needs; and
    - Expanding digital government services at the state and local levels.

The report can be found at [www.ct.gov/digitalequity](http://www.ct.gov/digitalequity)

- Criminal justice system involvement. Despite a historically low unemployment rate, the unemployment rate of formerly incarcerated individuals stands at approximately 30% nationally. Incarceration rates for Black men are approximately six times as that of white men [*Expanding Economic Opportunity for Formerly Incarcerated Persons*, Council of Economic Advisors, May 2022]. This has a demonstrated negative impact on job prospects, but is another untapped group of prospective labor to address the labor shortage in the state.

- Homelessness. With housing prices soaring again, the rate of households unhoused or underhoused is increasing and creating challenges for holding down a steady job. Over 3,000 working age individuals are estimated to be homeless in Connecticut, representing an untapped supply of labor.
- Mental Health and Substance Abuse. The opioid epidemic has not spared Connecticut, with the number of people addicted to opioids increasing in recent years. Mental health needs that remain untreated may lead to many of the barriers listed, impacting work readiness. Employment is a key part of any recovery plan.
  - For individuals with barriers to employment, specifically justice system involvement, homelessness, and mental health and substance abuse disorders, the workforce system case managers across the state have received either specific training or an awareness of family-centered and person-centered coaching methods and access to resources for referrals for specialized case management. JFES was the leader in this training initiative and the WIOA Administration has promoted this model across all programs so the individual participant is in the driver's seat and helps the programmatic staff in the workforce system define the barriers they are facing without programmatic staff drawing conclusions based on an intake form. This intention of this relationship- development is to produce actionable results over time, to encourage customer disclosure regarding barrier-related information with their case managers.

In addition, the DEI&A working group on Persons with Disabilities will continue to implement employer ("Windmills") disability awareness training, followed by assistive technology in the workplace training, will continue to cross-train train to achieve a 'no wrong door' approach between the AJCs and the state agencies providing services for individuals with physical, mental health, and intellectual and developmental disabilities. This workgroup will implement Integrated Resource Team training for AJC and partner staff, and will create a resource guide with eligibility criteria and staff contact list to support the relationships for successful Integrated Resource Team collaborations.

- When a barrier is identified, a variety of supports are available depending on the barrier. For justice-involved individuals, the American Job Center network has individual counselors within the Best Chance/Second Chance program that seeks to employ and train individuals as well as individual counseling appointments. Career ConneCT offers the We Rise Together program, providing specialized case management and training opportunities for justice-involved individuals. Many individuals receive case management services through this program and go on to training through WIOA. Business Service Networks also conduct employer outreach and notify employers of different incentives and tax credits available to them should they hire on an individual with a background that involves a criminal history. For the homeless population, the workforce system collaborates with family service agencies via direct referrals and referrals coordinated through 2-1-1 online or by telephone if needed. Substance abuse barriers are also supported with referrals to family service agencies and partner agencies that have expertise in behavioral health and/or addiction services. The opioid health crisis, followed by Covid, presented extreme challenges to all participants and staff within the workforce system. WIOA Administration pursued national dislocated worker grants to assist with Covid and the Opioid crisis. The Opioid NDWG spearheaded many successful initiatives that support individuals in recovery and made strides to reduce the stigma attached to the issue. The Employer Recovery Friendly developed a strong partnership of employers who have adapted a similar mindset

to help people with the disease and make accommodations that are person-centered and support recovery and an individual's ability to perform successfully in a supported environment. The WIOA Administration will continue to find opportunities to support participants in ways they identify would best help them and their family, and continue on a path towards sustainable employment to escape cycles of poverty.

- The Department of Housing's UniteCT Workforce Rental Assistance Program partnered with the Office of Workforce Strategy to provide up to 12 months or \$15,000 of rental assistance for qualifying participants registered in a workforce training program (non-credit) such as WIOA, Career ConneCT, SNAP E&T, and others. Implemented in June 2023 with approximately \$30 million allocated to the program, this opportunity is a substantial supportive service for qualifying participants in workforce training programs and is ongoing.

### System Challenges

- **Data Availability:** Each of the State agencies engaged in Connecticut's workforce/talent-development efforts collects data and conducts analysis to support its priorities, investments, and programs. However, the multiple systems are stand alone and do not interface with each other which hinder the ability to compile critical data and insight and bring together key sources of information to assess challenges and identify opportunities. Data sharing between agencies is not always available and does not allow for cumulative system outcome reporting.
  - Through funding from The Connecticut Project (TCP), the state is working with Jobs for the Future (JFF) to develop a plan for a single data system for all workforce development programming. The system will build off of and incorporate existing data systems to create a dashboard that will enable the state to analyze all current workforce development investments across state and federal funded programs in state agencies, WIOA, and public colleges and universities, including their efficacy in helping Connecticut residents secure quality jobs. With this information, the state will be able to strengthen and scale proven programs and strategies, share best practices, and ensure equity within our efforts.
- **Childcare Access:** Access to affordable, safe childcare is a challenge that Connecticut will continue to prioritize with policy changes, investments, and workforce programs. The Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care, led by the Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood, notes in their Five Year Strategic Plan, that ... "[a]ccess to care has never been more important to parents, given changing family work patterns." With most families relying on all adults in the household working, and that there are more single parent households with young children needing childcare, access and affordability of childcare will remain a challenge to be addressed.
  - Recognizing the need for an improved childcare system, through Executive Order 23-1, Governor Lamont established the Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care, to better understand the state's needs and propose solutions in a Five Year Strategic Plan. The Plan, submitted to the Governor in December 2023 incorporated extensive feedback from Blue Ribbon workgroups, national and local experts, Panel members, and other stakeholders including providers, parents, businesses and advocates and includes significant proposed changes to CT's systemic approach and strategies to support and advance the early childhood education workforce. In addition, the Governor greatly expanded eligibility for the Care4Kids program that provides subsidy's for low and moderate income parents.
- **Shrinking Labor Force:** The State reported over 90,000 job openings per month in 2023 (BLS/JOLTS), in December 2023, the gap was 22,000 more openings than

unemployed. The labor market participation rate (LMPR) in CT is ~67%, which is considered full-participation. However, there is a large disparity between white LMPR and black and brown populations, especially youth that do not participate. Policy changes and reducing barriers to labor force participation are needed to encourage more people to enter the workforce and reduce barriers for immigrants and speakers of languages other than English.

- **Changing Technology.** The rapid development of advanced technologies, including the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in almost every aspect of our daily lives, is revolutionizing the need for continuous learning and an education system that responds to changing skill needs.
  - While experts disagree on whether AI will create more jobs than it replaces, what they do agree upon is that all jobs will change as a result of advanced technologies. Continuous learning will be key for individuals to continue to hone their skills and remain competitive for jobs.

Advanced technologies also are adding pressure to our K-12 and higher education systems to focus not only on content knowledge but also on essential cognitive skills, including lifelong learning, self-regulation, critical thinking, situational awareness, creative problem solving, and communication, that will remain evergreen even as jobs change. We must adapt our traditional education system to prepare students for the jobs of the future.

To address the changes advanced technologies including AI will have on education and the workforce, the state established through legislation, a working group with members appointed by the leaders of both chambers of the Connecticut General Assembly as well as by the Governor. The working group met over a series of working sessions, both remote and in-person, and developed a series of recommendations with the support of the Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering (CASE). The Chief Workforce Officer, representing OWS, highlighted both the need to leverage AI to identify skills gaps for the workforce and the need to train the existing workforce to integrate AI into their workflows across all industries.

The CASE report highlighted that both industry and academia alike express high interest integrating AI into operational processes and pedagogy, respectively. However, adoption of AI into industry, particularly outside the traditional computing occupations, is still nascent. Additionally, educators are still at the discovery phase of incorporating AI into their curricula. Key challenges in the adoption of AI into the workplace and beyond include security and data privacy concerns, possible discriminatory practices, quality control, digital equity, and bottlenecked computing power. The working group recently concluded their research and is in the process of driving forth legislation and programming for the 2024 Connecticut Legislative Session. OWS and the Governor's Workforce Council will remain engaged in this work and will adapt and incorporate strategies related to the changes AI will bring to business and the workforce.

### **(C) State Workforce Development Capacity**

Connecticut's capacity to implement current and proposed workforce development activities and provide coordinated, aligned, integrated, comprehensive and accessible workforce development programs and services to jobseekers, workers and industry is strong, and continuously improving. Governor Lamont and the Governor's Workforce Council support a series of initiatives and investments to address Connecticut's workforce challenges, ranging from early childhood development, to strengthened career and technical education, to industry-specific enhancements

in higher education, to focused training for targeted workers.

Likewise, the General Assembly has raised the broad workforce development, education and training agenda to a new level of attention and support through an array of investments in innovative programs. Many of these workforce development activities are described in the preceding section. Connecticut businesses and employers have increased their active support for and participation in numerous practical partnerships, in particular, through Regional Sector Partnerships, to help build the skills of the workers they need for their companies to prosper. The capacity of Connecticut's workforce system to meet the challenges ahead is manifest in numerous examples. At both State and regional/local levels, an array of sector-specific workforce partnerships are in place to prepare targeted jobseekers and incumbent workers to meet employers' needs. The statewide network of comprehensive American Job Centers and satellite offices provide accessible facilities and presence in key communities. The P20WIN longitudinal data system provides increasingly useful information to guide system investment strategies.

## (b) STATE STRATEGIC VISION AND GOALS

### (1) VISION

Core to Governor Lamont's vision for Connecticut is a nimble workforce ready to meet the needs of the 21st century economy. In October 2019, Governor Lamont signed Executive Order No. 4 elevating the State Workforce Board by directing it do business as the Governor's Workforce Council. That Council, through its chair and his Chief Workforce Officer, now serve as the Governor's principal advisor on workforce development issues and coordinates the efforts of all state agencies and other entities promoting workforce development. A central component of the rebranding of the Governor's Workforce Council was including all new members with a strong emphasis on business leadership, who are CEOs of Connecticut's most successful and innovative companies, ranging from Stanley Black and Decker to Indeed to small clean energy training companies. Ensuring that a diverse suite of industry leaders are deeply engaged in the work of GWC remains paramount. The GWC Membership is complimented by members of community-based organizations, representatives from labor organizations, and community members. The GWC, assisted by the Office of Workforce Strategy is also focused on breaking down silos across the state and by precipitating partnerships between industry, philanthropy, community-based organizations, and academia with the goal of developing industry-aligned workforce programs that promote pathways into upwardly mobile careers.

Central to this vision is promoting educational and workforce training programs that encourage equity in the workforce. Given the adverse effects the pandemic had on populations who were already historically marginalized or disadvantaged, the Governor's Workforce Council has even more of a prerogative to ensure these individuals are a central focus of programs that are being developed. By revamping the Governor's Workforce Council, Governor Lamont is not only prioritizing the development of an innovative and successful workforce but also the intentionality of ensuring this workforce works for everyone in Connecticut.

Governor Lamont's 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. These are consortia of regional businesses who develop their own goals and objectives pertaining to their associated industry. These partnerships are a fundamental component of the workforce system that Governor Lamont envisions since it puts business front and center into outlining their collective needs first and then engaging partners such as educational or training providers, community-based organizations, or local governments. While the Governor's Workforce Council and Office of Workforce Strategy provides critical statewide oversight, these partnerships are a central way for regions to maintain regional autonomy by developing focused, organic, talent pipelines.

### (2) GOALS

In issuing Executive Order No. 4 on October 29, 2019, Governor Ned Lamont created the Governor’s Workforce Council to advance a bold goal that **every Connecticut resident will benefit from equitable, life-long access to pathways for career advancement that fit their interests and capabilities while providing job opportunities that meet the needs of our employers.**

The goals articulated in Executive Order No. 4 are embodied in GWC’s October 2020 Strategic Plan, and continue to drive the work of the Office of Workforce Strategy which seeks:

- 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 industry 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

The goals of this work include:

- Creating the most aligned, high-quality, and equitable workforce development system in the country.
- Developing a sustainable framework for coordination among all stakeholders in the state’s workforce development system, and report annually to the Governor and General Assembly about workforce coordination efforts and on how to further improve such coordination;
- Retaining skilled individuals within Connecticut;
- Introducing and mainstreaming best practices from academic research and from other cities, states, regions, and countries; and
- Achieving data-driven outcomes and consistently measuring outcomes across different programs and agencies, made possible by improved labor market and programmatic data systems across state agencies

Key objectives reflected in the plan strategies detailed below in Section II (c) include:

With respect to the overall workforce development system:

- Reduce the cost of education and training borne by individuals;
- Align workforce initiatives across agencies and public education institutions; inventory workforce initiatives, understanding of service delivery, leveraging programs and resources under applicable state and federal programs, create efficiencies and reduce duplication;
- Develop recommendations on potential state and federal statutory reforms to support the continuous improvement of workforce development services;
- Study the future of work and the resulting implications for Connecticut's workforce needs and opportunities

With respect to Connecticut's career pathways and workforce pipeline:

- Increase emphasis on career readiness in our public schools and universities by strengthening and supporting teaching of essential employability skills and habits of mind for the 21st century workplace, such as teamwork, professionalism, adaptability, complex problem-solving, situational awareness, cultural competencies, and resilience;
- Reduce barriers to higher education and quality workforce training with an emphasis on two-generational and whole-family approaches, including through wraparound services, mentoring, and career navigation and coaching;
- Strengthen the bridge from high school into post-secondary training and education;
- Increase the speed of developing new courses and programs at state universities and colleges and other related educational institutions or workforce training providers in order to meet the needs of employers and to improve the labor market outcomes of graduates;
- Improve and standardize processes for enrollment, transfer, and credit for prior learning;
- Bring transparency to the credentials conferred by public higher education institutions by translating credentials wherever possible to the skills and competencies developed to attain those credentials;
- Improve opportunities for work-based, credit-bearing and non-credit bearing learning such as internships, apprenticeships and project-based learning with workplace application. Increase access to portable and transferable dual-credit coursework in high schools;
- Emphasize lifelong learning and provide opportunities for up-skilling to workers throughout their careers;

With respect to partnering with employers to improve outcomes in the workforce development system:

- Assist industry and labor in ongoing efforts to close racial and gender gaps in healthcare, education, building trades, manufacturing, information technology, life sciences, and other fields;
- Support industry in shifting from degree-based hiring requirements to a skills-based focus because skill-based hiring can address inequities and improve job matching;
- Remove barriers for employers to engage as partners in the creation of a talent pipeline they need to be successful, such as train-to-hire and up-skilling initiatives for incumbent workers;
- Support state agencies and municipalities in their efforts to recruit businesses to

Connecticut, such as by facilitating new pathways and programs to create the necessary supply of workers;

State agencies are assisting the Governor's Workforce Council as it pursues these goals and objectives by:

- Providing all relevant information and data about agencies' workforce development programs and services, funding streams for these programs and services, and the outcomes of those programs and services.
- Partnering with OWS, the Department of Labor, the workforce development boards and others to develop innovative programs that provide supportive services for participants in workforce programs.
- Participating in P20 WIN, executing appropriate data-sharing agreements with one another and with the Office of Workforce Strategy to facilitate such analysis.

The work of the GWC encompasses all regions of the state and is focused on providing workforce opportunities for all of Connecticut's workers, and therefore, incorporates strategies to provide opportunities for people of any age, ancestry, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression, as well as to justice-involved persons, individuals with disabilities, military service members and veterans, immigrants and refugees.

The GWC is working to ensure that the statewide strategic plan is actively used to drive the Connecticut workforce system's goals, strategies, staff, partners, and decisions. Connecticut's growth more than ever depends upon fostering an innovative, entrepreneurial and inclusive economic environment in which its residents can build strong careers and businesses can find highly-skilled employees.

Through the GWC, Connecticut is creating a comprehensive vision and strategy for growing its economy through innovative, accessible, and easily navigable workforce programs and a workforce development system that includes collaboration, alignment, innovation, equity, performance accountability, and access to sufficient information and data.

This includes a commitment to eliminating administrative and statutory barriers to success wherever possible and the improvement of outcomes for the state's workers, students, and businesses.

### (3) PERFORMANCE GOALS (See CORE Programs Sections)

### (4) ASSESSMENT

The Office of Workforce Strategy is charged under state law (Public Law 21-2) with continuously assessing the overall effectiveness of Connecticut's workforce development system under the direction of the Chief Workforce Officer. The Office of Workforce Strategy is working closely with the Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) Performance and Accountability Unit and the CTDOL WIOA Administration Unit, in collaboration with colleagues in comparable functions at ADS, CSDE, Higher Education, and the Workforce Development Boards, to:

- Ensure that thorough reporting, assessment and continuous improvement processes are built in to all workforce funding contracts, Requests for Proposals processes, and state agency operations to ensure full assessment of all programming and tools.
- Develop and maintain a dashboard tool to capture and summarize selected data concerning program effectiveness and the aggregate impact of Connecticut's workforce system in addressing the vision, goals, and principles described in this plan, including disaggregation of reporting by race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender and other participant characteristics of focus in the plan.



Broad measures to be reviewed regularly will include:

- Industry engagement and delivering value to business/employer customers.
- Measurable skills development in terms of educational attainment and workforce credentials that matter to Connecticut businesses.
- Workforce training program outcome data collected from wage records.
- Securing jobs in high demand occupations showing promise for long-term growth in industry sectors valuable to Connecticut's economic expansion.
- Earned wages that help jobseekers and workers attain financial security and demonstrate career advancement.
- Achievement of diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of the operation of the workforce system.
- Degree of public awareness of in-demand careers offering a range of career opportunities and of the workforce system strategies to facilitate skill development and job access.
- Workforce system investments that generate a quality return.

See Section III (b) (4) Assessment and Evaluation of Programs.

#### (c) STATE STRATEGY

Economic development is most effective when approached with a clear vision, an eye for long-term stability and growth, and a strong plan of execution. While the state needs to continue to manage its finances responsibly and to streamline government, it must also make the required investments to move our economy forward and innovate in ways that will benefit all Connecticut residents.

Key components of Governor Lamont's vision to transform the state's economic development strategy include aggressive business recruitment, collaborative work across agencies to better support existing businesses and onboard new ones, as well as a strategic and long-term economic policy focus, including in the important area of opportunity zones.

At the highest level, the Governor's Workforce Cabinet, established by Governor Lamont and led by the Chief Workforce Officer, has set priorities for workforce program alignment, shared data collection, case management and reporting, and an industry informed system that map directly to the Governor's Workforce Council's Strategic Plan and committee work. The Workforce Cabinet includes state agency Commissioners and public education leadership that administer workforce programs.

Section III(b)(3) details the revamped organizational structure charged with delivering improved workforce development services to Connecticut communities and residents.

The state's strategies to achieve its vision and goals is in the Governor's Workforce Council Strategic Plan, approved in October 2020 and under revision for release in mid-2024. The plan details the GWC's six main areas of focus, established in a framework of overarching, foundational and strategic pillars:

##### Overarching Pillar

- Workforce Systems Alignment

##### Foundational Pillars

- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access
- Data and Performance

##### Strategic Pillars

- Education and Career Pathways
- Sector-Based Training
- Industry Leadership

As a working document, it is subject to regular updates, based on data driven decisions to meet new challenges and opportunities and in response to extensive input from industry, agencies, and individual workers and is currently under development to reflect evolving needs.

Strategies in GWC’s Strategic Plan include the following and will be adjusted to reflect the new committee structure from Section III (b):

### **Industry Leadership**

Industry Leadership strategies are those that rely most importantly on industry as the driver. Regional Sector Partnerships serve as the anchor strategy to accelerate Connecticut’s demand-driven approach to workforce development. Education and training organizations partner with businesses to develop strategies that fill gaps in the regional talent supply chain. Students and other jobseekers benefit from a more clearly articulated job demand picture and improved availability of training and support. Businesses can also lead the way in adopting skills-based hiring practices in quality jobs that will expand opportunities for all.

Regional Sector Partnerships 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 in pursuit of an effective, inclusive workforce system.

This committee will advance the following through the anchor strategy of the RSPs and with support in part by the Good Jobs Challenge grant:

- Increase the number of companies participating in RSPs by 25%
- Promote skills-based hiring practices so that 100% of the employers participating in RSPs report having overhauled their hiring practices to focus on skills, not just degrees.
- RSP employers can report that 80% of the jobs they have are “good jobs” as defined by the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Commerce, and reflected in the Quality Jobs Framework by Jobs for the Future.
- RSP employers are articulating their current and future academic, technical, and professional skills needs, have reviewed postsecondary curricula with at least two higher education institutions to ensure it is addressing skill needs, and are providing work-based learning experiences to help develop in-demand skills in future workforce.
- Employees of the participating RSP employers have access to incumbent worker training.

Through the work of the Industry Leadership committee and the RSPs, Connecticut will promote a skills-based hiring and training environment that provides greater equity and access and sets new standards for how educators train individuals for in-demand jobs. Ultimately, the process will more effectively and quickly match qualified jobseekers with employers, and create immediate economic benefits for workers, employers, and communities.

### **Sector-Based Training**

Sector-Based training strategies address short-term training across in-demand industry sectors, incumbent worker training, SNAP Employment and Training, and align current and future workforce development funding sources to scale best practice models, with a focus on those that offer a robust set of supports including childcare, transportation, stipends, housing, etc.

Connecticut is building scalable and sustainable sector-based training strategies that address near-term shortages and anticipate emerging needs. These training programs include opportunities for returning citizens, youth, Veterans, and other individuals with barriers to employment. An example of a scalable and sustainable sector-based training is Career ConneCT, launched in 2022, modeled after the Eastern CT Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative,, and Connecticut's Registered Apprenticeship Programs enable thousands of individuals to earn while they learn.

This committee will advance and support sector-based training strategies:

- Train and place 6,000 individuals through Career ConneCT (end of 2026)
- Train and place 2,000 individuals through Good Jobs Challenge (end of 2027)
- Build documented credential pathways in key in-demand industries, including healthcare, IT, advanced manufacturing
- Develop a plan for sustainable funding models like Pay-It-Forward, a revolving loan fund in which individuals receive free training and supports, and upon earning a job, pay back the cost of their training at zero-interest and on a set schedule aligned to their salary. Repayments are re-invested into the loan, creating a self-sustaining training system

### **Education and Career Pathways**

Over 70% of jobs require some postsecondary certification, industry-recognized credential, or associate degree. Although equitable access to higher education continues to be a priority, not every student needs, or is able to pursue, a traditional higher education pathway that leads to a degree. The increasingly fast pace of technology advancement, including AI, has increased the emphasis on preparing our students to develop life-long learning and career readiness skills. This committee's work will address education to career pathways policy and development (high school to post-secondary, including areas of dual credit/dual enrollment, industry partnerships, career exploration and advising, teacher professional development), adult education, and work-based learning, and ensuring equitable re-engagement supports and flexible career pathways on-ramps for high-risk youth. The GWC's Education and Career Pathways committee will work to advance and scale initiatives in the following areas:

- **Dual Enrollment.** Dual credit coursework is an evidence-based strategy with documented positive impacts on high school and college outcomes. Evidence shows dual credit programs have positive effects on students' college degree attainment, college access and enrollment, college credit accumulation, and completing high school especially for at-risk students, and general academic achievement in high school. Connecticut is investing \$3.8 million in 89 school districts across the state to help students receive college credits for courses they are taking in high school. Through these grants, districts are creating new partnerships with public and private institutions. To encourage high quality dual enrollment, the State Department of Education has engaged the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) to enable any district with a higher education institution the opportunity to achieve NACEP accreditation for dual enrollment
- **Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative.** In 2018 the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board (EWIB) created the Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (YMPI), which provides foundational manufacturing skills training for high school students who are interested in careers in manufacturing upon graduation. The YMPI, which is based on the nationally recognized Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI), is a collaboration between EWIB, Three

Rivers Community College, Quinebaug Valley Community College, the Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance Regional Sector Partnership (EAMA RSP), 18 public high schools, and ReadyCT. The YMPI provides a high school 'on ramp' to MPI training and employment, offers a career pathway for non-college bound students, and taps a large workforce segment that was historically underutilized. Students receive a YMPI certificate at completion for career pathways, college credits, pre-apprenticeship hours, OSHA 10 certification, and job development and employment services.

- Youth Health Care Pipeline Initiative. Building off the success of YMPI, EWIB is expanding its Healthcare Pipeline Initiative and has partnered with regional high schools to pilot healthcare trainings for high school seniors that lead to recognized credentials. These credentials are required for entry level healthcare careers such as CNA and EMT. The demand for entry level healthcare positions is rapidly increasing, and YHPI provides an opportunity for a high school graduate to gain immediate employment on a high demand healthcare career pathway. The YMPI pilot is currently participating in 3 local Eastern Connecticut High Schools: Norwich Free Academy, East Lyme, Lyman Memorial
- CT Health Horizons: Career Pathways are not limited to high school. All students, including college students at all degree levels, need access to academic pathways that lead to careers. Every college student should understand the career opportunities that every degree prepares them for, have access to meaningful work-based learning that builds experience and pathways to their first professional career, and access to micro credentials of value to enhance opportunities in specific specialties. With \$35M in state ARPA funds, the state launched CT Health Horizons, with the goal of increasing the nursing and social work pipeline, with a focus on diversifying the workforce. Connecticut State Colleges & Universities (CSCU) is the fiscal sponsor and program manager, working with UConn and The Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC); OWS is providing strategic oversight and capacity support. Grants under way:
  - Tuition Support: to incentivize low-income and minority students to enter accelerated and cost-effective nursing and social work programs.
  - Faculty Support: to expand seat capacity and train an influx of nursing and social work students.
  - Innovative Programs: to promote employer-driven programs to support entrance into careers in nursing and social work
- Industry Engagement. Promote and support industry engagement including Regional Sector Partnerships, where industry are active partners with educators to inform curriculum development, provide faculty externships supporting professional learning to implement new curriculum, and provide students with robust work-based learning experiences, including mentoring, internships, and pre-apprenticeships. Schools will have access to a career pathway toolkit, providing a roadmap and curriculum for multiple industry-led credentials of value for in-demand occupations and access to business leaders through Regional Sector Partnerships to ensure programs remain current with the changing needs of industry. Programs will lead to stackable credentials, including higher educational credits, credit-bearing certificates and degrees within a career path, and/or industry recognized credentials that can be assess for credit, and or pre-apprenticeship credentials.
- Career Accelerator. Many low-income populations who are interested in participating in high-quality training programs as a means to attaining gainful employment do not have the financial means to do so. This need is most acute for individuals who are not

qualified to receive free training through Title IV instruments, such as Workforce Pell grants, or do not meet eligibility criteria under the Workforce Opportunity and Innovation Act programs. In Connecticut, legislation (Public Act 22-118 and Public Act 23-75, codified into General Statutes §§ 4-124mm and 4-124nn) has been passed requiring the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) to research and develop a Career Accelerator program. OWS is working with Social Finance to design a zero-interest, state-sponsored “Pay-it-Forward” or “Career Accelerator” program that will allow individuals, who face financial barriers to training, to participate in training in high-demand fields in Connecticut with financial assistance. Through Income Share Agreements, individuals would receive no-cost loans for training, along with supports such as childcare and transportation. Upon earning a job, participants pay back the cost of the training at zero interest, with pay-back terms contingent upon their salary.

### **Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion**

The DEI&A Committee guides the GWC on advancing workforce diversity and inclusivity, and works to address persistent barriers that undermine access to sustainable work and training programs. The foremost barriers facing Connecticut’s lower- paid workforce include childcare, housing, transportation, benefits cliffs, and access to behavioral health services. Many of these barriers disproportionately affect specific underserved populations.

Fundamental to these strategies is the recognition that a motivated person with a good job or training opportunity is often thwarted by barriers not of their making. These plans are intended to help our workers and jobseekers while creating a positive return for the state and its taxpayers. The DEI&A Committee includes working groups to address:

- **BIPOC:** Increasing BIPOC representation across industries.
- **Veterans:** Providing transition support for veterans and facilitating skill translation for those active in the Reserve or Guard, enhancing talent sourcing for Connecticut's in-demand sectors.
- **Returning Citizens:** Developing an employment toolkit, fostering community forums with employers, and creating pathways for skills development, workforce integration and entrepreneurship Youth: Aligning systems and engaging disconnected youth to ensure effective skills development, supports to overcome barriers, and integration into the workforce.
- **PWD (Persons with Disabilities):** Implementing employer awareness training, advocating a 'no wrong door' concept, and promoting employment within the physical, mental health and intellectual and developmental disabilities communities. This committee will implement Integrated Resource Team training for AJC and partner staff, and will create a resource guide with eligibility criteria and staff contact list to support the relationships for successful Integrated Resource Team collaborations.
- **Immigrants and refugees:** Developing training and employment pathways that enable effective integration of immigrants and refugees into the workforce, including addressing specific barriers such as language learning, credentials recognition, and support for legal pathways for undocumented immigrants.

### **Connecticut Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care**

The Connecticut Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care, which was established by Governor Lamont through an Executive Order in 2023, was tasked with developing a 5-year strategic plan for a childcare system that benefits families, providers, and Connecticut’s economy. The final report, submitted to the Governor’s office on December 8, 2023, incorporated extensive feedback from workgroups, experts, panel members, providers, parents, businesses, and advocates. It provides a

vision for Connecticut's childcare infrastructure that will improve access to high-quality care for tens of thousands of families through efforts aimed at affordability, stabilizing and expanding child care businesses, and improving the quality of programs that support family needs and optimal child development in the early years.

### **Benefit Cliffs**

2Gen and the Office of Workforce Strategy have been working with Social Finance to develop policy recommendations at either the state or federal level for helping individuals and families overcome Benefits Cliffs and while supporting employers to fill skill gaps. CT continues to promote the Benefits Calculator developed by the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, providing training for Career ConneCT program providers, as well as staff in several AJCs and community colleges, as an advising tool for students and job searchers.

### **Transportation**

Access to reliable, affordable transportation is out of reach for many underserved populations. The cost of obtaining a driver's license, insurance, and a reliable vehicle prohibits many people from engaging in educational and skills training programs and / or employment. This issue is acute in more rural areas of the state where public transportation is limited. However, even in regions with public transportation, additional barriers such as schedules and destinations prohibit the use of public transportation. The CTPass program which provides free transit passes to all students in public schools, colleges and universities was expanded to cover access to non-credit skills training programs. OWS, working with the Department of Transportation, 2Gen and the Department of Labor, is conducting a research project on transportation, including a landscape analysis of existing transportation demand, capacities, and gaps; analysis of state-funded options to be scaled; creation of 4-5 car-based options with costs, efficiencies, potential for scale, achievable outcomes; and financial analysis of options, including potential financing sources and risk analysis.

### **Adult Basic Education**

Twenty percent (20%) of adults with a high school diploma or equivalency require remedial education but do not have access to free adult basic education programs, leaving those who are financially vulnerable unable to acquire the basic skills that are foundational to participation in many training programs that lead to meaningful jobs.

In 2024, with support from OWS, Capital Workforce Partners and Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board are conducting Basic Skills Remediation Pilot Programs for adults with have a high school diploma or equivalent and are in need of access to no-cost basic skills remediation in order to pursue occupational training programs in manufacturing, green jobs, IT and CDL. The pilots will uncover best practice models and approaches to basic skills remediation that can be replicated to benefit more individuals throughout the state.

### **Data and Accountability**

Accountability and data-driven management strategies use technology to increase accessibility, transparency, and accountability. They allow us to better understand program outcomes and the return on our investment in training and supportive services. Program managers and policy-makers will be able to create and revise programs based on real-time data. Analysts can study the overlapping impacts of government initiatives to improve their design.

Like most states, workforce development is a highly dispersed function within Connecticut, with dollars spread across multiple agencies to fulfill a number of workforce goals. The data systems tracking these investments are also dispersed. To be most effective, data must be managed, organized and maintained centrally to enable analysis of state and federal investments and outcomes as a whole; provide comparisons across programs, strategies, regions, and demographic groups; and give key stakeholders information on programs or strategies that

should be brought to scale.

Connecticut is working to align technology and data systems across mandatory One-Stop partner programs, state agencies, and public colleges and universities under the direction of Chief Workforce Officer and the Governor's Workforce Council. Through funding from The Connecticut Project, the state is working with Jobs for the Future to develop a plan for a single data system for all workforce development programming. The system will build off of and incorporate the existing data systems to create a dashboard that will enable the state to analyze all current workforce development investments across state and federal funded programs, identify best practices, braid funding sources to provide sustainability, and align workforce programs without costly and complicated redundancies.

In addition, the GWC Data and Accountability Committee is working with the P20 WIN Board on a Request (#0042) to study the impact of workforce training and education on economic outcomes. The requested study, resulting in an interactive dashboard of data, proposes to 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. OWS is currently working with OPM DAPA and DOL's Research Department to gather the requisite information from partner agencies to perform the analysis.

### **Adult Education**

Launch a working group including Adult Ed leadership, CT State Community College, and WDBs to develop plans and goals.

Connecticut will create a coordinated, accountable adult literacy system that links Adult Education, community colleges, and regional WDBs to deliver education and training programs tailored to students' goals and needs. Adult Education will support a contextualized and work-based learning approach to help students achieve their desired outcomes.

The Office Workforce Strategy, under the leadership of the Chief Workforce Officer and the Governor' Workforce Council has responsibility to ensure alignment of all workforce programs as described above. Powerful examples of these alignment efforts are provided throughout the plan sections.

OWS works with representatives of State agencies responsible for administering core WIOA programs (CTDOL, ADS, DSS, and CSDE) joined by representatives of other critical workforce system collaborators and stakeholders in ongoing integrated State and local-level monitoring and oversight to identify gaps to be addressed and opportunities for effective program and resource alignment.

Lead responsibility to review and assure alignment of programs and resources falls to the Governor's Workforce Council. OWS is supported in this role by CTDOL's WIOA Administration, Performance and Accountability Unit and Office of Research which are charged with system performance review to ensure value and productivity of investments, analyze labor market information to identify gaps, needs and opportunities for innovation and improvement, and provide insight and guidance to the OWS and the Governor's Workforce Council on appropriate actions.

## **III. OPERATIONAL PLANNING ELEMENTS**

### **(a) STATE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION**

## (1) STATE BOARD FUNCTIONS

Governor Lamont's Executive Order No. 4 in 2019, directed the creation of the Governor's Workforce Council (GWC), formerly known as the Connecticut Employment and Training Commission, set the expectations, requirements, and designated it as the WIOA-mandated state workforce board. In 2021, the GWC was codified in state law under PL 21-2 and the number of council members was expanded to include additional representation from community-based organizations and other sectors, and was modified again in 2023 under PL 23-93 (see full list of membership composition located in Section III (b)(3)(B)). PL 21-2 also established the Office of Workforce Strategy, a state Agency to oversee the work of the GWC, and established the Chief Workforce Officer as the Department Head to the Agency.

The Governor's Workforce Council, as the State Workforce Board, coordinates among stakeholders in the workforce system, including industry, state agencies, quasi-public and independent entities, boards, councils, and commissions, public and private education and training institutions, workforce development boards, nonprofit institutions and labor unions. The first meeting of the GWC was held on November 21, 2019. Full Council meetings are held quarterly to approve all plans and projects with Committee work proceeding between meetings.

- The Office of Workforce Strategy, led by the Chief Workforce Officer, provides staff to the GWC to:
- Implement, promote, & improve the GWC Workforce Strategic Plan and the WIOA Unified State Plan
- Serve as the primary advisor on workforce development policy and strategy, in coordination with other state entities/legislature
- Liaison with state agencies, workforce development partners, educators, philanthropy, & industry
- Promote equity and access to increase workforce participation of historically underrepresented populations
- Create, support, and fund sustainable workforce curriculum that is high quality, industry aligned, and represents best practice

The Chief Workforce Officer, Dr. Kelli-Marie Vallieres, supported by the Office of Workforce Strategy team are charged with assisting the GWC in its work, including:

- Serving as the principal advisor to the Governor for workforce development policy, strategy, and coordination
- Serving as the lead state official/agency for the development of employment strategies and initiatives
- Chairing the Governor's Workforce Cabinet
- Developing and updating as necessary a state workforce strategy in consultation with the GWC
- Collaborating with the regional WDBs to adapt and adopt best practices for workforce development established by such boards
- Coordinating the measurement and evaluation of outcomes across education and workforce development programs
- Issuing guidance to state agencies, the GWC, and the WDBs in furtherance of the state workforce strategy and requirements under WIOA
- Coordinating with CTDOL, ADS, SDE/Adult Education, and the WDBs and partners, to promote and enhance the service capabilities of the six WIOA programs, ensuring compliance with state and federal laws



- Coordinating and aligning workforce programs to leverage resources, share data/program outcomes, and evaluate program effectiveness across all Connecticut State Agencies

The Governor has appointed GWC members that have the experience and skill to ensure a cohesive, collaborative, ongoing, and meaningful process, drawing on the people leading Connecticut's workforce development efforts.

The GWC released its Workforce Strategic Plan on October 28, 2020, which is currently under revision and slated for release in mid-2024. The Plan puts forward a coordinated, statewide strategy for building an equitable, inclusive, and innovative workforce that meets the needs of the current economic environment. The Plan is a collaborative effort and solicits feedback and recommendations from industry representatives, educators, philanthropic and community-based organizations, and other key groups. The original Plan recommends strategies in four key areas: business leadership, education and training in support of career pathways, equity and access, and data. The revised plan establishes an Overarching Pillar, Foundational and Strategic Pillars for its strategic framework and has updated the GWC committees that are charged with advancing initiatives in support of the Pillars:

#### OVERARCHING PILLAR

- Workforce System Alignment – charged with developing a coordinated workforce development system that brings key stakeholders across public agencies, as well as industry and nonprofits, together to effectively align and leverage resources and expertise, measure outcomes, assess what works and scale those practices that enable all residents of Connecticut to access high-quality jobs. This Committee is also brings together the WIOA partners and stakeholders for planning, coordination, policy development, and compliance.

#### FOUNDATIONAL PILLARS

- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Access — charged with focusing on strategies to enable marginalized communities, including re-entry population, veterans, people with disabilities, youth, and BIPOC, to have equitable access to high-quality jobs, and advancing efforts to remove barriers to participating in education, training and work by addressing areas that include childcare and early childhood education; transportation; addressing “benefits cliffs”; and implementing AJC Navigator Pilots.
- Data and Performance – ensuring that data guides workforce development strategy and serves as the basis for all decision making on workforce development programming including planning, implementation, and overall evaluation by providing centralized guidance and best practices on how data should be used. Committee initiatives include establishing a Credential Registry, Dashboards & Standard Evaluation Framework, exploring CTHires Enhancements; and P20WIN Workforce data queries

#### STRATEGIC PILLARS

- Education and Career Pathways – addressing education to career pathways policy and development (high school to post-secondary, including areas of dual credit/dual enrollment, industry partnerships, career exploration and advising, teacher professional development), adult education, and work-based learning, and ensuring equitable re-engagement supports and flexible career pathways on-ramps for high-risk youth.
- Industry Leadership (formerly Business Leadership) – addressing the development of high-quality career pathways and sector-based training programs, including skills-based hiring, good jobs, and supporting Regional Sector Partnerships (RSPs, including new RSPs in Architecture, Construction and Engineering).
- Sector-based Training – addressing short-term training across in-demand industry sectors, incumbent worker training, SNAP Employment and Training, and aligning current and future workforce development funding sources to scale best practice models, with a focus on those that offer a robust set of supports including childcare, transportation, stipends,

housing, etc.

## (2) IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE STRATEGY

### **(A) Core Program Activities to Implement the State's Strategy**

The Office of Workforce Strategy has responsibility of the full implementation of many of the strategies detailed in Section II (c) State Strategy working with many State and private partners. The WIOA-supported One-Stop Career Centers, branded as the American Job Centers, remain the central vehicle for delivering much of the programming contemplated in the plan – connecting jobseekers to skills training and education activities as well as directly to employment and ensuring that all training is responsive to the needs of industry, especially those offering middle skill jobs with career ladders.

#### **Redesigning Customer Access to Workforce and Education services**

Leveraging the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) and IT Capital Bond dollars, OWS and DAS worked in partnership with CTDOL and other agencies to develop Jobs.CT.Gov, a comprehensive discovery tool for job search, career services and workforce training. Jobs.CT.Gov is a one-stop hub for Connecticut residents that offers easy access to state services such as exploring career pathways, locating the American Job Centers, finding and funding training and education, and finding a job. The portal is designed to be customer-friendly to easily connect job seekers to the workforce supports they need. Jobs.CT.Gov, along with Business.CT.Gov, and Health.CT.Gov, are examples of cross-agency collaboration leading to better experiences for residents and businesses by making information more easily accessible.

#### **WIOA Career Services**

The CTDOL WIOA Administration Unit administers the WIOA Title 1B funding for CT's workforce development system which includes three of the core required partner programs – Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth. The administration of the funds includes but is not limited to the following functions; policy and procedure development, monitoring – both programmatically and fiscally, development of grants and contracts, reporting, and management information system support.

Through these functions, CTDOL's WIOA Administration Unit is able to assist with the strategies and alignment of the core program activities of WIOA Title 1B with other required and non-required partner programs in the American Job Center network. This is accomplished through various means including the assignment of liaisons to the workforce development boards (WDBs) who have regular communication with the staff at the WDB and who also attend regularly scheduled meetings of the WDBs in order to keep abreast of their planning, priorities, policies and strategies for the ensuring that a full complement of programs and services are available to the job seekers and employers in the region. Technical assistance is also provided through regular meetings of the WIOA Administration Unit with the WDBs on various WIOA Title 1B topics including the negotiations of service delivery by and through required and non-required partner programs; ensuring MOUs and appropriate cost sharing mechanisms are in place. These combined efforts serve to lead and strengthen the commitments of the required partner and non-required partner programs in meeting the goals and objectives as outlined in the state's strategy in II(c) above. Core WIOA program activities in Connecticut will be aligned as partners build upon existing inter-agency relationships and program collaborations.

Whenever possible, especially after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, services are delivered in a variety of formats include by phone, over web-based tools like Zoom or Microsoft Teams, email, and when appropriate, in-person. The WIOA application and many client intake forms are now fully online, resulting in greater access to services during periods of office closures. All regular in-person services such as case manager appointments or orientation sessions are now hosted over Zoom or Teams throughout the state.

Additionally customers that come through the AJC system from a Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) referral from the CT Department of Social Services are encouraged to be co-enrolled into WIOA Adult or Youth programs whenever possible in order to leverage funding, supportive services, and to leverage training dollars. Through a data sharing agreement with JFES and DSS, WIOA case managers are able to utilize the JFES data within the CTHires system as verification of TANF recipient for low income eligibility for WIOA services. This expedites the data collection and document gathering process for this population.

### **American Job Centers (AJC) Customer Flow**

Walk-in customers at comprehensive American Job Centers will be greeted at the main reception desk by a team of CTDOL and/or WDB partner staff, as front desk coverage will be a shared responsibility between the two partners.

CTDOL will provide Unemployment Insurance staff experts, virtually, via private, Teams dedicated stations, at the comprehensive AJCs to answer Reemployment and Unemployment Insurance-related inquiries from customers. CTDOL established a Consumer Contact Center to answer numerous claimant UI inquiries as a result of the Pandemic. The Contact Center currently has 106 representatives answering phone calls and emails on general UI inquiries every day.

CTDOL provides access to Unemployment Insurance inquiries via Consumer Contact Center (phone, "Quick Clicks" and provide callbacks option). UI staff experts are also accessible by pre-scheduled virtual appointments via Teams at our comprehensive AJCs to answer Reemployment and Unemployment Insurance-related inquiries. Staff members may be able to assist in the processing of unemployment claims directly, in-person, for jobseekers with disabilities who may have difficulty filing applications over the phone or via the Internet.

Generally, the Career Centers in each comprehensive American Job Center are staffed jointly by CTDOL and WDB staff (with the exception of Hamden/New Haven), with each partner committed to assigning a minimum of one staff member on a full time basis.

AJCs have expanded access to career services via virtual sessions through Teams, Zoom and other online resources. Customers may request assistance through an online form to schedule either virtual or in-person services through the AJC.

When a job seeker enters an American Job Center seeking services, the AJC staff will first determine whether or not the customer is registered in the CTHires system, which is used to track the services provided to each job seeker. If the customer is not registered, he or she will be guided to a computer and asked to complete the CTHires customer registration. If the customer needs assistance in completing the registration process, staff assistance will be provided.

American Job Center customers are provided with some form of orientation to the employment services that are available to them through all the various partners. Job Center staff discuss the customer's job search plans and provides customers with the opportunity to sign up for employment readiness core workshops, such as Successful Job Search Strategies, Interviewing Strategies and Techniques, and Fundamentals of Resume Writing. Additional workshops are available depending on the region. If the customer needs one-on-one job search assistance, career counseling, or a resume critique, every effort will be made to provide that service at that time, if not, then scheduled based on customer's availability. If the customer is interested in self-service activities, s/he can utilize CTHires to conduct job searches, create a "virtual recruiter", post a resume, or access online courses. Customers can also visit AJC Career Centers for access to computers, fax machines, copiers, resume paper, and free postage for mailing applications and resumes. Customers will also be informed about the various services available under WIOA.

Customers who self-identify as veterans or eligible spouses will be assessed for significant barriers to employment and other characteristics that qualify for one-on-one job search

assistance from a CTDOL Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialist. Jobseekers with a self-disclosed disability may be referred to either a Disability Program Navigator or Disability Employment Initiative representative (depending on region). Jobseekers with disabilities may also be referred to or from Aging and Disability Services (ADS) for service. All customers have the option of accessing the universal services available in the center.

Staff is assigned to each of the career centers in the comprehensive American Job Centers to support and assist jobseekers in whatever way needed. Jobseekers needing to improve computer skills will be referred to a computer skills workshop or drop-in computer skills classroom to work on developing or enhancing their computer skills.

Customers interested in WIOA services will be connected to the appropriate WIOA representative or WIOA information session. This is coordinated online since early 2020 to accommodate virtual service delivery and will continue when convenient for both staff and participants in the future. Application, intake and employment plans or any subsequent forms are shared over CTHires and with tools such as DocuSign to gather signatures electronically.

All American Job Center (AJC) customers will be asked if they are receiving public assistance benefits (i.e. TANF, SNAP, HUSKY, Care 4 Kids) and referred to the appropriate WIOA service entity to assist with any special needs beyond those offered by the AJC. Such referrals will be documented and outcomes noted.

Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) services and WDB Title I services have been co-located wherever/whenever possible with Title II/Adult Education and Title IV/Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Two Vocational Rehabilitation programs of ADS have been successful in achieving a model of either full or part-time co-location in each of the WDB regions. Two Adult Education providers have also experienced success in co-locating in the Northwest WDB and in the East WDB. If/where co-location is not feasible, all staff in each of the comprehensive American Job Centers will be trained to become familiar with services provided by Adult Education and ADS and be able to make an intelligent, informed decision about when to refer a customer to one of these agencies. In turn, all staff at Adult Education and ADS has been trained to become familiar with the services available at the American Job Centers across Connecticut, capable of making referrals to those Job Centers for any customer.

The American Job Centers are hubs from which jobseekers can be referred to sector-focused programs in targeted sectors such as Manufacturing, Health Care or Construction. Job Developers from organizations like ADS have joined the Regional Business Service teams in each region.

American Job Center staff will be familiar with these targeted sector grants and programs in each region and capable of making informed referrals to them. In some situations, targeted sector program staff may be co-located at an American Job Center. Accessible printed program information is made available to jobseekers.

The regional WDBs deliver Adult and Dislocated Worker program activities through the American Job Center system via comprehensive and affiliate centers. Career services are provided to a wide range of jobseekers, with specialty programs directed to returning citizens, veterans and individuals with disabilities. Services include career coaching, guidance on job search techniques, skill and interest assessments, advice and support through peer groups, individual employment planning, and job development and placement. Occupational training is provided through access to Individual Training Accounts (ITAs). Support services are funded for transportation, childcare, or technological needs, among other needs, to support an individual's successful participation in WIOA activities. Needs-based payments are available by regional policy to support individuals in training. When resources are designated, the Workforce Boards coordinate layoff aversion activities locally to complement state Rapid Response efforts. This can

include the funding of supplies or training to keep a business open and its employees on staff, preventing a layoff from occurring, as well as leveraging other resources such as Shared Work programs to address payroll needs.

### **Business Services**

Teams engage employers and provide recruitment and hiring assistance, as well as access to an array of training resources for incumbent workers and new hires. See detail on services to employers in Section III(a)(2)(D) Coordination, Alignment and Provision of Services to Employers below.

### **CTDOL-Administered Services**

WIOA Title 1 and Wagner-Peyser services are available through Connecticut's affiliate and comprehensive *American Job Centers*. CTDOL will provide the following services:

#### Wagner-Peyser Labor Exchange

Under the Wagner-Peyser Act, CTDOL Employment Services (ES) receives federal funding to provide universal access to an integrated array of employment-related labor exchange services. These services, delivered both virtually and in person, include job search assistance, job referral, and placement assistance for jobseekers, reemployment services to unemployment insurance claimants, and recruitment services to businesses with posted job openings.

During the last program year, a total of 9,141 Wagner-Peyser program participants received employment services (staff-assisted or self-services) through the American Job Centers, with 19,865 staff-assisted services provided statewide. Virtual employment workshops on resume writing, interviewing, job search strategies and LinkedIn were also offered. Participants also benefited from services such as career guidance, information about specific companies and labor market trends, and one-on-one career counseling through the American Job Centers. In addition, staff with board-certified credentials from the Professional Association of Résumé Writers & Career Coaches (PARWCC) provided resume preparation services.

#### Unemployment Insurance Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (UI RESEA)

CTDOL meets the reemployment needs of many UI claimants through the Unemployment Insurance Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (UI RESEA) program, which serves claimants who are either identified as most likely to exhaust benefits or receiving Unemployment Compensation for Ex-service members (UCX). Selected claimants receive virtual or in-person services statewide through comprehensive American Job Centers. DOL's RESEA program design includes an increased UI presence in the AJCs and the involvement of UI trained staff. Specifically, each RESEA customer meets one-on-one with a RESEA representative to discuss the rights and responsibilities of the unemployment insurance program. Ongoing staff training includes an emphasis on enhancing the skills needed to assist claimants with their reemployment efforts; RESEA program representatives have been trained to effectively access labor market information specific to a claimant's job skills and employment prospects, develop a reemployment plan to meet the claimant's needs and determine appropriate referrals to reemployment services or training.

Each RESEA must include the following minimum components to serve the needs of the claimant.

- UI eligibility review, including review of work search activities if such activities have not been waived, and referral to adjudication if an issue or potential issue(s) is identified;
- Customized labor market and career information based on an assessment of the claimant's needs;
- Enrollment in the ES program;

- Support, to the extent needed, for the claimant in the development of an individual reemployment plan tailored to the claimant’s needs; and
- Information and referral to additional reemployment services and other AJC services, resources, and training, as appropriate.

The RESEA program was temporarily offline with the implementation of the new UI system, ReEmployCT in July 2022, and experienced technology barriers requiring outside consult and assistance. CT enlisted assistance from our ReEmploy consortium partners and the UI Information Technology Support Center (ITSC), a national collaborative between USDOL, the states, and local workforce agencies, to address these technology barriers within the system. As a result, CT DOL decided to build upon and expand the RESEA program to better meet current and future needs of the RESEA program by developing a robust RESEA module in the ReEmployCT system. This new development project is currently underway and is expected to be completed year ending 2024. In the interim, a temporary solution, Interim RESEA, was implemented statewide in September 2023. This temporary, manual solution is only viable until the new RESEA program is implemented in ReEmployCT.

#### UI RESEA Joint Impact Study with NYDOL

CTDOL successfully implemented a joint RESEA Impact Study in partnership with NYDOL in November 2021, and contributed study participants through June of 2022. The goal of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of reemployment services and service delivery strategies and the impact they have on improving employment outcomes and reducing UI benefit duration. All individuals who completed their Initial RESEA Appointment were referred to CTDOL’s RESEA Bootcamp Workshop which includes Job Search, Interviewing, Resume Preparation and LinkedIn content. The RESEA Bootcamp Workshop serves as one of multiple reemployment services under evaluation in the study. The evaluation study is now in the data analysis phase with a final report expected at the end of 2024.

Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) helps individuals return to suitable employment as quickly as possible following employment loss. Participants are part of worker groups certified by the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) whose jobs were believed to be affected by increased imports or a shift in production to a foreign country. Benefits to eligible workers include job training, job search assistance, relocation and readjustment allowances, and wage subsidies for individuals 50 years of age and older who return to lower-paying work. The TAA program entered termination mode on July 1, 2022. As a result, no new certifications are allowed to be made and the only new participants permitted to enter the program are workers from previous certifications who have not yet received training.

Mandatory co-enrollment with the Dislocated Worker Program continues to meet or exceed the required threshold levels set by USDOL. By working across programs, this aligns with the Agency’s goals of promoting workforce development programs to support economic growth.

Although the program is in termination, there was still TAA activity to report during the program year, 10/1/2022- 9/30/2023:

- Training: 23 participants were active in training, with training payments totaling \$416,763.
- Trade Readjustment Allowances (TRA): \$698,136 was provided for 1,254 weekly TRA claims, including 477 weeks of basic TRA, 712 weeks of additional TRA, and 65 weeks of completion TRA. Individuals who satisfy applicable program requirements may receive one or more types of TRA income support: up to 26 weeks of basic TRA; up to 65 weeks of additional TRA, and up to 13 weeks of completion TRA.
- Reemployment/Alternative Trade Adjustment Assistance (R/ATAA): \$19,892 in payments was issued to eligible workers.

During termination, the Connecticut TAA program has continued to conduct outreach to

workers from previously certified companies who have not participated in Trade Act training. This included almost 3,500 outreach attempts to individuals, such as direct mail, email and phone calls. Connecticut's additional plans related to Trade have remain suspended based on the current status of the program. Should that change in the coming Program Years, Connecticut is poised to redeploy resources back into the Program where activity is currently minimal.

Veterans Services: CTDOL assists Connecticut veterans and covered persons with their employment and training needs by providing job search assistance and individualized career services, making referrals to supportive services, and sharing information about other state and federal programs. CTDOL ensures priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses and encourages their use of American Job Center (AJC) resources; in the AJCs, customers may receive one-on-one assistance either on a walk-in basis or by appointment. .

Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG)-funded Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialists provide intensive services and facilitate placements to meet the employment needs of veterans and eligible spouses who have significant barriers to employment or have otherwise been designated by the U.S. Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) as qualifying for DVOP services. These barriers and designations include the following:

- a special disabled or disabled veteran, as those terms are defined in 38 U.S.C. §4211(1) and (3); special disabled and disabled veterans are those who are entitled to compensation (or who, but for the receipt of military retired pay, would be entitled to compensation) under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; or, were discharged or released from active duty because of a service-connected disability;
- veterans who had active military service, in whole or in part, during the Vietnam Era, which is Aug. 5, 1964, through May 7, 1975; for veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam, the timeframe is Feb. 28, 1961, through May 7, 1975;
- a homeless person, as defined in Sections 103(a) and (b) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11302(a) and (b)), as amended;
- a recently-separated service member, as defined in 38 U.S.C. § 4211(6), who has been unemployed for 27 or more weeks in the previous 12 months;
- an offender, as defined by WIOA Section 3 (38), who is currently incarcerated or who has been released from incarceration;
- an individual lacking a high school diploma or equivalent certificate;
- a low-income individual (as defined by WIOA Section 3 (36));
- veterans ages 18-24;
- transitioning service members in need of intensive services (specifically, those who have been assessed as not meeting Career Readiness Standards; are ages 18-24, regardless of whether they meet Career Readiness Standards; or are active duty service members being involuntarily separated through a Service reduction-in-force); and
- wounded, ill, or injured service members receiving treatment at Military Treatment Facilities or Warrior Transition Units (MTFs – WTUs) and the spouses and family caregivers of such wounded, ill, or injured service members.

Individualized career services include comprehensive and specialized assessments of skill levels and service needs; development of an individual employment plan to identify the employment goals, suitable objectives and appropriate combination of services for the participant to achieve the employment goals; group counseling; individual counseling and career planning; and short-term prevocational services that may include development of learning skills, communication skills, interviewing skills, punctuality, personal maintenance skills, and professional conduct to prepare

individuals for unsubsidized employment or training. Veterans and eligible spouses who do not qualify to receive intensive services from a DVOP may receive these services from other AJC staff.

DVOPs will continue to employ effective outreach strategies to identify veterans and encourage their enrollment in the workforce system. Outreach locations include, but are not limited to, the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs Connecticut Veterans Home; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Clinics and Vet Centers; Connecticut State Colleges and Universities; local homeless shelters, libraries and town halls; community and veterans organizations including Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and The American Legion; and Reserve and National Guard units. DVOPs also participate in re-entry and ex-offender meetings and serve on advisory boards, including those of members of Connecticut's delegation in the United States Congress.

Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVERs), also funded by JVSG, conduct outreach to area employers to assist veterans in gaining employment and facilitate the employment, training, and placement services furnished to veterans in the state's AJCs. LVERs are available to:

- plan and participate in job and career fairs;
- conduct job searches and workshops and establish job search groups, in conjunction with employers;
- coordinate with unions, apprenticeship programs and businesses or business organizations to promote and secure employment and training programs for veterans;
- inform Federal contractors of the process to recruit qualified veterans;
- promote credentialing and licensing opportunities for veterans; and
- coordinate and participate with other business outreach efforts.

**Coordination of Services:** In providing services under JVSG, the DVOP will assess the need for intensive services and case management and make appropriate referrals to other services available through CTDOL or other workforce partners. Veterans and eligible spouses with significant barriers to employment (SBE) will receive individualized career services from the DVOP and other AJC staff such as CTDOL Career Development Specialists and WIOA partners. Referrals to other agencies and organizations providing supportive services, including the Department of Veterans Affairs, will assist veterans with addressing barriers and resolving issues that hinder their ability to secure gainful employment. AJC services such as job search and career planning, résumé-writing assistance, career counseling, and prevocational services will help the veteran attain job-ready status. Once a veteran is determined to be job-ready, the DVOP will work with the LVER to make employment connections while continuing to provide case management and other intensive services as appropriate. CTDOL utilizes a case conference approach whereby any CTDOL or partner staff member may refer a job-ready veteran to an LVER for job development or job referral services, including veterans who do not qualify for JVSG but are served exclusively by the Wagner-Peyser, WIOA Adult, or WIOA Dislocated Worker programs.

**JVSG Staff Development:** The DVOPs and LVERs participate in required online and classroom courses facilitated by the National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI) and are afforded opportunities to earn credentials such as Certified Professional Résumé Writer (CPRW). CTDOL supports the participation of JVSG staff in the annual National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) Veterans Conference which provides training and networking opportunities.

**Employer Outreach and Business Support:** LVERs will perform structured outreach to better engage employers, identify new contacts, and maintain established relationships, utilizing service delivery strategies that include the provision of routine follow-up after veterans are referred and more frequent employer visits. CTDOL will rely on LVER staff to help increase the employer penetration rate and enhance relationships with business organizations. LVERs will collaborate with federal contractors and other specific employers to regularly assist with their hiring needs



and will promote employers' apprenticeship opportunities for veterans. In partnership with local businesses, community organizations, and other state and federal agencies, CTDOL will support career fair opportunities for veterans by assisting with organizational efforts and performing outreach to engage employers, maximize veteran attendance, and promote the American Job Center system. One such example is the annual Hartford Athletic Hiring Expo, hosted in partnership with CTDOL.

CTDOL staff members will make referrals to the University of Connecticut's Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans (EBV) program, which supports business initiatives for veterans through experiential and small business management training, and will provide information to EBV participants about JVSG services. Additionally, CTDOL will maintain relationships with partners of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), such as SCORE, and the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), which also includes the involvement of the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development and the University of Connecticut. JVSG staff will attend the SBA's Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) meetings and cover outreach tables to promote AJC services to veterans and support entrepreneurial development services.

Homeless Veterans: Services to homeless veterans will be coordinated with the grantees of the U.S. Department of Labor's Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) program. CTDOL's DVOPs will participate in regularly scheduled outreach at HVRP grantee locations or otherwise coordinate with grantees to provide individualized career services and ensure the enrollment of HVRP participants in Wagner-Peyser. The DVOPs also will help to identify homeless veterans in the community, make referrals to HVRP and SSVF, and provide supportive services of their own to help connect homeless veterans with housing and employment. Additionally, JVSG staff will participate in annual Stand Down events that provide supplies and services to homeless veterans.

VA Vocational Rehabilitation Participants: CTDOL will continue to collaborate with state and federal agencies to provide services to veterans who may benefit from vocational rehabilitation, including those who are participating in the Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program. A Memorandum of Understanding between CTDOL, the Hartford Regional Office of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs/VR&E Division, and the U.S. Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service, defines the partnership in place to assist veterans served under the auspices of Title 38, Chapter 31 of the United States Code.

#### Jobs First Employment Services-

CTDOL will administer the Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) program in partnership with CTDSS and the five WDBs. CTDOL oversees the Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) program, which helps people gain new job skills and find a job. The participants are people receiving Temporary Family Assistance who are referred to the program. They may qualify for a range of services, including job search help, adult basic education, GED preparation, English for speakers of other languages, on-the-job training, and occupational skills training.

CTDSS determines which TFA clients are eligible for the JFES program and refers those clients to a JFES virtual Orientation session. CTDOL contracts with each of the five WDBs for direct case management services to these JFES clients. In addition, CTDSS contracts with the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies (CCFSA) to provide Barrier Intervention Services to JFES clients who may have barriers that prevent them from fully participating in the JFES program.

CTDOL hosts and facilitates a bi-weekly meeting with the JFES front-line Supervisors and WDB Administrators to ensure that any issues occurring on the front line are being addressed and to provide any necessary guidance to the WDBs concerning JFES policies and procedures. This group was formed in the summer of 2020 as a result of Covid and has become known as the Virtual Services Work Group. CTDOL also coordinates closely with the Care4Kids program

operated by the CT OEC and the United Way. This program provides valuable child care services to our JFES participants so that they can participate fully in JFES employment services like Job Search, vocational training, Adult Education classes, Subsidized Employment, Community Service

CTDOL has implemented a Family Centered Coaching approach to serving JFES clients. All JFES case managers, supervisors and WDB Administrators who work on the JFES program have gone through extensive training on Family Centered Coaching and each workforce region has created and implemented a Family Centered Coaching plan for their respective regions that puts the client in the driver's seat, considers the importance of diversity equity and inclusion policies in serving these TFA clients, and also considers the hopes and dreams of the program participant and their families as well as any challenges that may be getting in the way of achieving their career goals and overall family wellness.

CTDOL has implemented a number of policy changes in the JFES program which benefit our JFES participants including covering a client's transportation costs to and from any part-time or full-time job for the entire time they are receiving TFA benefits, helping to mitigate the Benefit Cliff effect for our clients. CTDOL has also promoted the use of ride sharing services such as Uber and Lyft to assist clients who are participating in employment activities or employment in urban or rural areas where public transportation may be lacking.

CTDOL has partnered with the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS) to provide free Financial Literacy classes for JFES clients and all JFES clients are encouraged to participate in these classes using the Money Matters curriculum. A workshop about the Volunteer Income Tax (VITA) program is also offered to clients. CTDOL is also partnering with the Department of Housing to provide access to the Rental Assistance benefits available through the Unite CT program. Both CTDOL and DOH are exploring the possible co-location of Housing Navigators who can assist clients with accessing this UniteCT program.

CTDOL has partnered with CTDSS and the Refugee Resettlement agencies in Connecticut to develop new processes and procedures to help expedite the connection between refugees and parolees who are working with Resettlement agencies or sponsors and the JFES case managers.

CTDOL has also been an active participant in the state's 2 Gen Initiative . participating on both the 2Gen Council as well as the 2 Gen Economic mobility workgroup.

The CTDOL JFES program engages with other Education and Training providers in a number of ways. CTDOL engages with the Department of Education through its 2 Gen work as members of the 2 Gen Council. CTDOL engages with the Department of Education and the Community College system through its involvement in the Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative and the Domain One committee which is a sub-group of the Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative. In addition, the CTDOL JFES program works closely with the Department of Education and its Adult Education providers through membership in the statewide Disability Focus Group which is responsible for planning the annual Conference on Serving Adults with Disabilities which will be celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> annual conference on May 3, 2024.

The CTDOL JFES program has tried to improve access to Postsecondary Credentials by eliminating mandatory assessments of JFES participants who are interested in pursuing vocational training and giving case managers maximum flexibility in determining whether a client is ready to be successful in a vocational training program. CTDOL has also partnered with NASWA to offer the Grow with Google program to JFES participants so that they can acquire IT related career credentials which make them more marketable to employers and expedite their return to the workforce.

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) administers core programs and services listed in the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (WIOA Title II). Each local and regional board of education must establish and maintain a program of adult classes or provide for the participation in a program of adult classes for its adult residents (Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-69).

***CSDE-Administered Activities***

- to support shared governance structure, CSDE will participate in the Governor’s Workforce Council meetings.
- to strengthen interagency partnerships, CSDE will:
  - have members of the CSDE Adult Education Unit serve as members of the five regional Workforce Development Boards.
  - share system infrastructure costs.
  - provide services through the One-Stop system.
  - make funding available to each of Connecticut’s five designated local workforce areas.
  - review and evaluate proposals with a team including representatives of the WDBs and One-Stop system partners.
  - assess local workforce areas’ needs and WDBs’ goals in conjunction with each WDB.
  - refer students to One-Stop Centers, monitor, act on referrals from One-Stop Centers.
  - provide appropriate training for One-Stop partners.
- to strengthen coordination and collaboration with key educational sectors and employers, CSDE will:
  - align Integrated Education Training Program (IET) training curriculum with employer/labor market needs. (IET is Connecticut’s contextualized integrated education and training program strategy.)
  - partner with community colleges to assist adults’ transition to postsecondary education and training.
  - work with the One-Stop system to address the needs of local customers and employers and link adult education strategically to other employment and training services.
  - work with the State’s longitudinal data system and use a common intake form to provide consistently defined and applied data from adult education programs.
- to continue to invest in integrated technology to meet the unified technology requirements of WIOA and other Federal initiatives, CSDE will:
  - work to interface the Literacy, Adult, and Community Education System (LACES) with the State’s common intake and reporting system.
- to support engagement in continuous research and analysis to realize the potential of state’s workforce programs and delivery systems, CSDE will
  - continue to offer the IET program and ensure that it is aligned with labor market needs.

- to assist the entire WIOA partnership deliver a unified message, CSDE will:
  - participate in coordinated system-wide efforts to increase awareness of the Connecticut workforce system.

### **Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) Administered Activities**

The department's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Supported Employment (SE) programs will assist individuals with disabilities to prepare for, secure, retain, advance in or regain employment.

Housed within the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) are two Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs. The general VR program, situated within the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), serves individuals with all types of disabilities except those with the primary disability of legal blindness. The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) serves consumers that are legally blind, as well as current or former transition-age consumers with visual impairments. Consumers who are legally blind and deaf or hard of hearing are served by either BRS or BESB. The Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) projects their core programs, including the two VR programs and the Senior Community Services Employment Program, will collectively assist 8,815 individuals in FFY 2023. This includes an estimated 8000 individuals with disabilities served by BRS, 745 individuals who are blind or have a visual impairment served by BESB, and 70 older workers in the SCSEP program.

### **Connecticut Department of Social Services Administered Activities**

The CT Department of Social Services (CTDSS) administers SNAP E&T, a work program designed to help SNAP recipients gain skills that will help increase self-sufficiency. SNAP E&T offers short-term vocational programs that are job focused and employer driven. Offerings range from 1-day security guard programs to 2-year associates degrees. The program operates on a third party reimbursement model. Partners investing nonfederal funds in allowable employment and training activities can leverage those funds and receive a fifty percent reimbursement. In addition to leveraging funds, these partnerships allow CTDSS to leverage the expertise and experience of each partner.

The SNAP E&T components included in the CTDSS state plan of operations include; Education/Vocational Training, Supervised Job Search, Work Experience and Job Retention. These activities are delivered through eighteen partnerships that include five nonprofit organizations, a private nonprofit college, and all twelve community colleges within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) system. The current college partners delivering services are under CT State Community Colleges; Capital Campus (CC) located in Hartford, Gateway Campus (GC) located in New Haven, Housatonic Campus (HC) located in Bridgeport, Asnuntuck Campus (ACC) located in Enfield, Northwestern Campus (NWCC) located in Winsted, Three Rivers Campus (TRC) located in Norwich, Naugatuck Valley Campus(NVC)) located in Waterbury, Middlesex campus (MXC) located in Middletown, Quinebaug Valley Campus(QVC) located in Danielson, Norwalk Campus (NC) located in Norwalk, Manchester Campus(MC) located in Manchester, Tunxis Campus (TC) located in Farmington, Goodwin College located in East Hartford, Connecticut Center for Arts and technology (ConnCAT) located in New Haven, Opportunities Industrialization Center located in New London, Capital Workforce Partners located in Hartford and Homeless Hospitality Center located in New London. In addition to the partnerships with service providers, CTDSS also partners with the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) system office to help coordinate statewide initiatives. CTDSS partners with CTDOL through an MOU, which allows data sharing needed to fulfill the annual reporting requirements, included in the Agricultural Act of 2014, also known as the 2014 U.S. Farm Bill. In addition to the data share agreement, CTDSS utilizes CTDOL labor Market information (LMI) to approve programs based on the availability of jobs in selected employment fields.

As mandated in the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018, SNAP E&T participants receive case

management. Our current contractors provide case management services that are unique to their SNAP participants and beyond what they provide to their other non-SNAP clients. This includes employability assessments, progress monitoring, monthly case notes and coordination with other service providers. Case management services can also include referrals to other services such as Adult Basic Education or other support services to enable the participant to remain engaged in his or her activity. While skills building are the focus of the program, CTDSS balances the need for immediate employment with the goal of moving participants to self-sufficiency. There are circumstances when the component will be Supervised Job Search or Work Experience. Successful participants who begin employment after participating in an E&T component may participate in Job Retention services. Job Retention provides support services to participants for a minimum of 30 days and a maximum of 90 days. Examples of supports offered are reimbursements for expenses that are reasonable and necessary; including equipment or tools, clothing or uniforms, and transportation needed to maintain employment.

As of October 2023, there were 284,973 households, comprised of 494,600 individual recipients, receiving nutrition assistance from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. These low-income households include approximately 60,126 individuals who are not exempt from SNAP general work requirements. The Connecticut SNAP population is a diverse group with varying degrees of work readiness.

In addition to direct food benefits, SNAP in Connecticut also includes free educational opportunities. SNAP E&T is a skills based, employment focused, work program. The SNAP E&T program's primary goal is to assist SNAP recipients in gaining skills and utilizing work-related activities that will lead to paid employment. SNAP E&T is voluntary, with a focus on vocational training. SNAP recipients, who are not receiving TFA, are encouraged to participate by self-enrolling with the provider of their choice. Successful participants gain skills needed to find employment or improve employment in the current job market. The resulting outcome is increased self-sufficiency and decreased dependence on public assistance.

### **Office of Early Childhood (OEC)**

OEC Workforce Initiatives include:

- Leading the focused efforts on workforce for the Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care's work to develop a Five Year Strategic Plan, submitted to the Governor in December 2023. The Report incorporates extensive feedback from Blue Ribbon workgroups, national and local experts, Panel members, and other stakeholders including providers, parents, businesses and advocates and includes significant proposed changes to CT's systemic approach and strategies to support and advance the early childhood education workforce.
- *Elevate*, the Office of Early Childhood's quality improvement system. Elevate gives child care providers the tools and guidance they need to improve their programs through supportive and customized support from Service Navigators, creation of program plans, and incentive for reaching Elevate Member+ status.
- ctSHARES website ([ctshares.org](http://ctshares.org)), funded by OEC and administered by the CT Association for the Education of Young Children. ctSHARES provides access to job postings, policies, forms, regulations, handbooks, guidance, savings and other information for Connecticut's early childhood education professionals. With a ctSHARES account, jobseekers or employers have access to ECE Jobs CT, a free tool for both job seekers and employers who are looking to hire early childhood education program staff and support professionals. Posting are shared to eight other online job sites.
- Marketing Campaign designed to: (a) help recruit individuals to the field of early childhood education, (b) promote certification and degree completion, and (c) direct individuals looking for ECE related jobs to a state-wide Job Board.

- Qualified Workforce Incentive Bonuses: direct payment to providers in licensed, state funded programs to promote certificate and degree completion.
- Established CT's first Registered Apprenticeship program for family (i.e., home-based) child care in partnership with CTDOL and CSEA-SEIU's Education and Support Fund, to mentor and guide participants toward the completion of a Child Development Associate (CDA) and National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) accreditation, which leads to a wage increase upon completion. OEC is coordinating the development of a registered apprenticeship program for center-based early childhood educators in partnership with employers across CT.

### **Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)**

CTDSS administers the CSBG federal block grant (approx. \$8M annually) with assistance from the CT community action agency network. The purpose of CSBG is the reduction of poverty, revitalization of low-income communities, and empowerment of low-income families and individuals to become fully self-sufficient.

CSBG can provide an array of services - employment work supports, child and family development, community empowerment, independent living. CSBG has identified the following national performance indicators for states to follow: 1,116 persons employed; 768 maintain job for at least 90 days/achieve a "living" wage; 9,211 receive employment supports such as skills/competencies; and 75 completion of ABE/GED.

### **Child Support**

CTDSS administers the statewide child support program. The goals of the child support programs are to assist families in reaching independence through increased financial and medical support, establish paternity for children born out of wedlock, and connect non-custodial parents with the Fatherhood Initiative.

## **(B) ALIGNMENT WITH ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE PLAN**

Preceding sections have described numerous programs and activities provided by education, human services, training and economic development partners that may be considered outside of the plan. CT believes that in order to be prudent and effective, these programs must be managed with a unified workforce strategy and vision led by Governor Lamont and his Chief Workforce Officer.

Activities conducted for and services provided to jobseekers, workers and industry through the core WIOA programs covered by this Unified State Plan represent a significant portion of the state's larger workforce development system. Other vital entities and stakeholders in the broadly conceived workforce system include the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS), Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), Board of Regents for Higher Education/Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (BOR/CSCU); Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) K-12 comprehensive schools system, Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS), Office of Early Childhood (OEC), an extensive network of private colleges and universities represented by the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC), proprietary schools, regional/local Chambers of Commerce, sector-focused business associations, organized labor, community-based organizations (CBOs) and non-profit service providers. Collectively this spectrum of stakeholders represents more workforce development-related resources and programs, serving more participants, than do the core WIOA programs covered by this Unified State Plan. The stakeholders in Connecticut's broad and informal workforce system identified above have an impressive history and track record of collaboration in developing effective strategies and minimizing duplication.

State agencies, educational institutions and workforce partners will participate in the efforts of the Governor's Workforce Council to align activities across programs. The Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS), for example, collaborates and cooperates in a coordinated manner through a set of specific agreements with a wide array of organizations, entities and programs among workforce-related partners and stakeholders not specifically covered by this Unified State Plan, to pursue and achieve their respective objectives. Details are available in the two state plans for vocational rehabilitation and supported employment services incorporated in this Unified State Plan.

In CT, two entities receive federal funds for the Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP). The State Unit on Aging, as the State Grantee and The WorkPlace, as the National Grantee, are active statewide partners. With the State Unit on Aging now part of ADS, the actions and goals of SCSEP are now included in this Unified State Plan to provide a roadmap for serving older workers along with individuals with disabilities under the other Bureaus of ADS.

Memorandums of Understanding and Infrastructure Agreements were developed to cultivate partnerships. Through these partnerships, the regular use of shared office and meeting space at the American Job Centers rounds out the services for older workers and workers across the life span. With a dedicated presence at the AJC, SCSEP staff work collaboratively to integrate services delivered through the AJC. Co-location limits the likelihood that older workers will miss opportunities to avail themselves of the quality services delivered through the American Job Centers. Co-location improves the connection between SCSEP staff, The WorkPlace and AJC staff through the visible presence as well as collaborative conversations centered on the best menu of services for each individual.

Another example of an "outside" collaboration, is with the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). The OEC will be an engaged partner with entities that prepare and provide training for individuals working with young children and their families across any setting. The OEC will partner with workforce entities to ensure individuals entering and re-entering the workforce have access to high-quality and stable child care through our School Readiness Program, Child Day Care Centers, Smart Start, Preschool Development Grant program, and Care4Kids child care subsidy program.

The child care subsidy program is an integral partner within Connecticut's workforce system. Care4Kids provides a child care subsidy to low and moderate income parents who are either enrolled in TFA, enrolled in an approved education and training program, or who are employed. The childcare subsidy is intended to make child care more affordable, therefore, allowing parents to enter the workforce and stay employed. The child care subsidy can be used for all types of early childhood settings, including licensed centers and family child care homes, and unlicensed relative. The CCDBG reauthorization of 2014 required states to implement significant policy shifts that address continuity of care and quality of care for the child. The focus on continuity provides more child care stability for working parents. The OEC will be available to provide information to the Workforce Development Boards and various workforce partners on the importance of high-quality childcare and early childhood resources. In addition to providing materials at the American Job Centers, the OEC offers information and training through the Child Care Resource and Referral Service and Child Care 211 Infoline.

#### (C) COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS

Key State agency and local WDB partners were engaged in the statewide process of planning for WIOA implementation at State and local levels, emphasizing coordination of services and resources to provide high quality customer services and requisite support services. The Commissioners of CTDOL, ADS and CSDE are responsible for the review, endorsement and modification of the Unified State Plan to ensure coordination objectives are met.

Commitments to service and resource coordination among these State agencies are captured in Memoranda of Understandings (MOUs) executed by the local workforce boards and the respective State agency Commissioners. Representatives of these State agencies participate in the

planning efforts of each of Connecticut's five WDBs to develop and update local WIOA plans, emphasizing cross-agency coordination consistent with provisions described in the endorsed Unified State Plan.

Furthermore, the CSDE will provide services to eligible individuals who are 17 years old or older, are not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under Connecticut law, are basic skills deficient, do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, or are English language learners. Adult education programs will serve as the major Unified Plan Partner entry point for individuals who lack basic skills. Once a participant has enrolled, adult education provider staff will refer participants to an American Job Center or Youth Provider to conduct a workforce assessment and develop an educational/career plan. Participants can be referred to the American Job Center for evaluation. A unified referral management system will help local programs track participants as they move from agency-to-agency. This system will allow programs to give timely assistance to participants if they get stuck or seem to be dropping out. Information will be shared with WIOA core partners about adult education eligibility requirements, as well as dates, times, and locations of sites where adult education is offered.

The ADS Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs within BESB and BRS offer a wide range of services to eligible individuals, including guidance and counseling, mobility training, rehabilitation technology, adaptive equipment, rehabilitation teaching, job coaching, on-the-job training, low vision services, as well as a variety of skills assessments. BESB provides services on a statewide itinerant basis through its office location in Windsor. BRS provides services in 14 offices across Connecticut where consumers may apply for assistance. In five of these locations, BRS is co-located with at least one core partner program. In several other locations, offices are in close physical proximity to partners. As long-term lease obligations and other logistical issues prevent movement toward increasing the number of co-locations, it is believed that formalizing referral processes and creating a service delivery structure that encourages partner collaborations will lead to improved coordination in services.

BRS and BESB have assigned staff to the primary American Job Center (AJC) locations in each of the five WDB regions to engage clients in services and to act as a dedicated liaison to the AJC. Staff serves on relevant committees and work groups at the AJCs. Through this approach, BRS and BESB staff become aware of initiatives, employment opportunities within each region, as well as workshops and training opportunities for consumers to register for and participate in. In addition, ADS has assigned staff to act as administrative liaison to each of the five boards in an effort to enhance communication and promote continued collaboration. An example of this continued collaboration was in the area of work-based learning experiences. BRS and BESB worked closely with each of the five WDB regions to develop and implement contracts to facilitate work-based learning experiences for Pre-Employment transition students. This innovative model increased access to important learning opportunities and exposed this young adult population to services available through the workforce system.

ADS also administers the Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP) through its State Unit on Aging. SCSEP participants may register with the local American Job Centers. The first visit to an American Job Center can be overwhelming when an older worker is returning to the labor market. Older workers may be individuals seeking employment after being employed in a particular field for a length of time; individuals who have been out of the workforce for a length of time; or individuals who have recently exhausted unemployment compensation. As a required WIOA partner, SCSEP staff presence at the AJC will increase visibility of the program as well as promote familiarity and willingness to actively engage in services through AJC. The shared cubicle and meeting space promote interaction between SCSEP and AJC Staff. These interactions increase collaboration and sharing of resources to support older workers. Older workers who come to the AJC can also be referred to SCSEP as they seek assistance. Older workers can meet their SCSEP program coordinator at the AJC as well as attend monthly job club meetings at the AJC. However, since this co-location occurs on a part-time basis and SCSEP participants often access services on differing days and times, a second action to improve participant enrollment is the establishment of a single point of entry at the AJC for SCSEP's older workers. This staff person



would guide the SCSEP participant through the enrollment process at the AJC to support ongoing and regular use of the AJC.

An additional aspect of this coordination includes cross referral processes already in place between the SCSEP Grantees. With services that overlap in some areas of the state and due to the limited resources of each grantee, ADS and The WorkPlace work together and determine who and how to best serve the participant. This program coordination streamlines program point of entry and services and maximizes limited resources.

Strategy: SCSEP will develop and implement marketing strategies aimed at increasing awareness of SCSEP services within labor market and job training initiatives.

During the last SCSEP Work plan, strides were taken to improve the partnership between SCSEP and the one-stop system. The ADS State Unit on Aging met with one-stop administrators to provide information about older workers and about SCSEP. Each of the state's SCSEP offices has a working relationship with the local one-stop. In some areas that relationship is very strong as sub-grantee staff is co-located in the office. Staff provides information about SCSEP to potential enrollees. In other regions where co-location is not available, SCSEP continues to refer participants for workshops and job development services. The one-stops continue to be valuable resources for SCSEP participants across the state and the state will endeavor to continue cultivating these partnerships.

This includes clients living in rural or outlying areas. In addition, in the Fall of 2021, the DOL JFES Unit implemented a new policy that provides transportation subsidies to JFES clients that become either partially or full employed for the first four weeks of their new employment. In addition, the DOL JFES unit is in the process of expanding that same transportation policy to cover JFES clients who become partially or fully employed by providing them with transportation subsidies for the entire time they are receiving TFA benefits which will eliminate any "transportation cliff" effect that clients may have encountered in the past.

WIOA Administration also supports WDBs in funding transportation costs for both rural and city residents. If a participant needs to travel to school, training, or work, and they are an eligible participant within our adult, dislocated worker, or youth programs, then CTDOL will reimburse costs associated to transportation as an allowable supportive service to the individual. The workforce regions support individuals in a variety of ways, such as taxis, ride sharing, bus, rail, or mileage reimbursement. Where bus transportation is accessible, all workforce regions make use of programs from the Department of Transportation, such as waiving of bus fares for a time-limited period. Each cost falls under local workforce board policies and at the onset of the pandemic, most limits to supportive services were waived due to less participation in activities and higher needs. The state and local regions will continue to support individuals with transportation barriers in ways that are the most reasonable for their travel needs, while minimizing the burden on the participant, for as long as funding is available to cover costs.

#### (D) COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO EMPLOYERS

##### **State Level**

OWS maintains collaborative partnerships with workforce system partners including CTDOL, ADS, Adult Education, DECD, Workforce Development Boards and CT State Community College and Connecticut State University system to develop a statewide vision that enhances and aligns the services offered to Connecticut businesses. CTDOL leads this partnership in the coordinated approach of its five Regional Interagency Business Engagement Teams (BETs) to improve communication among all partners and develop innovative solutions to ever-changing business challenges. The BETs hold regional meetings on a monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly basis. They are led or co-led by CTDOL and Local Board personnel, and give all partners an opportunity to discuss labor market information, business needs and local activities happening in each region. CTDOL Business Services Specialists attend Regional Sector Partnership meetings across the state

as “support” members to provide information regarding CTHIRES, workforce development programs and recruitment assistance. In addition, all workforce partners contribute content for the *Interagency Employer Resource Guide* and *Employer Reference Card* publications which offer road maps to the many programs, services and incentives available to business. These publications are maintained by CTDOL and are available in electronic format and provide an important marketing tool for the business services professional.

The Office of Workforce Strategy engages with employers and workforce system stakeholders to promote strong employer and association-led Regional Sector Partnerships, sector strategies and career pathways initiatives and support effective service strategies for the workforce system’s employer customers. OWS maintains a list of Regional Sector Partnerships and initiatives to coordinate state efforts and to inform and connect new entrants to share ideas and best practices. State Board meetings have included presentations from industry sector leaders and offered an opportunity for members to share this information with their constituencies. OWS has maintained a strong relationship with the CT Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) and through their leadership and funding resources, CT has successful manufacturing and IT sector partnerships. The Manufacturing Innovation Fund and the Tech- Talent Initiative (described in previous sections) have provided millions of dollars to CT businesses to support and foster their growth. DECD’s Chief Manufacturing Officer leads that sector and he is also a member of the Governor’s Workforce Council.

The CTDOL Business Engagement Unit (BEU) was created in the summer of 2022, by appointing a centralized Unit Director with staff assigned to each comprehensive, American Job Center to ensure service coverage in all five CT workforce regions. The BEU ensures that free, labor exchange services are provided to CT Businesses using the CTHires Job Bank, and provides a targeted team approach to provide prompt, relevant, business services. Key responsibilities include assisting businesses to meet hiring needs and connecting job seekers to employment opportunities. Additionally, the unit handles various functions such as:

- vetting employer registrations in CTHIRES, implementing security enhancements to prevent fraud
- customized recruitment events
- promotion of events through our vast network of workforce and community-based partnerships
- collaboration with our CTDOL Veteran’s staff for referrals and hiring events
- providing access and assistance with CTHires for job postings and resume screening
- referrals to resources and programs to support business needs
- layoff aversion and downsizing support through Shared Work and Rapid Response programs

In 2023, a total of 854 business registrations were processed by staff into the State Labor Exchange, CTHires. During this same period, employers posted 57,150 new Connecticut job orders, and 219,685 job orders were indexed from corporate websites. Business Services Specialists partnered with CT businesses to hold 326 in-person hiring events at CT AJCs. Business Services Specialists doubled their outreach efforts to job seekers and workforce partners/colleagues by reaching 6,650 total CT subscribers to their AJC Hiring Event distribution lists. CT Department of Labor staff assisted over 6,855 employers, providing over 10,553 services. These services included: business consultation, referrals to additional support programs, recruitment assistance, candidate referrals to job postings, and assistance utilizing CTHires. Additionally, the unit partnered with local organizations such as Chambers of Commerce, Educational Institutions and non-profits by assisting with several Job Fairs held throughout our state.

CTDOL’s Business Engagement Unit sponsors free, monthly, business seminars for business owners and managers, supervisors, attorneys, and human resource professionals interested in learning about current workforce issues. The focus is to provide compliance assistance and

presentations are given by staff from CTDOL and other State Agencies who oversee CT Labor Laws. Recent topics have included: Drug Testing in the CT Workplace, The Interaction of CT Leave Laws, What to Expect During a Wage Investigation, Managing Your Business's UI Account, Understanding CT FMLA & CT Paid Leave, UI 101 for Employers, UI Trust Fund Solvency, and Introduction to Employment Law. These seminars were restarted in 2023 and have since garnered 2265 registrants. Business Seminar information is updated regularly and can be found at CTDOLBusinessTeam.com. Interested parties can also subscribe to the distribution list to receive a direct email.

#### What's Next for the Business Engagement Team 2024-2026?

- Continue to utilize Campaign Monitor to increase our Business Seminar statewide subscription list which now has climbed over 750 registrants
- Expand our 5 regional Campaign Monitor AJC Hiring Event subscription lists from 6,650 to 10,000 total subscribers.
- Explore other aspects of Campaign Monitor capabilities such as list maintenance, analysis of effectiveness, template design, outreach, and survey satisfaction which is 92%
- Further successful partnerships- increase communications and referrals to and from our Adult Education partners. BEU staff have been invited to speak at their meetings and Adult Ed colleagues are referring students to our recruitment events. Goal is to make this happen statewide.
- Last year's outreach efforts have led to increased speaking engagement opportunities to businesses and jobseekers. Expand partnerships with Chambers of Commerce, Small business groups and associations – many are involved with RSPs for the first time and opportunities will arise for collaboration.
- Employer Seminars- provide additional topics for presentations, be responsive to current events and law changes that affect CT employers.
- Artificial Intelligence- educate our team as much as possible to the opportunities these tools may provide.

In addition, Business.ct.gov provides streamlined access to business resources, industry sector partnerships, training assistance and incentives. Recently created publications – Connecticut's Industry Sector Partnerships, Employer Resource Guide, and Employer Resource Card offers a roadmap to the many programs, services and incentives that may be available to business. The publications are also available electronically through the business.ct.gov Web site.

#### **Local Level**

Each comprehensive American Job Center has organized Business Services functions to serve business customers in a single, unified, coordinated Regional Business Services Team structure. The Team consists of experienced business services professionals from a variety of partner organizations including the state's Workforce Development Boards, the Departments of Labor, Economic and Community Development, Aging and Disability Services (ADS), Education, regional community colleges and technical high schools, and regional/local economic development officials.

The Regional Business Services Teams coordinate services across programs and agencies to provide each business customer with effective strategies and aligned services that meet their needs. Monthly working meetings among the Regional Business Services Teams support information sharing and cross-training on partner programs and lead to the coordination of service strategies and effective service strategies for the varied business customers. Program descriptions, services and incentives available to business customers are published in the Employer Resource Guide and Employer Resource Card. Business services are marketed extensively, consistent with a focused business outreach strategy in each region. Social media tools such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are utilized as a low cost option to market workforce and education training programs, job fairs, events and available jobs.

Business Services Teams aspire to follow these principles:

- It's not about us – It's all about the Business!
- We are committed to providing seamless service to Business customers.
- Business customers in CTHires must post all job openings for which recruitment support is provided.
- All posted job openings will be communicated and made accessible to the full network of prospective jobseekers.

Furthermore, from the perspective of the ADS VR programs, the primary goal of coordinated activities with employers is to establish long-term partnerships that foster a mutually beneficial relationship for both the employer and VR consumers. These long-standing relationships are built on genuine interest in the work of each employer, their needs and their priorities. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor within the VR program is a resource employers can turn to for information, referrals to other service providers, and to learn about job site accommodations and provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) while waiting for a position that fits the individuals skill set. Other valuable services such as informational interviews, job shadowing opportunities and work assessment site hosting can be offered. Company tours can be arranged for consumers to teach about a wide variety of careers, particularly important to transition-age youth clients who may otherwise have very limited exposure to actual job sites.

ADS is enthusiastic about CT's collaborative strategy that offers employers a seamless and coordinated team approach to placing job orders and identifying qualified candidates for employers.

In addition, CSDE promotes workforce preparation skills including literacy instruction, employability skills, career exploration and development, and links to employment, employment services and other options to respond to the evolving workforce needs of Connecticut's business community and to promote individual self-sufficiency. Providers develop partnerships with local businesses for on-site workforce education classes to assist employees perform specific job tasks and increase productivity. Adult Education services are also included in the Employer Resource Guide and the Employer Resource Card that are published by DOL and distributed to employers.

#### (E) PARTNER ENGAGEMENT WITH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The Governor's Workforce Council Education and Career Pathways Committee will engage education and training providers to infuse new certificate programs to the eligible training provider list. The five Workforce Development Boards each engage multiple education and training providers in their regions and regularly solicit new providers to join in providing their services. The GWC has significant representation from industry leaders from many sectors and will be identifying training gaps and educational solutions to those gaps.

Connecticut education leaders and their key staff participate in decision-making processes defining and driving workforce system policy and strategy at both State and local levels. At the State level, Connecticut's Commissioner of Education (executive leader of Connecticut's public schools system), and the President of the Board of Regents for Higher Education/Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (executive leader of a system of public 4-year universities and 2-year community colleges) are directly engaged in all phases of workforce development planning, strategy design, oversight and coordination. In addition, the Superintendent of the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS) ensures that the contributions of CTECS are included, critical information is shared, and opportunities for coordination of programs and services are pursued, addressing the shared goal of ensuring that youths and adults (students) are ready for productive work in Connecticut's key industry sectors.

#### **CSDE: Partner Alignment with Educational Institutions**

CSDE will promote partnerships among local adult education providers and institutions of higher education, especially CT State Community College, to promote the successful transition of participants to postsecondary education and training. CSDE will rely on information from the workforce development system to track the progress of participants who have exited from their programs and have entered postsecondary education and training.

The CSDE will work with other core programs and One-Stop partners to ensure that adult education and literacy activities are in alignment and to develop career pathways which provide access to employment and training services for individuals in adult education and literacy activities. The CSDE will collaborate with the DOL to assist local providers in partnering with One-Stop Centers to develop career pathways and provide access to employment and training services. Professional development will be provided to local programs, including orientation to adult education programs and services for One-Stop partners and other agencies. Local adult education providers will refer adult learners to the Workforce Development Boards' Eligible Training Providers Lists for information about training opportunities in their region.

ADS liaison counselors work closely with the American Job Centers to make referrals for services within each agency's programs. When appropriate, ADS consumers may be eligible for training offered on DOL's eligible training provider list. Consumers take an active role in the process of pursuing these trainings, and VR Counselors are available to provide assistance. If there is a barrier to the ADS consumer accessing the trainings as a similar benefit to what ADS offers, the ADS counselor can approve payment to fund the DOL training. When ADS consumers access these DOL services, their names are automatically entered into the CTHires database allowing for optimal performance reporting.

### **ADS: Partner Alignment with Educational Institutions**

Both Vocational Rehabilitation Programs at ADS are actively involved in a variety of transition school- to-work initiatives, with extensive collaboration and coordination at the administrative and service delivery levels of the organization. Through a cooperative agreement with the State Department of Education, the roles and responsibilities of the VR programs and the public educational system are clearly defined, including financial responsibilities and coordination of services and staff training. Representatives from both VR programs serve on an interagency transition task force and appointed representatives from the Connecticut State Department of Education serve on the State Rehabilitation Council to BESB and to BRS. VR program information is presented at in-service training programs for public school teachers and guidance counselors on issues affecting students who have disabilities.

Regarding higher education, the Board of Regents has a cooperative agreement addressing services available in the university setting for students with disabilities. This agreement is with both VR programs and describes responsibilities to ensure that students with disabilities achieve equal access to classroom instruction, internships, and school-sponsored activities.

VR Program staff members participate and present information at BESB-organized in-service training programs for public school teachers and guidance counselors on issues affecting students who are blind or visually impaired. BESB Children's Services Program provides a comprehensive training series every year for school district staff about low vision aids and adaptive technology, braille instruction, expanded core curriculum activities and resources available to facilitate the education and transition of students served by BESB.

### **(F) IMPROVING ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIALS**

Connecticut recognizes the value and importance of postsecondary credentials and certificates to workers and businesses, and that they vary significantly by industry sector and specific occupation. A variety of sector-specific initiatives are underway within each of Connecticut's five local workforce areas, most in conjunction with the appropriate local WDB.

In addition, the GWC committees will also be focused on examining characteristics of gaps in supply and demand, identifying high quality credentials and certifications, and ensuring swift access to training for CT residents. The GWC will solicit input from industry associations, unions, companies large and small to identify credentials of value, stack-ability, and ensure that proper marketing and messaging reaches students and jobseekers to improve WIOA program performance. The goal is to identify and verify the credentials employers value and that actually contribute to hiring, productivity and opportunity for career advancement.

CSDE offers three programs leading to a high school equivalency diploma: Adult High School Credit Diploma (AHSCD), General Educational Development (GED), and the National External Diploma Program (NEDP). Local adult education programs also provide basic skills and workforce education through its highly successful contextualized integrated education and training program, Integrated Education and Training program (IET). All participants in adult education, including those in Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language, will learn about career pathways and will be taught the skills needed to succeed in postsecondary education and training. Participants who earn the high school equivalency diploma will be referred to CT State Community College and other institutions of higher education to transition to postsecondary education and training.

### **Registered Apprenticeships**

With regards to Registered Apprenticeships (RA), the Connecticut Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship Training (CTDOL/OAT) will continue to implement strategies to support expansion, diversification and integration of RAP and further our commitment to new programs. CTDOL/OAT staff provide outreach, marketing and technical assistance statewide.

Elements of our strategy include:

- Creatively applying RA as an important workforce and career solution to introduce employers to Registered Apprenticeship as a recruitment, training, retention, skills transfer, and succession model.
- Encouraging utilization of WIOA funding, where applicable, to support training programs and supportive services
- Building strategic and scalable partnerships in new sectors including, but not limited to, insurance, manufacturing, health care, finance, education, construction, and hospitality to coordinate and identify potential pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship program development, integration and implementation
- Cultivating relationships with Boards of Education, Superintendents, Career Technical Advisors and School Counselors with industry employers/partners
- Fostering a better understanding with CT's Community Colleges, Adult Education, and other institutions of higher education linking their programs to workplace-based related instruction
- Identify CTE programs within high schools and programs within higher education institutions for careers in various industries for pre-apprentice credentialing as best practice models
- Consult with CSDE for the development of a best practices guide to help local and regional boards of education to incorporate relationships with the industries in their middle and high schools in accordance with Student Success Plans (SSP) and capstones
- With workforce development system partners and the American Job Centers (AJCs), incorporate apprenticeship into the workforce development system's business model so that Workforce Board and AJC personnel can emphasize to employers and job seekers the value of an industry-recognized credential awarded through an apprenticeship

- Engage employers and introduce them to the WDB's and AJC's to potentially increase the numbers of low-income individuals and underrepresented populations in their apprenticeship programs
- Explore modernization of Connecticut's apprenticeship IT system to enhance data collection capabilities and reporting of programmatic data.

Through these efforts, CT will be poised to enhance the state's economy and growth while expanding registered apprenticeships which will support middle to high skilled jobs.

### **Board of Regents for Higher Education - Connecticut State Colleges and Universities**

CSCU is the state's public higher education system of community colleges, regional universities and the state's on-line college. Benefiting students, as well as Connecticut and its citizens, CSCU:

- Offers expansive access to affordable high-quality undergraduate and graduate full-time and part-time educational opportunities.
- Instills a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Promotes economic growth and workforce development.
- Provides vital services to communities and individuals.

#### ***Mission***

The Connecticut State Colleges & Universities contribute to the creation of knowledge and the economic growth of the state of Connecticut by providing affordable, innovative, and rigorous programs. CSCU learning environments transform students and facilitate the opportunities for an ever-increasing number of individuals to achieve their personal and career goals.

#### ***Vision***

The Connecticut State Colleges & Universities will continually increase the number of students completing personally and professionally rewarding academic programs.

### **CSCU Governance**

#### ***Board of Regents***

A 22-member Board of Regents for Higher Education governs CSCU. Among many responsibilities, the board adopts an operating budget for the CSCU system; sets statewide tuition and student fee policies; establishes financial aid policies; reviews, licenses, and accredits academic programs; adopts policies addressing human resources operations; and, also holds broad responsibilities for development and coordination of statewide higher education policy.

#### ***About Connecticut State Colleges and Universities***

- In the last two decades, CSCU institutions have conferred over 260,000 degrees and certificates.
- CSCU educates Connecticut students and a small but growing number of out-of-state students. More than 97% of CSCU students are Connecticut residents.
- With 70,000 students enrolled in credit certificate and degree programs (50,000 in credit, and 20,000 in non-credit), the CSCU system is the second-largest public higher education system in New England.
- About 45% of all college students in Connecticut attend a CSCU institution.

- Approximately 87% of CSCU graduates remain in Connecticut after receiving their degrees.
- Non-credit programs, such as those targeting workforce training, serve an additional 30,000 students.
- In 2017 the Board of Regents announced its decision to merge the 12 community colleges under its purview into a single institution. CT State Community College officially launched July 1, 2023. It is the largest institution in Connecticut and the largest community college in New England. The college has stabilized enrollment during the recent academic year. CT State is continuing to place student success measures into place that will increase its current completion rate. Data suggests that completion rates for white students and Black and Latine students need to improve. Faculty, staff, and administrators care deeply about improving these metrics and will continue to work on putting measures into place that will move the needle in a positive direction. CT State currently has a 69% student retention which is slightly under the national average for higher education.
- The merger seeks to leverage economies of scale to address longstanding budget challenges while remaining firmly committed to the access that is the foundation of the community college mission. In short, the merger addresses financial concerns without closing any locations while leveraging resources to increase vital student supports. The BOR's commitment to keeping all locations open lies at the heart of the strategic motivation behind the merger. In a small state, when students can move easily and freely between the campuses and when all courses count toward a degree or credential, student outcomes will improve. A single institution provides a way to remove barriers for students and implement student success reforms at scale.

### **WIOA Related Policy and Funding Solutions**

CSCU has identified a number of innovative solutions to the challenges the system faces which align with the WIOA system. Implementing any of these will require additional resources from policymakers.

#### ***Partnerships with K-12***

Expanding pathways from high school is essential for Connecticut to reach its goal of increasing college completion rates, closing the achievement gap, and increasing high school student engagement.

#### ***Partnerships with Business***

CSCU has been dedicated to addressing the needs of business and industry for a skilled workforce. The state can help to meet employer demand by partnering to promote internships or apprenticeships for Connecticut college students and graduates. Early exposure to employment opportunities while in higher education programs can help students and businesses to see their future in Connecticut. CSCU colleges and universities can also address the incumbent worker training needs of the state's small and mid-sized employers.

#### ***Partnerships with Office of Workforce Strategy & Workforce Development Boards***

CSCU has been working closely with OWS and the WDBs to design and deliver industry-responsive programs. The Career ConneCT initiative has provided an opportunity for the CSCU to provide programs and services with the WDBs to assist Connecticut residents in gaining the skills they need to meet the workforce needs of the state's employers. This partnership will greatly expand the training provided in the areas of manufacturing, healthcare, construction and IT.

#### ***Partnerships with Other State Agencies***



CSCU works closely with state agencies to implement special projects related to workforce. CSCU is working with the Office of Early Childhood to stabilize lab schools on college campuses and supporting the current workforce in building their skills and experience. CSCU, and its 12 community college campuses, have established a partnership with Department of Social Services to expand educational opportunities to low-income families through the SNAP Employment and Training Program.

## G. COORDINATING WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

### **Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development**

The Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) is the state of Connecticut's leading agency responsible for strengthening Connecticut's competitive position in the rapidly changing, knowledge-based economy. DECD is focused on support for existing businesses and jobs with a wide range of programs and services to help companies prosper; promote Connecticut industries and businesses both domestically and across the globe; and strengthen Connecticut's communities by provided funding and technical support for local community and economic development projects. The agency oversees a broad range of initiatives and programs in the following areas: business development, opportunity zones, brownfield redevelopment, arts, historic preservation, community revitalization and tourism.

DECD is executing a vision to dramatically improve the state's economic development performance in conjunction with AdvanceCT . In addition, underway, the state is developing an updated, long-term, comprehensive, and data-driven strategic plan as well as a cluster strategy for recruitment and retention of companies.

The needs and priorities of Connecticut's in-demand and emerging industries and businesses are:

- fiscal stability of the state's finances to ensure a stable and predictable environment that will yield private investment confidence
- build on the state's strengths (talent, location, quality of life)
- focus on innovation, key business sectors to stimulate business development, including offshore recruitment
- focus on talent development
- streamline governmental processes/regulation
- comprehensive multimodal transportation and infrastructure plan
- collaborate with key partners to improve business climate

The state and its economic development partners are focused on key economic drivers such as Insurance/Financial Services, Manufacturing, Bioscience, Software, Data Services and Technology, and Tourism. The need for skilled talent in critical growth occupations in these key industry sectors has been identified as a strategic priority requiring a continued close cooperation and coordination of workforce and economic development efforts. The agency works closely with industries to address challenges and opportunities facing all businesses.

DECD is a strategic partner with the Department of Labor with the launch of the Governor's Workforce Council to ensure alignment between industry needs and developing the talent pipeline. In addition, in the area of manufacturing and tech talent, DECD has resources in place to promote innovation and growth.

Governor Lamont's administration reformed the way state government provides incentives to private companies looking to add jobs or make significant capital investments in Connecticut. The foundation of the state's strategy is taking shape with a focus on four key programs, including two new concepts. Led by the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), the state now utilizes a performance-based, "earn-as-you-go" system,

meaning employers won't reap state incentives until they create a certain number of jobs or make a certain level of investment.

The new strategy does not require the state to borrow money up front to incentivize job growth as the Department of Economic and Community looks to reduce its bond obligations. The objective is to develop a competitive strategy that works for taxpayers and grows the economy. The major programs the state will now focus on include:

- a modified Small Business Express program that no longer offers state loans or grants, but is now a loan guarantee program run by private partners, with an emphasis towards woman-owned companies, underserved communities, and distressed municipalities
- a JobsCT Rebate Program that rewards companies in specific industries (finance and insurance, advanced manufacturing, health care, bioscience, technology, and digital media) that create at least 25 jobs paying above-average wages, and
- a greater focus on two existing incentive programs: the Urban and Industrial Site Reinvestment Tax Credit - which will be available to projects that add significant new economic activity and jobs at an old industrial site or urban center; and the Sales and Use Tax Relief Program that exempts businesses from paying the sales and use tax when they acquire tangible personal property, equipment and services from Connecticut Innovations, the state's quasi-public venture investor that oversees the program.

The state and its economic development partners are focused on key economic drivers such as Insurance/Financial Services, Manufacturing, Bioscience, Software, Data Services and Technology, and Tourism. The need for skilled talent in critical growth occupations in these key industry sectors has been identified as a strategic priority requiring a continued close cooperation and coordination of workforce and economic development efforts. DECD is a strategic partner with the Governor's Workforce Council and the Department of Labor and strives to ensure alignment between industry needs and developing the talent pipeline. In addition, in the area of manufacturing and tech talent, DECD has resources in place to promote innovation and growth which include the following:

### **Chief Manufacturing Officer**

This position is an important ambassador and serves as a concierge for the industry on matters of workforce development, supply chain resiliency, innovation, business climate, regulations, etc. and will collaborate with private, public, academia, local, state and federal government partners to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to strengthen Connecticut's manufacturing sector. The Chief Manufacturing Officer is the author of CT's Manufacturing Strategic Plan and the Make it Here 2030 initiative – CT's plan for full employment in the manufacturing sector by 2030.

### **Manufacturing Innovation Fund (MIF)**

Connecticut manufacturing is booming, fueled by a robust supply chain of over 4,500 businesses. Nearly one of every ten Connecticut employees now works in the manufacturing sector – and the demand for skilled manufacturers continues to accelerate. To advance manufacturing even faster, the state government established a \$130 million Manufacturing Innovation Fund (MIF). Among its many initiatives, the MIF supports innovation and growth in the state's advanced manufacturing sector. The fund assists manufacturers to develop or modernize critical equipment, support technological advancement, encourage research and development, and provide critical workforce training. The objective is to strengthen the supply chain network of small/medium manufacturing companies and ensure a productive, flexible, well-trained advanced manufacturing talent pool with competitive skills. DECD provides administrative oversight, with the counsel and support of an eleven-member advisory board, the majority from manufacturing companies.

## CSDE: Coordinating with Economic Development Strategies

CSDE will participate in and support efforts of the Governor's Workforce Council to assist Connecticut business employers by continuing to develop and implement contextualized integrated education and training I-BEST programs that address the workforce needs of those businesses.

### (b). STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS AND POLICIES

As the coordination entity for all workforce activities in the state, including WIOA, the Office of Workforce Strategy facilitates and drives the development of all policies. With respect to WIOA, OWS is supported by the CTDOL which maintains day-to-day responsibility to ensure that an appropriate and comprehensive set of state workforce system policies is established and are in place to guide effective WIOA service delivery. CTDOL has demonstrable experience and expertise in this role, having been responsible for administrative oversight and direction of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) implementation in Connecticut. Building on a foundation of administrative policy developed during that time, the CTDOL's WIOA Administration Unit has systematically drafted and developed the necessary inventory of WIOA-related workforce system policies. The CTDOL WIOA Policy Manual can be found at <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/wioa.htm> . The policy manual is designed to be updated as necessary to account for changes and improvements in WIOA service delivery over time.

#### (1) THE STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS THAT WILL SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATE'S STRATEGIES.

As administrative entity for WIOA implementation in Connecticut, CTDOL has lead responsibility to ensure that appropriate operating systems are in place and used effectively by all WIOA and workforce system partners, with appropriate oversight by the state board. A description of Data Collection and Reporting elements is included below.

#### **Connecticut Department of Labor**

Data collection and reporting for the six core WIOA programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser, Adult Education and Literacy Activities, and Title 1 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973) will occur within separate case management systems located at each of three State agencies including the Connecticut Departments of Labor (CTDOL), Education (CSDE), and Aging and Disability Services (ADS).

CTDOL has contracted with Geographic Solutions to implement a web-based case management system, CTHires, to provide virtual services to individual jobseekers and employers, and to collect data required by WIOA for reporting on self-services and staff-assisted services for the Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser, and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) and Foreign Labor Certification, TANF/Jobs First Employment Services Program, Apprenticeship and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) Program. CTDOL is also working with OWS and the Local WDB to include other workforce grant activities in CThires, this includes CareerConneCT, Good Jobs Challenge, Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative and Community Project Grants.

#### **Connecticut State Department of Education**

All adult education providers funded by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), Adult Education Unit, collect and report through the Connecticut Literacy, Adult and Community Education System (LACES). The data entered in LACES are used by CSDE to meet reporting requirements at the Federal and State levels. LACES data are the basis for completing the Federal reporting requirements of the National Reporting System (NRS).

LACES is a longitudinal database containing student information. The Student ID created for each new student in LACES is unique to that student across adult education providers and fiscal years. Students returning to adult education in a future fiscal year maintain the same LACES

Student ID. Students who transfer from one adult education provider to another, or prepare in adult education and then register for the GED test will also be able to utilize the same LACES Student ID.

### **Connecticut Department of Aging and Disability Services**

The ADS maintains an approved vocational rehabilitation case management system for both of the department's vocational rehabilitation programs. This system runs locally on servers housed within ADS and contains case information relevant to individual consumers and reportable data. The vendor has maintained an active relationship with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) who governs data collection for public vocational rehabilitation programs. RSA data elements have been adjusted to be compatible with the WIOA- Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) document.

SCSEP uses the SCSEP Performance and Results Quarterly Progress Reporting System (SPARQ) developed and maintained for the US Department of Labor. It is an online system and both grantees and sub-grantees have access to the system for data entry. Information about SCSEP locally, statewide and nationally can be accessed through this system.

### **WIOA Annual State and Local Area Reporting**

Reporting processes for the WIOA Annual State Performance Report will involve CTDOL obtaining electronic files for each report period from the three Connecticut State agencies for each of the six WIOA core programs. The WIOA Annual Local Area Performance Report is a subset of the WIOA Annual State Performance Report, covering only the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs. These electronic files will be matched to each of the electronic files for each of the six WIOA core programs to determine if an individual was co-enrolled in one or more of those programs. If the participant was co-enrolled in another core program, the specific code value identified in the WIOA Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) that applies to those services will be appended to the participant record.

These same electronic files will be used to obtain employment information for each program participant who has a social security number and an exit date from one or more of the six WIOA core programs. CTDOL currently is responsible for reporting wages, entered employment rates, and employment retention rates for individuals who exit the Wagner-Peyser, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Trade Adjustment Assistance programs.

Each program's electronic file containing co-enrollment data, wages, and employment information will be returned to each of the three State agencies for use in their Federal report submissions.

### **Eligible Training Provider (ETP) Performance Report**

CTDOL will use the CTHires case management system to collect data and generate the Eligible Training Provider Performance Report on all students in programs, and on WIOA participants, as required under WIOA.

### **Effectiveness in Serving Employers Report**

CTDOL will assume the role as lead agency in the Effectiveness in Serving Employers Report. Connecticut will be reporting on the Employer Penetration rate and Employee Retention.

Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) maintains and operates an automated Workforce Development Business System to support the operational and management needs of the State of Connecticut's One-Stop employment service delivery system under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). To address these operational, management, and reporting needs, CTDOL requires that state and contractor staff funded under the WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser and National Dislocated Worker grant programs enter data into the

CTHires system. Staff delivering services under the Trade Adjustment Assistance and Apprenticeship programs also record data for this federal program into the CTHires system.

CTDOL also requires authorized representatives of contractor agencies funded under WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs to sign a Data Access Agreement, to ensure the protection of Personally Identifiable Information (PII) in their possession. United States Department of Labor (USDOL), Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) No. 39.11 is appended to the Data Access Agreement. In addition, staff members of these agencies that will access the CTHires system are required to sign a form entitled Acknowledgment of Receipt of Confidential Information to advise them of responsibilities with respect to confidential information.

**(2) THE STATE POLICIES THAT WILL SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATE'S STRATEGIES (E.G., CO-ENROLLMENT POLICIES AND UNIVERSAL INTAKE PROCESSES WHERE APPROPRIATE). IN ADDITION, PROVIDE THE STATE'S GUIDELINES FOR STATE-ADMINISTERED ONE-STOP PARTNER PROGRAMS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO A ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM**

Workforce programs in Connecticut are increasingly adopting a strategy of co-enrollment across various funding streams to ensure clients have access to a comprehensive range of services aimed at supporting their employment goals. This approach involves integrating programs like the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth and Adult programs with other essential services such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) delivery of the Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) program, disability services within Aging and Disability Services, and Adult Education programs. By coordinating enrollment across these diverse programs, clients can benefit from a broader menu of services tailored to their individual needs, ultimately leading to better outcomes. Moreover, this strategy fosters increased communication and collaboration between state agencies, facilitating more efficient and effective service delivery to the public.

As this continues to be a goal of the mutual agencies and partners, some tangible action items Connecticut is pursuing include co-enrollment flexibility embedded in WIOA policy that specifically outlines new data sharing agreements where individuals no longer need to provide the same documentation to multiple partners for enrollment, such as between JFES and WIOA Adult or WIOA Youth programs as the JFES service delivery captures much of the eligibility criteria for WIOA programming and is embedded within the same case management system for data entry, CTHires. (See WIOA Policy on Management Information System here: <https://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/WIOApolicyManual.pdf>)

Trade Adjustment Assistance has maintained a consistent co-enrollment across the WIOA Dislocated Worker program which has proven to be a benefit to customers that transition from one program to the additional supports sometimes made available under WIOA funding.

Additionally, WIOA, JFES, Trade Adjustment Assistance, and Adult Education have agreements to share assessment testing results for mutual customers in order to not re-test individuals needlessly if the window of time from testing is acceptable and meets the eligibility needs for additional program enrollments.

Overall, co-enrollment across funding streams promotes a coordinated approach to workforce development, ensuring that individuals receive the comprehensive support necessary to succeed in the labor market.

**CTDOL Policy on Infrastructure Funding**

WIOA makes improvements to the public workforce system including a requirement that required partner programs dedicate funding for allowable infrastructure and other shared costs that are allocable to the partner and in proportion to the partner's use and the relative benefit received by the partner program. US DOL has provided detailed guidance to states regarding the development of MOUs and the determination of infrastructure and other shared costs (TEGL 17-

16). The Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) between local Workforce

Development Boards (WDBs) and one-stop required partners is the instrument by which costs to support the one stop centers are outlined. The MOU must describe the operating budget of the one-stop centers, including how the costs of services provided by the one stop system and how the operating costs of the system will be funded, including the infrastructure costs for the one stop system. An Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) detailing the respective costs of each partner agency is a mandatory component of the local Memorandum of Understanding between the WDBs and one-stop partners. In addition, USDOL has made available resources provided at recent WIOA convenings including the attached information regarding a comparison between local and state funding mechanisms.

CT DOL has issued initial guidance from the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) predecessor, Office of Workforce Competitiveness (OWC), in MEMO GP 17-02 that was delivered to the Chief Elected Officials, Workforce Board Chairs, and Workforce Board Directors, and Agency Commissioners on June 1, 2017. The Memorandum of Understanding One-Stop Infrastructure Cost Sharing Guidance referencing WIOA Sec. 121(c), 121(h), USDOL TEGL 17-16, 20 CFR 678.700 – 678.760. The Memo provided updated guidance regarding one stop infrastructure cost sharing and the development of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs).

OWS will be working with the WDBs and partners in WIOA to provide updated guidance on Infrastructure Funding Agreements beginning in PY24. Below represents the prior approach and guidance which remains in effect.

After Memo GP 17-02, CT DOL WIOA Administration shared a policy issuance on One-Stop Center Infrastructure Cost-Sharing Agreements. The Issuance conveyed guidance for Local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs), Chief Elected Officials (CEOs), and one-stop center Required Partners to manage creation of a local infrastructure cost-allocation agreement (IFA). This included the deadline for advising the State of an impasse in completing the agreement is given, and the deadline for submission of infrastructure budgets. Procedures were discussed whereby a State- determined infrastructure-cost allocation mechanism would be triggered if a local agreement is not reached prior to the State deadline. The appeals process for disputing the contribution required of a one-stop partner by such a State mechanism is described.

WIOA requires that the MOU include details on how the Local WDB, CEO, and one-stop center Required Partners will fund one-stop infrastructure costs for all comprehensive one-stop centers in the local area. It is recommended that any infrastructure cost-sharing agreement for affiliated-site costs be negotiated separately from the statutorily required cost-sharing agreement covering comprehensive one-stop centers. WIOA sec. 121(h) mandates that the State, through the designated authority of the Governor, provide guidance to assist local WDBs, CEOs, and one-stop partners to determine equitable and stable methods to fund one-stop center infrastructure costs. The cost-allocation methodology must be in accord with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards in 2 CFR Parts 200 and 2900. WIOA and its implementing regulations also require that the State's guidance include timelines for Local WDBs to notify the State if local infrastructure cost- allocation negotiations reach an impasse. If the Local WDB and the required partners are unable to conclude *and sign* a local infrastructure cost-sharing agreement for the ensuing Program Year before the State's deadline, WIOA gives the State no recourse but to impose an alternative State infrastructure cost-allocation mechanism. This is *not* an alternative to the local funding agreement. It is a statutory *consequence* triggered by an inability of the concerned parties in the LWDA to self-determine a funding plan.

**State Guidelines** In compliance with WIOA sec. 121(h)(1)(B)(ii) and the implementing rules at 20 CFR 678.700-678.55, as well as US Department of Labor Guidance letters, e.g. Training and Employment Guidance Letter 17-16, OWC issued the "Connecticut WIOA Infrastructure Cost Sharing Guidelines." Local MOU signatories are not bound to follow these recommendations; they

may, in fact, adopt any local cost-allocation mechanism that is in accord with the Uniform Guidelines in 2 CFR Parts 200 and 2900. Nevertheless, we strongly encourage local WDBs, CEOs, and one-stop partners to develop their local infrastructure-cost allocation agreements using these guidelines.

**Notice of Impasse** An agreement must be negotiated, signed, and in effect by January 1, 2018, therefore final IFAs are due by December 1, 2017. Local WDBs must provide a Notice of Impasse to OWC no later than November 1, 2017 where local negotiations were unsuccessful. This notification may originate with the Local WDB, the CEO, or any one of the Required Partners. Does this need to be updated?

**Budgets** Local budgets upon which the local infrastructure cost-allocation agreements will be based must be submitted to OWC by November 1, 2017. These will be reviewed by OWC and the WIOA Administration Unit. In the event of unsuccessful negotiations for a local infrastructure cost- allocation agreement, any budget approved by the Local WDB, CEO, and Required Partners will be used by the State as a basis for a State-imposed mechanism, as mandated by the WIOA Final Rules. If, by the State deadline for local cost-allocation agreements, there is also no locally approved infrastructure budget, the WIOA Final Rules require the State to determine that budget for the local area.

**State Infrastructure Cost-Allocation Mechanism** If, by December 1, 2017, the local infrastructure cost-allocation mechanism has not been completed, signed, and submitted to the State, the State will be statutorily compelled to impose a State infrastructure cost-allocation mechanism as prescribed by WIOA sec. 121(h) and the Final Rules in 20 CFR Part 678. The specific allocations in this mechanism will be transmitted to the LWDB, the CEO, and the one-stop Required Parties for the local area prior to the start of January 1, 2018, if feasible. The State mechanism generally makes fewer funds available than a local agreement. The U.S. Department of Labor notes in its preamble to the WIOA Final Rules, “...while under the local-funding mechanism partner programs may contribute through any funds allowed by their authorizing statutes, under the State funding mechanism, infrastructure funds must come from administrative funds for the majority of partner programs.”

**Appeals Process** Upon receipt of the specific terms of a State infrastructure cost-allocation mechanism, any local WDB or one-stop required partner may appeal for cause, within 21 calendar days, in writing (electronic or hardcopy) the State’s determination regarding the portion of funds (or non-cash contributions) it the Local WDB or required partner is to provide. To be officially received, an appeal must fully contain evidence of the following:

- A. An introduction identifying the appellant and designating the letter as a formal appeal
- B. Full citations from WIOA or the WIOA Final Rules in Title 29 or Title 34 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* that support the appeal.
- C. Identify the basis for the appeal. WIOA stipulates that a State mechanism allocation determination may be appealed only if the determination is inconsistent with the requirements of WIOA sec. 121(h)(2)(E). The Final Rule at 20 CFR 678.750 further limits admissible grounds for an appeal to three possibilities. The petitioner must make a case that the State’s determination is inconsistent with:
  - i. the proportionate-share requirements in 20 CFR 678.737, or
  - ii. the cost-contribution limitations in 20 CFR 678.730(c), or
  - iii. the cost-contribution caps in 20 CFR 678.738
- D. The letter must be signed (electronic signature is acceptable) and dated.

WIOA provides that in circumstances where the local Board is unable to reach an agreement with required partners regarding infrastructure costs that a State Funding Mechanism (SFM)

will be applied.

State guidelines on one-stop partner contributions will be updated in collaboration with OWS and its predecessor OWC as roles and responsibilities continue to be defined.

Starting in PY22, CTDOL WIOA Administration began to provide a more detailed review of the Infrastructure Funding Agreement procedures from the lens of fiscal monitoring in order to support the WDBs in transparency and identify potential best practices in using such tools as the Space Cost Analysis provided by CTDOL Facilities Unit. CTDOL WIOA Administration, in collaboration with OWS, will continue to identify ways to cost share for services that do not take up physical/square footage space (i.e. virtual service cost sharing methodologies). OWS will work with CTDOL, the WDBs and other WIOA partners to develop and issue updated IFA guidance in PY24.

### (3) STATE PROGRAM AND STATE BOARD OVERVIEW

#### (A) STATE AGENCY ORGANIZATION

As of July 1, 2021, Public Law 21-2 enacted in June 2021 codified the role of the Office of Workforce Strategy. The law designated the Chief Workforce Officer to serve as (1) the principal advisor for workforce development policy, strategy and coordination to the Governor; (2) the lead state official for the development of employment and training strategies and initiatives; (3) the chairperson of the Workforce Cabinet, which shall consist of agencies involved with employment and training, as designated by the Governor; and (4) the liaison between the Governor, the Governor's Workforce Council 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.

Responsibilities of the Chief Workforce Officer include:

- 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;
- Coordinate workforce development activities (A) funded through state resources, (B) funded through funds received pursuant to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, 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 and the workforce development plan developed by the Governor's Workforce Council;
- 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;
- Coordinate measurement and evaluation of outcomes across education and workforce development programs, in conjunction with state agencies;
- Review any state plan for each WIOA program before such plan is submitted to the Governor;
- 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;
- 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;

- 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;
- 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.
- Coordinate, in consultation with the Department of Social Services, with community action agencies to further the state workforce strategy; and
- 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, and the American Job Center system.

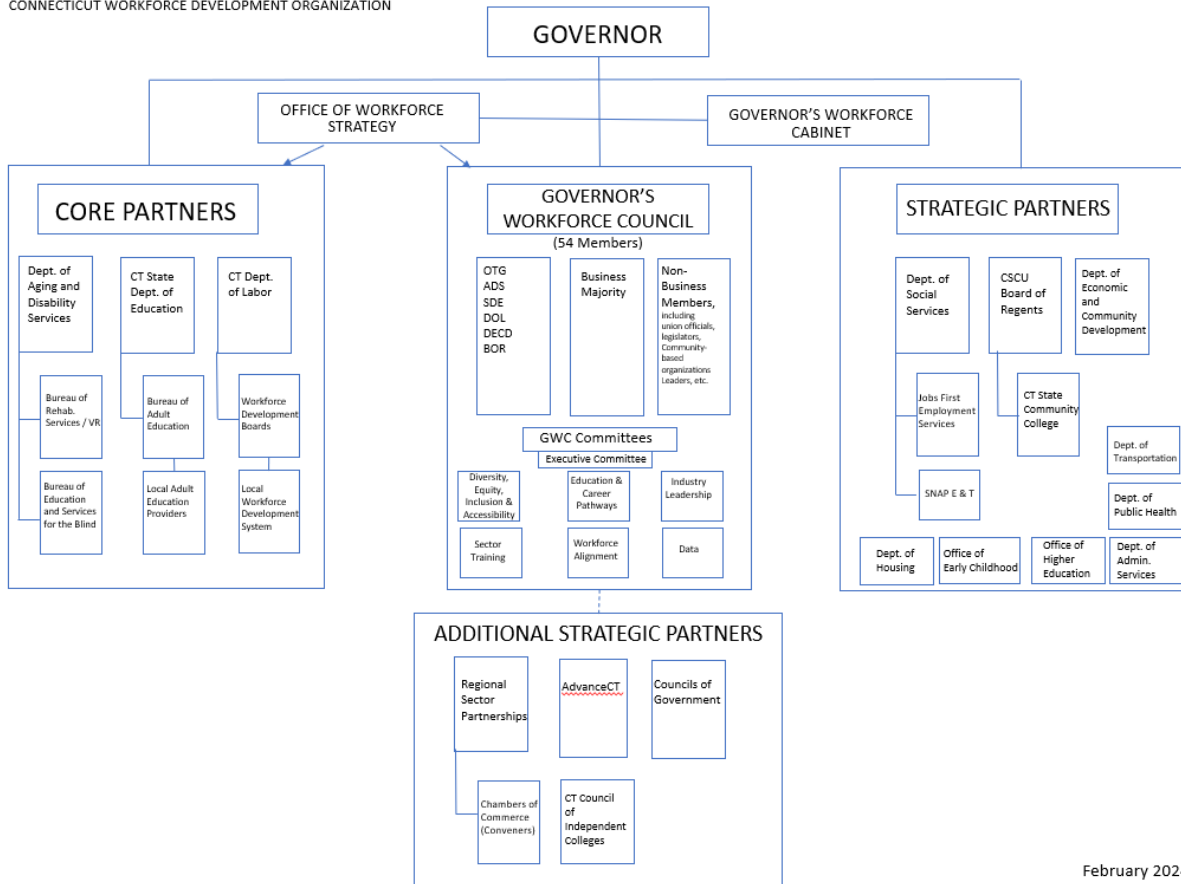
In conjunction with one or more state agencies enter into such contractual agreements, in accordance with established procedures and the approval of the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management, as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of this section. The Chief Workforce Officer may enter 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.

Public Law 21-2 also established or modified a number of committees and boards involved in workforce development that will assume central roles in the efforts of the Office of Workforce Strategy to align and improve the workforce system:

- Governor's Workforce Council. Serves as Statewide Workforce Board under WIOA, see full description
- Governor's Workforce Cabinet. Includes all state Commissioners involved in workforce development. To align policies across state agencies.
- Council of Advisors on Strategies for the Knowledge Economy. To promote the formation of university-industry partnerships, identify benchmarks for technology-based workforce innovation and competitiveness and advise the award process for innovation challenge grants to public postsecondary schools and their business partners and grants under section 4-124hh.
- CTECS Industry Advisory Committees. Industry cluster committees advise CTECS and the community colleges on specific skills standards, corresponding curriculum and a career ladder for the cluster which shall be implemented as part of the schools' core curriculum
- Connecticut State Apprenticeship Council
- Connecticut Apprenticeship and Education Committee
- Technical Education and Career System Board
- Technology Talent Advisory Committee
- Manufacturing Innovation Advisory Board
- P20 WIN Governing Board. To oversee development and implementation of the P20 WIN data system
- Credential DataBase Advisory Committee. To advise the Office of Higher Education on

the development of the credentials database.

CONNECTICUT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION



February 2024

### CT Department of Labor Organization

The Connecticut Department of Labor is committed to protecting and promoting the interests of Connecticut workers. In order 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. We ensure the supply of high-quality integrated services that serve the needs of our customers.

The CT Department of Labor’s WIOA Administration Unit has administrative responsibilities for the WIOA Title IB funded programs as well as a multitude of other federal, state and discretionary funded programs providing workforce development programming. Many of these programs operate on a statewide level and others are specific to individual programs and services within a dedicated workforce region, based on state funding overseen by WIOA Administration for the development and monitoring of contracted workforce programs.

These programs include: Trade Adjustment Allowance, National Dislocated Worker Grants, including Disaster Relief, Rapid Response, State Youth Employment Program, Department of Children and Families Youth Employment Program, STRIVE, Second Chance Initiative, Opportunities for Long-term Unemployed a.k.a. Platform to Employment, Mortgage Crisis Job Training Program, Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative, Retail Workforce Development Program, and Building Better Futures, a justice-involved youth program, . The administrative functions of this unit includes but is not limited to policy and procedure development, monitoring – both programmatically and fiscally, development of grants and contracts, reporting, and management information system support. Within PY21, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

made funding available to the state that gave CTDOL WIOA Administration the ability to contract with many new non-workforce development board service providers by entering into legislatively-directed funds to entities such as the Boys and Girls Club and a Women's Mentoring Network, among many more, to serve individuals most impacted by the health crisis. Many of these programs will continue to operate with ARPA funding through PY25.

CTDOL local office staff members deliver direct services within American Job Centers under the Wagner-Peyser, Trade Adjustment Assistance, Unemployment Insurance, and Veterans programs. Examples of services provided under these programs include: assessment of skills, vocational counseling, provision of labor market and other information, provision of referrals to employment and to supportive services for individuals, recruitment services for employers, unemployment insurance, and rapid response assistance for employers and their employees. These services are designed to assist individuals to obtain employment to ultimately achieve self-sufficiency, and to assist employers to secure qualified employees to assist them to become competitive.

CTDOL's Unemployment Insurance (UI) Operations, UI Tax, and ES Board of Review are separate divisions within CTDOL. These divisions work closely with the Employment and Training Division and the local American Job Centers to provide seamless customer services.

### **Jobs First Employment Services (JFES):**

The Connecticut Department of Labor's Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) unit, often referred to as the CTDOL Welfare to Work unit administers the Jobs First Employment Services program, which serves recipients of Temporary Family Assistance (TFA). TFA is Connecticut's cash assistance program for low-income families or pregnant women using federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding. TFA eligibility is administered by the Connecticut Department of Social Services (CTDSS). The CTDOL administers the JFES program in partnership with the Department of Social Services (CTDSS) and the five Workforce Development Boards (WDBs). The WDBs operate as intermediaries that subcontract with other organizations to provide services to JFES participants at American Job Centers (AJCs) located throughout the state. Services include job search assistance, vocational education, adult basic education, unsubsidized employment, subsidized employment, case management, community service and other support services such as in-home assessments, case management and transportation benefits. All JFES participants are eligible to receive childcare subsidies through the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (CTOEC). The ultimate goal of the JFES program is to enable participants, through employment, to become independent from cash assistance and be self-sufficient.

The CTDOL JFES unit has implemented a number of initiatives since the last CT WIOA state plan was submitted. First, CTDOL implemented the JFES CTHires electronic case management system in March 2018. Connecticut was the first state in the country to successfully implement a TFA/Welfare to Work system in partnership with Geographic Solutions.

Since the implementation of the JFES CTHires system in 2018, the JFES unit has worked to maintain this system and to fine tune the various types of reports and data that can be generated from the JFES CTHires system.

### **CT State Department of Education**

The Connecticut State Department of Education is committed to quality adult education programs which are accessible to all Connecticut adults and lead to mastery of the essential proficiencies needed to function as productive citizens in work, family and community environments. Connecticut's adult education programs are governed by Connecticut General Statutes, which require local school districts to offer education programs necessary to acquire basic literacy skills, elementary education, English language proficiency, secondary school completion and/or

preparation for equivalency or proficiency examinations. Local school districts and other eligible agencies providing mandated adult education programs are reimbursed by the Connecticut State Department of Education on a cost-sharing, sliding scale based on the relative wealth of a district.

By supplementing Connecticut's commitment of state and local adult education dollars with WIOA Title II dollars, Connecticut expands its provider network while enhancing and supporting programs and services that are more comprehensive, cost-effective and responsive to community needs. In addition to the local school districts, volunteer programs, community based organizations and other agencies provide adult education services in

Connecticut by recruiting and retaining educationally and economically disadvantaged adults. By focusing on the needs of learners, families, communities and employers, adult education programs succeed in improving the skills of Connecticut's learners, enabling thousands of residents to attain a secondary school diploma, helping to close the skills gap in the workplace, assisting non-English speakers to learn English, easing the transition to post-secondary education, preparing residents to attain U.S. citizenship and helping families to break the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy.

### **Department of Aging and Disability Services**

The mission of the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) is to maximize opportunities for the independence and well-being of people with disabilities and older adults in Connecticut. The primary customers of the agency are individuals with disabilities and older adults. In the employment-based programs, business/employers are a dual customer.

The Department has four programmatic bureaus, including:

- Bureau of Aging Services (Aging)
- Bureau of Disability Determination Services (DDS)
- Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)
- Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)

Programs, policies and practices are designed to promote employment, independence, equal access, self-sufficiency and self-advocacy. ADS is the designated state agency for the two VR programs. Consumers with disabilities who need help finding employment may apply for assistance at the applicable ADS offices. They may seek assistance to prepare for, secure, retain, advance in, or regain employment in a competitive and integrated setting. Services may include vocational counseling, benefits counseling, job search assistance, skill training and career education, school-to-work transition services, on-the-job training in business and industry, assistive technology services for mobility, communication and work activities, vehicle and home modifications, supported employment services, restoration services for a physical or mental condition and assistance accessing transportation options. Once eligibility has been determined, consumers work with a VR counselor to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) to identify the target employment goal and the services that ADS can provide to assist them in reaching that goal. The IPE also identifies the consumer's responsibilities to help reach the desired job goal.

#### ***ADS-SCSEP***

As the state SCSEP grantee, ADS relies on its sub-grantee, who is under contract to provide services in the grant's service areas of Fairfield, Litchfield and New Haven Counties. Consumers seeking assistance in these areas can contact the sub-grantee or the State SCSEP Coordinator at ADS. In areas served by The WorkPlace, consumers can contact their local offices or the State SCSEP Coordinator at ADS, as well, to be directed to local services.

### **CT Department of Social Services**

CTDSS provides a wide range of services to children, families, older adults, persons with disabilities, and other individuals who need assistance in maintaining or achieving their full potential for self-direction, self-reliance and independent living. CTDSS delivers a wide variety of services to children, families, adults, people with disabilities and the elderly, including health care coverage, food and nutrition assistance, child support services, independent living services, energy assistance, and program grants. CTDSS administers Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program; the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, among others. With a staff of about 1,900, the department provides services to more than 1 million Connecticut residents of all ages.

**Local Initiatives**

***Connecticut’s Workforce Development Boards (WDBs)***

Connecticut’s Workforce Development Boards conduct comprehensive planning and coordinate regional workforce development policy and programs. With a regional focus, the Boards assess regional employment and training needs and priorities, conduct planning for and coordinate programs that address those needs. In addition, the Boards create annual employment and training plans, and review regional grant proposals and plans submitted to state agencies by other organizations to assure that all regional planning is consistent with an overall statewide blueprint for workforce development. The Boards, with the Office of Workforce Strategy, the Connecticut Department of Labor, other State agencies and private organizations, form a statewide partnership to achieve comprehensive workforce development in the State.

Details of Workforce Development Board initiatives are provided above in Section II (a) (2) Workforce Activities.

***Workforce Development Board Initiatives***

Section II (a) (2) demonstrates Connecticut’s Workforce Development Boards’ leadership in attracting funds to support Connecticut’s workforce development efforts across the education and training continuum and the willingness of the WDBs to play a critical intermediary role in the efforts led by higher education and workforce system partners. Together they have developed and implemented several new industry sector partnerships with career pathway components.

**(B) STATE BOARD**

The Governor’s Workforce Council brings together stakeholders working to guild a workforce system second to that of no other state. Membership prescribed by PL 21-2 and again by PL 23-93, includes businesses, state agencies, quasi-public and independent entities, boards, councils, and commissions, public and private education and training institutions, workforce development boards, non-profit institutions, labor unions, and the State’s Chief Manufacturing Officer. The Board is includes three Fortune 500 CEOs, the CEO of Connecticut’s largest private employer, university presidents and public school superintendents, the Connecticut AFL-CIO president and 32BJ district director, elected officials, and experienced leaders of community-based organizations and of small and large companies in key industry sectors.

**(i) Membership Roster**

The voting members of the Governor’s Workforce Council, the State Workforce Board under WIOA, and their professional affiliations, include:

**Council Members**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Sector</b>
Mark Argosh   Social Venture Partners CT, Executive Director	Business

**DRAFT**

Kelli-Marie Vallieres   CT OWS, Chief Workforce Officer	Public Sector
Governor Ned Lamont   CT Governor	Elected Official
Toni Walker   CT General Assembly, State Representative	Elected Official
Herron Gaston   CT General Assembly, State Senator	Elected Official
Paul Pernerewski   City of Waterbury, Mayor	Elected Official
Peter Nystrom   City of Norwich, Mayor	Elected Official
Leslie Torres-Rodriguez   Hartford Public Schools, Superintendent	Local Government
Danté Bartolomeo   CT DOL, Commissioner	Commissioner
Dan O’Keefe   CT DECD, Commissioner	Commissioner
Amy Porter   CT ADS, Commissioner	Commissioner
Charlene Russell-Tucker   CT SDE, Commissioner	Commissioner
Sharon Barr   Alexion, Senior VP of Research & Product Development	Business
Cindi Bigelow   Bigelow Tea, Executive Director	Business
Shawn Coyne   General Dynamics Electric Boat, VP of Human Resources	Business
Melissa Turner   Yale New Haven Hospital, Chief Human Resource Officer	Business
Leticia Colon de Mejias   Energy Efficiency for All, Co-Chair	Business
Chris DiPentima   CBIA, CEO	Business
Brian Doubles   Synchrony, President & CEO	Business
Shane Eddy   SVP Operations, Pratt & Whitney	Business
Wes Alexander   Travelers, Vice President of Workforce Solutions	Business
Jeffrey Flaks   Hartford Healthcare, CEO	Business
Rohan Freeman   Freeman Associates, President	Business
Joseph Gianni   Bank of America, President Greater Hartford,	Business
Maggie Hulce   Indeed, Senior Vice President	Business

**DRAFT**

Suresh Muthuswami   Tata Consultancy Services, Chairman North America	Business
Molly Kellogg   Hubbard-Hall, CEO	Business
Jeff Auker   Infosys, Associate Vice President	Business
Martin Guay   Stanley Black & Decker, CEO	Business
Anthony Medici   Medtronic, Sr. Director of Operations	Business
John Murphy   Nuvance Health, CEO	Business
Ray Pineault   Mohegan Gaming & Entertainment, President & CEO	Business
Kathleen Silard   Stamford Hospital, CEO	Business
Erika Smith   ReNetX Bio, Inc, CEO	Business
Steve Sullivan, Eversource, CEO	Business
Shellye Davis   AFL- CIO, Executive Vice President	Labor
Tiana Ocasio   AFL CIO, Executive Secretary	Labor
Ed Hawthorne   AFL-CIO, Incoming President	Labor
Keri Hoehne   Local 371 UFCW, Executive Vice President	Labor
Paul Costello   NECA & IBEW Local 90 JATC, Apprenticeship Director	Labor
Gregory Ugalde	Expert in Residential Construction
Peter Salovey   Yale University, President	Higher Education
Radenka Maric   UCONN, President	Higher Education
Terrence Cheng   CSCU, President	Higher Education
Sal Menzo   Goodwin University, Superintendent	Higher Education
Judy Olian   Quinnipiac, President	Higher Education
Rebecca Rose, Lyman Hall High School, Agricultural Science Director	Representative from Agricultural Science
Nikitoula Menounos   CT Technical Education and Career System, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning	Representative from Vocational-Technical High School
Monette Ferguson   Alliance for Community Empowerment, Exec Dir.	Community-Based Organization
Michelle James   CAA of Western CT, Executive Director	Community-Based Organization

Jay Williams   The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, President/CEO	Community-Based Organization
Shehu Muhamed	Community Member
Tywanda Talley-Rushing, Senior Career Manager, Career Resources, Inc.	Community Member

**Ex-officio Members**

The five Workforce Development Boards sit as Ex-officio, non-voting members of the GWC.

- Alex Johnson, Capital Workforce Partners, President & CEO
- Bill Villano, Workforce Alliance, President & CEO
- Cathy Awwad, Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board, Executive Director
- Michael Nogelo, Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board, President and CEO
- Joseph Carbone, The WorkPlace, President & CEO

**(ii) Board Activities**

The Governor’s Workforce Council continues to make great strides in bringing together the best minds to advance the state’s approach to education and training. The Office of Workforce Strategy provides extensive direct support to Council members to enable them to be most effective in their leadership roles. The Chair of GWC and the Chief Workforce Officer meet regularly with all Committee Chairs to support their effective leadership in their areas of cognizance.

The Governor’s Workforce Council relies on this staff work, quarterly meetings and regular and clear communications to coordinate among the important stakeholders in the workforce system, including businesses, state agencies, quasi-public and independent entities, boards, councils, and commissions, public and private education and training institutions, workforce development boards, nonprofit institutions, labor unions, and the state’s Chief Manufacturing Officer.

The functions of GWC and its committee structure to actively guide its work to implement its Strategic Plan were fully described above in Section III (a) (1) State Board Functions.

**(4) ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS AND ONE-STOP PROGRAM PARTNERS**

**ASSESSMENT OF CORE PROGRAMS**

Connecticut’s Unified State Plan outlines a four-year strategy for the six core programs:

- Adult Program (Title 1 of WIOA)
- Dislocated Worker Program (Title 1)
- Youth Program (Title 1)
- Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program (Title II),
- Wagner – Peyser (Title III)
- Vocational Rehabilitation Program – BESB (Title 1 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV,) and
- Vocational Rehabilitation Program – BRS (Title 1 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV.)



Assessment of these core programs will be done by the respective administrative State agency. Executive Order #4 requires the Governor's Workforce Council to review the state's workforce development system and create a plan that makes strategic recommendations to improve the state's workforce system in a variety of areas, including better coordination, reducing barriers to training, strengthening the bridge from high school into post-secondary training and education, and emphasizing data-driven outcomes. In the spirit of continuous evaluation and improvement, the GWC Strategic Plan is under revision and will issue a revised Strategic Plan in mid-2024.

The GWC Data and Accountability Committee is working with the P20 WIN Board on a Request (#0042) to study the impact of workforce training and education on economic outcomes. The requested study, resulting in an interactive dashboard of data, proposes to 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. OWS is currently working with OPM DAPA and DOL's Research Department to gather the requisite information from partner agencies to perform the analysis.

CTDOL's Employment Services Operations Unit conducts annual case file reviews and monitoring of the Wagner-Peyser and Unemployment Insurance (UI) Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) programs in each of the five workforce development regions. These reviews ensure the American Job Centers (AJCs) are providing effective and appropriate services to program participants and are adhering to federal and state program requirements. A formal written monitoring report identifying best practices, areas of concern and findings resulting from the review is generated within thirty days of completing each review. The Employment Services Operations Unit provides technical assistance to AJC Directors, Programs & Services Coordinators and staff to quickly address any deficiencies and ensure the delivery of high-quality services that meet the specific reemployment needs of program participants and Unemployment Insurance eligibility requirements for UI claimants.

The Connecticut Departments of Labor (CTDOL), Education (CSDE), and Aging and Disability Services (ADS), will use the primary indicators of performance specified in section 116(b) of WIOA and contained in State Performance Reports to assess the performance of the six core programs. Each program's actual performance will be assessed in relation to the State adjusted levels of performance and revised State adjusted levels of performance. Connecticut does not have any additional indicators of performance referenced in section 116(b)(2)(B) as part of this Unified State Plan.

This State assessment will utilize quarterly wage records to determine program quality and effectiveness with respect to outcomes including employment rates and median earnings for participants with a social security number that exited from one or more of the six core programs. Also, the average cost of those participants who received career and training services, respectively, during the most recent program year and the three preceding program years will be assessed, while considering relevant economic conditions e.g., unemployment rates and characteristics of participants.

CTDOL reviews the Quarterly Reporting Analysis shared by USDOL to ensure accuracy of data being reported. Additionally, CTDOL will use the Local Area Performance Report broken down by local area for the WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs to determine each local area's performance on the primary indicators with respect to local performance targets. This local area data will be used to identify best practices and opportunities for improvement.

#### **ASSESSMENT OF ONE-STOP PARTNER PROGRAMS**

Other One-Stop delivery system partner program services included in the Workforce Performance Accountability, Information, and Reporting System that are reportable to USDOL

will be assessed annually using outcome measures on the Program Performance Scorecard e.g., employment rate, and median earnings.

CT Department of Labor (CTDOL) will use the program performance scorecard and the WIOA Annual Statewide Performance Report Template to assess the progress of participants who are exiting from the WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Wagner-Peyser programs in entering or remaining in employment. The state assessment will use quarterly wage records to determine entered employment rates in the second and fourth quarters after exit for program individuals who exit with social security numbers to determine their success in entering or remaining in employment. Median earnings will also be considered to determine progress towards self-sufficiency. Local Workforce Development Boards will be responsible for following up with participants exiting from the WIOA Youth program to assess enrollment in, persistence in, and completion of postsecondary education. Connecticut has not set any additional indicators of performance.

## (B) PREVIOUS ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Evaluation and assessment activities in Connecticut deploy a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to assess program efficacy using both in-house staff and contract researchers. Data provides the impetus for programs and policy and informs their planning and development, and enables course corrections post implementation that enable greater impact. The Governor's Workforce Council Data and Accountability Committee is guiding implementation of the data and performance management initiatives of the Council's strategic plan detailed above, including the significant progress achieved in the last two years.

Some of these activities happen during the course of regular operations, for example, through routine structured interactions with organizations receiving workforce grants, and through the implementation of the P20 WIN data platform. Other evaluation and assessment activities are formalized and implemented through the use of third party subject matter experts hired to provide specialized research.

The state's evaluation and assessment activities aim to investigate how specific operational practices and policy interventions affect the success of workforce programs and their participants. Relevant research questions include the following:

- What types of services are most likely to improve the labor market outcomes of program participants, especially over the medium to long term?
- How can operational practices be better structured to facilitate improved operations and better outcomes for workforce program participants?
- What program supports ensure program sustainability, continued program participation for participants, and limit premature program exit for participants while ensuring innovation and sustainability?
- What practices facilitate partnership between service providers?
- What practices facilitate regional partnerships and industry engagement?
- How can services be made more customer-centered?

Answering these types of questions requires taking a long and broad view on program operations and outcomes.

Assessments begin with the regular assessment and reporting by the agencies responsible for WIOA Core programs as described more fully in other sections of the plan. These include:

- The CTDOL WIOA program office regularly assesses results of the WIOA programs delivered through the American Job Centers and recommends adjustments to the program as needed.

- In order to develop a framework for assessment of effectiveness of programs, DOL, in collaboration with the Office of Policy and Management and the University of Connecticut, through the P20 WIN collaboration, piloted a 'return on investment' (ROI) framework for assessing program impact, using data from the WIOA Adult program for the pilot. While results are preliminary, the tools and methods developed for this pilot could be expanded and replicated for other programs. The ROI framework is based on similar work undertaken in Virginia, and with guidance from national workforce applied research groups.
- The CTSDE Adult Education office assesses and reports outcomes for all programs funded through them using Title II funds as detailed in Section VIII (f) To improve the quality and effectiveness of adult education programs, the CSDE conducts two evaluation processes: an annual desk audit for all providers, and an onsite monitoring evaluation for selected providers.
- The Adult Education office has adapted strategies to improve program outcomes by providing targeted technical assistance to local programs, monitoring performance with the local provider, and offering evidence-based professional development for practitioners to improve teaching and learning.
- Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), ADS assesses its vocational rehabilitation programs through Primary Indicators of Performance and files quarterly RSA 911 Case Service Reporting along with WIOA Annual Reporting to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).
  - ADS's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and Bureau of Educational Services to the Blind (BESB) continue to work with RSA toward negotiated levels of performance across all indicators. At this time, BRS and BESB have completed and agreed upon negotiated performance levels for Measurable Skills Gains (MSGs). In Program Year 2020, BRS and BESB exceeded the agreed upon threshold for this measure. BRS and BESB expect to complete negotiated levels of performance for all other measures during Program Year 2021.
  - BRS and BESB continue to monitor and refine VR program policies and procedures for the alignment of common measures of performance under WIOA which includes efforts to strengthen our partnerships with all WIOA Core Partners.

The Governor's Workforce Council with the support of OWS has pursued a number of specific assessment activities, including but not limited to:

- The Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative, a model that has been replicated across the state, has used regular program assessments to refine the specific strategies and tactics used on the model since it began in 2017. Adjustments have included in the number of classes offered, in the definition of outcomes, and in the hiring process.
- Assessment of the OWS experience with its CARES Act investments in short term training programs has informed the structuring of the more extensive Career ConneCT program which launched in 2022.
  - Examples of applying findings to program improvement include:
    - In CARES healthcare programs, certifications were not directly related to completion of the program. Career ConneCT program requires all necessary certifications are obtained as part of its training programs.
    - Inclusion of support services for participants in training programs improved completion rates so this feature is included in every

Career ConneCT program.

- Steps to encourage collaboration across providers in the proposal process improved both efficiency and effectiveness or proposed training and was built into the process.
- Based on assessments of CARES Act programs, OWS built pre-assessment into the Career ConneCT recruitment portal registration process to improve program design, identify supports needed, and increase the rate of program completion.
- OWS is working with OPM and vendors to measure results consistently across all the WDBs, including the collection of 70 data points for all participants in the CT HIRES system as a core of the system.

**(C) EVALUATION**

The Governor's Workforce Council and OWS are charged with ensuring the thorough evaluation of all initiatives and investments in the workforce development system to ensure that funds are deployed effectively to generate the impacts desired. Evaluation projects will be conducted in collaboration with the subject initiative's sponsors, the cognizant state agency, the WIOA partners, including the local workforce development boards, and other stakeholders in the work of the initiative. Consideration will be given to past evaluations to ensure that future ones are valuable use of State and local resources. The nature and type of these projects will unfold throughout WIOA implementation and will at a minimum focus on factors effecting program outcomes. Evaluations provided by Federal agencies will also guide the direction of State efforts.

In implementation of the GWC Strategic Plan, Connecticut will build data and performance management tools at both a system-wide and a program level that illuminate results and help the Council to analyze program impact and return on investment. Ideally, these tools will build the capacity to analyze the effectiveness of programs alone and in combination and also better understand labor market trends. This functionality will help decision-makers understand the participants in workforce programs, the services they receive, and the outcomes.

GWC and OWS will advance work in the following areas:

- **System-wide Dashboard Plan.** Through funding from The Connecticut Project (TCP), the state is working with Jobs for the Future (JFF) to develop a plan for an integrated data system for all workforce development programming. The system will build off of and incorporate existing data systems to create a dashboard that will enable the state to analyze all current workforce development investments across state and federal funded programs in state agencies, WIOA, and public colleges and universities, including their efficacy in helping Connecticut residents secure quality jobs. With this information, the state will be able to strengthen and scale proven programs and strategies, share best practices, and ensure equity within our efforts.
- **State Longitudinal Data System.** Working with the P20 WIN Board a Request (#0042) to study the impact of workforce training and education on economic outcomes. The requested study proposes to 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. OWS is currently working with OPM DAPA and DOL's Research Department to gather the requisite information from partner agencies to perform the analysis.
- **Career ConneCT and Good Jobs Challenge Evaluations.** OWS is working with the Office of Policy and Management on the development of learning agendas and Request

for Proposals to engage vendors to conduct independent evaluations of the programs.

(5) DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

(A) FOR TITLE I PROGRAMS

(i) Youth Activities in Accordance with WIOA Section 128(b)(2) OR (b)(3)

After allocations are determined for the Governor’s Reserve and Rapid Response, the remainder is allocated towards Youth, Adult and Dislocated Workers. For Youth, **Following the Statutory Formula, the following occurs:**

**WIOA Youth Activities**

Formula:

1/3: Local area relative share of total unemployed in areas of substantial unemployment (ASU) (average 12 months ending 6/30)

1/3: Local area relative share of excess unemployed (average 12 months ending 6/30)

1/3: Local area relative share of disadvantaged youth (American Community Survey 2016-2020)

**Minimums:**

A local area may not receive an allocation percentage that is less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the past 2 years.

**Maximum:** Not allowed

(ii) Adult and Training Activities in Accordance with WIOA Section 133(b)(2) OR (b)(3)

**WIOA Adult Activities**

Same as Youth Activities, except Formula uses disadvantaged ADULTS instead of YOUTH

The Minimums that result are what Connecticut at times refers to as a “Hold Harmless” provision, meaning after the calculations are complete, if one region or more has less than 90% of their combined average previous to year’s allocation’s percent, the remaining regions’ allocations will be reduced in a percentage similar to the formula in order to allow the harmed region(s) to raise to the 90% minimum of the prior year’s allocation’s averages.

(iii) DISLOCATED WORKER EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH WIOA SECTION 133(B)(2) AND BASED ON DATA AND WEIGHTS ASSIGNED

Funds to local areas must be allocated based on a formula created by the Governor using the following 6 data factors:

- Insured unemployment data
- Unemployment concentrations
- Plant closing and mass layoff data
- Declining industries data
- Farmer-rancher economic hardship data
- Long-term unemployment data

The formula will use the most appropriate data available

Weighting a factor zero is not permitted unless a rationale is presented in an approved State Plan.

**Minimum:**

A local area may not receive an allocation percentage that is less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the past 2 years.

**Maximum:** Not required, but allowed

These formulas aim to distribute WIOA funds to Workforce Development Boards based on the specific needs and employment situations within their respective regions, allowing for tailored support and training programs to address local workforce challenges.

The Minimums that result are what Connecticut at times refers to as a “Hold Harmless” provision, meaning after the calculations are complete, if one region or more has less than 90% of their combined average previous to year’s allocation’s percent, the remaining regions’ allocations will be reduced in a percentage similar to the formula in order to allow the harmed region(s) to raise to the 90% minimum of the prior year’s allocation’s averages.

**(B) FOR TITLE II**

(i) Describe the methods and factors the eligible agency will use to distribute Title II funds.

Through CSDE, the State of Connecticut will award multi-year grants to eligible providers through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process to enable providers to develop, implement and improve adult education and literacy activities. All eligible applicants go through the same application and review process and have direct and equitable access to apply and compete for Title II grants and contracts, including WIOA Sections 225 (Corrections), 231 (Grants) and 243 (IEL/Civics). Grantees will have the opportunity to continue for a second year depending upon satisfactory performance and funding from Congress. The following agencies are eligible for funding through the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE):

- a. a local educational agency;
- b. a community-based organization or faith-based organization;
- c. a volunteer literacy organization;
- d. an institution of higher education;
- e. a public or private nonprofit agency;
- f. a library;
- g. a public housing authority;
- h. other nonprofit institutions that have the ability to provide adult education and literacy activities to eligible individuals;
- i. a consortium or coalition of the agencies, organizations, institutions, libraries, or authorities described above;
- j. a partnership between an employer and an entity described above.

CSDE will make funding available in each of Connecticut’s five designated local workforce areas. In conjunction with each WDB, CSDE will help to assess local area needs and WDB goals.

CSDE will use the 13 WIOA considerations for funding to award grants, including the following consideration: “past effectiveness of the eligible provider in improving the literacy of eligible individuals, to meet State-adjusted levels of performance for the primary indicators of performance”, described in WIOA section 116, especially with respect to eligible individuals who have low levels of literacy. Prior performance will be evidenced by meeting or exceeding performance measures based on documentation from the LACES database and annual reviews of previously funded providers, and evidenced by comparable objective performance measures demonstrating successful student outcomes for new eligible providers.

**Demonstrated Effectiveness**

An eligible provider must establish that it has demonstrated effectiveness through the following criteria: performance data on its record of improving the skills of eligible individuals, particularly eligible individuals who have low levels of literacy in the content domains of reading, mathematics, English language acquisition, and other subject areas relevant to the services contained in the state’s application for funds. An eligible provider must also provide information regarding its outcomes for participants related to employment, attainment of secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and transition to postsecondary education and training (34 CFR 463.24).

The following Connecticut state-imposed elements **will** be used in determining demonstrated effectiveness of eligible training providers:

- credential attainment rate;
- measurable skills gain;
- median earnings;
- employment rate;
- total number of individuals served; and
- program of study completed.

There are two ways in which an eligible provider may meet the requirements in this section:

An eligible provider that has been funded under Title II of the WIOA must provide performance data required under Section 116 of the WIOA to demonstrate past effectiveness. Past effectiveness will be evidenced by meeting or exceeding performance measures based on documentation from the Literacy Adult and Community Education Services (LACES) database and annual reviews of previously funded providers.

An eligible provider that has not been previously funded under Title II of the WIOA must provide performance data to demonstrate its past effectiveness in serving basic skills deficient eligible individuals in all of the following areas:

- Reading;
- Mathematics;
- English language acquisition; and
- other subject areas relevant to the services

**Alignment with WDB Local Plans**

1. Applicants must describe the alignment between their proposed services and the local WDB plan by demonstrating the extent to which the eligible provider aligns the proposed activities and services and the strategy and goals of the local plan, as well as the activities and services of the one-stop partners.
2. As required under the WIOA, local boards will conduct a required review of the local AEFLA grant applications as part of the evaluation process to determine whether the applications are consistent with the local plan and to make recommendations to the eligible agency to promote alignment with the local plan.
3. After the WDB review process, a review team comprised of interagency staff and experts in each priority area will evaluate proposals responding to the RFP. Interagency participants will include representatives of the CSDE, the WDBs and one-stop partners.

**General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) Section 427**

The purpose of the GEPA is to ensure that, in designing their projects to be carried out with federal funds, applicants address equity concerns that may affect the ability of certain potential beneficiaries to fully participate in the project and to achieve high standards. Consistent with program requirements and its approved application, an applicant may use the federal funds awarded to it to eliminate barriers it identifies. Section 427 of the GEPA affects all applicants for grant awards under this program. In order to receive funding under this program, all applicants for grants must include information in their applications to address this provision. Applicants must complete the GEPA Attestation form.

(ii) Describe how the eligible agency will ensure direct and equitable access to all eligible providers to apply and compete for funds and how the eligible agency will ensure that it is using the same grant or contract announcement and application procedure for all eligible providers.

To ensure direct and equitable access for all eligible providers, the Connecticut State Department of Education will publish a *Notice of Availability* in all major newspapers throughout Connecticut and post the notice on the CSDE's web page. The RFP will be emailed to all local education agencies and higher education institutions; to a master list of current and past providers including community-based organizations, regional education service centers, housing authorities, volunteer organizations, Department of Correction, other correctional facilities and institutions; and to all current providers and WDBs. A Bidder's Conference will be publicly advertised with the *Notice of Availability* and held at a central location to provide answers to questions regarding appropriateness of proposed projects and application procedures.

#### (B) TITLE IV VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Under the Rehabilitation Act, the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) provides vocational services to eligible individuals with disabilities who are seeking to prepare for, secure, retain, advance in, or regain employment through the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and the Bureau of Education and Services to the Blind (BESB). Federal Title IV funds are distributed at a rate of 85 percent of the appropriation applied to the VR General Program and 15 percent allocated to the VR Blind Program. For the state match appropriation, funding is applied at a rate of 88 percent to VR General Program and 12 percent to the VR Blind Program. Factors that contribute to the application of these funding allocations includes consideration of the number of consumers served within each program, maintenance of effort requirements, programmatic and purchase of service costs, and staffing requirements to maintain each program. Flexibility is built into the state appropriation to allow for adjustment in the allocation percentages to each program in response to variations in these variables.

## 6. PROGRAM DATA

### (A) DATA ALIGNMENT AND INTEGRATION

i. Describe the State's plans to make the management information systems for the core programs interoperable to maximize the efficient exchange of common data elements to support assessment and evaluation.

Connecticut has a database with the PIRL from Vocational Rehabilitation, WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth, and Wagner-Peyser. The database allows Connecticut to compare the data from the three core WIOA programs. In comparing the files Connecticut can determine which customers are served by multiple programs, success rates for those served by multiple programs, indicators a person is likely to participate in more than one program, which Workforce Development Boards are more successful at integrating services.

Connecticut currently has an integrated web-based data system for four of the six core



programs and includes the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program. Connecticut is looking for integrated system options as they become available in the near future.

Connecticut is working to align technology and data systems across mandatory One-Stop partner programs, state agencies, and public colleges and universities under the direction of Chief Workforce Officer and the Governor's Workforce Council. Through funding from The Connecticut Project, the state is working with Jobs for the Future to develop a plan for an integrated data system for all workforce development programming. The system will build off of and incorporate the existing data systems to create a dashboard that will enable the state to analyze all current workforce development investments across state and federal funded programs, identify best practices, braid funding sources to provide sustainability, and align workforce programs without costly and complicated redundancies.

The Governors Workforce Council (GWC) will assist the Governor's Chief Workforce Officer and Agency Commissioners in finding ways to align technology and data systems to improve service delivery by participating on interagency work groups to identify financial and other resources necessary to accomplish this work. By working with the State's Data Officer and the GWC Data and Accountability Committee, experts will continue to identify financial and programmatic actions necessary to accomplish this work.

Reporting processes for the WIOA Annual State Performance Report will involve CTDOL obtaining electronic files for each report period from the three State agencies for each of the six core programs. Individual records in each of these electronic program files will be matched against the CTDOL database that stores the WIOA unique identifiers to determine if such identifier already exists.

These same electronic files will be matched to each of the electronic files for each of the six core programs to determine if an individual was co-enrolled in one or more of the six core programs. If the participant was co-enrolled in another core program, the specific code value identified in the WIOA Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) that applies to those services will be appended to the participant record.

Also, these same electronic files will be used to obtain employment information for each program participant who has a social security number and an exit date from one or more of the six core programs.

CTDOL currently is responsible for reporting wages, entered employment rates, and employment retention rates for individuals who exit in the Wagner-Peyser, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Trade Adjustment Assistance programs. CSDE reports the data on these indicators for Title II.

Each program's electronic file containing the assigned WIOA unique identifier, co-enrollment data, wages, and employment information will be returned to each of the three State agencies to use in their federal report submissions.

### **Eligible Training Provider (ETP) Performance Report**

CTDOL will use the CTHires case management system to collect data and generate the Eligible Training Provider Performance Report on all students in programs, and on WIOA participants as required under WIOA. Once the CareerConneCT portal is operational it will supplement the CTHIRES data.

### **Effectiveness in Serving Employers Report**

CT DOL will assume the role as lead agency in the Effectiveness in Serving Employers Report.

- ii. Describe the State's plans to integrate data systems to facilitate streamlined intake and service delivery to track participation across all programs included in this plan.

Connecticut is working to align technology and data systems across mandatory One-Stop partner programs, state agencies, and public colleges and universities under the direction of Chief Workforce Officer and the Governor's Workforce Council. Through funding from The Connecticut Project, the state is working with Jobs for the Future to develop a plan for an integrated data system for all workforce development programming. The system will build off of and incorporate the existing data systems to create a dashboard that will enable the state to analyze all current workforce development investments across state and federal funded programs, identify best practices, braid funding sources to provide sustainability, and align workforce programs without costly and complicated redundancies.

iii. Explain how the State board will assist the governor in aligning technology and data systems across required one-stsop partner programs (including design and implementation of common intake, data collection, etc.) and how such alignment will improve service delivery to individuals, including unemployed individuals.

The Governors Workforce Council (GWC) will assist the Governor's Chief Workforce Officer and Agency Commissioners in finding ways to align technology and data systems to improve service delivery by participating on interagency work groups to identify financial and other resources necessary to accomplish this work. By working with the State's Data Officer and the GWC Data and Accountability Committee, experts will continue to identify financial and programmatic actions necessary to accomplish this work.

As part of the state's journey toward an all-digital state government and provide easy access to information for individuals, the GWC, in collaboration with the Department of Administrative Services, launched a new jobs portal to assist Connecticut residents – and those seeking to become Connecticut residents – in their job search. Through jobs.ct.gov, jobseekers can access powerful job search tools, tips and resources to help land a job, and directs individuals to free and low-cost training and certification opportunities and services available in the workforce system, and employers for access to resources to help hire, train and retain talent.

Connecticut is working to align technology and data systems across mandatory One-Stop partner programs, state agencies, and public colleges and universities under the direction of Chief Workforce Officer and the Governor's Workforce Council. Through funding from The Connecticut Project, the state is working with Jobs for the Future to develop a plan for an integrated data system for all workforce development programming. The system will build off of and incorporate the existing data systems to create a dashboard that will enable the state to analyze all current workforce development investments across state and federal funded programs, identify best practices, braid funding sources to provide sustainability, and align workforce programs without costly and complicated redundancies.

iv. Describe the State's data systems and procedures to produce the reports required under section 116, performance accountability system. (WIOA section 116(d)(2)).

Reporting processes for the WIOA Annual State Performance Report will involve CTDOL obtaining electronic files for each report period from the three State agencies for each of the six core programs. Individual records in each of these electronic program files will be matched against the CTDOL database that stores the WIOA unique identifiers to determine if such identifier already exists..

These same electronic files will be matched to each of the electronic files for each of the six core programs to determine if an individual was co-enrolled in one or more of the six core programs. If the participant was co-enrolled in another core program, the specific code value identified in the WIOA Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) that applies to those services will be appended to the participant record.

Also, these same electronic files will be used to obtain employment information for each program participant who has a social security number and an exit date from one or more of the six core programs.

CTDOL currently is responsible for reporting wages, entered employment rates, and employment retention rates for individuals who exit in the Wagner-Peyser, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Trade Adjustment Assistance programs. CSDE reports the data on these indicators for Title II.

Each program's electronic file containing the assigned WIOA unique identifier, co-enrollment data, wages, and employment information will be returned to each of the three State agencies to use in their federal report submissions.

#### **(B) ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPANTS' POST-PROGRAM SUCCESS**

CT Department of Labor (CTDOL) will use the program performance scorecard and the WIOA Annual Statewide Performance Report Template to assess the progress of participants who are exiting from the WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Wagner- Peyser programs in entering or remaining in employment. The state assessment will use quarterly wage records to determine entered employment rates in the second and fourth quarters after exit for program individuals who exit with social security numbers to determine their success in entering or remaining in employment. Median earnings will also be considered to determine progress towards self-sufficiency. Local Workforce Development Boards will be responsible for following up with participants exiting from the WIOA Youth program to assess enrollment in, persistence in, and completion of postsecondary education. Connecticut has not set any additional indicators of performance.

CT State Department of Education will use local program performance to assess using the same standards used for the National Reporting System (NRS). The National Reporting System (NRS) is the accountability system for the federally funded, State-administered adult education program. It embodies the accountability requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, the Act) for the adult education and literacy program (Title II) and reporting under WIOA.

JFES case managers utilize a Service Needs Assessment that is completed by CT Department of Social Services to identify barriers to employment, while also reviewing a Work Readiness Assessment with each client. In addition, our Family Centered Coaching approach to serving the clients is intended to make the client more comfortable in disclosing barriers that stand in the way of their success as the client defines them. If the JFES case manager identifies barriers that require special expertise or additional time and energy to resolve, the JFES case manager can make what we call a Barrier Intervention Referral (BIR) to the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies (CCFSA) and the CCFSA case managers will work with the client to address those barriers needing extra attention so that the client can participate in JFES activities again.

WIOA Case Managers will seek to follow a similar family-centered and person-centered case management style that invites more conversation and relationship-building into the traditional assessments. For youth programs, or programs that serve individuals aged 24 or younger, WIOA Administration seeks similar person-centered approaches and also encourages peer mentors. Goals have been included within state funded youth programs to hire on youth aged 24 of younger to be a part of the program administration and development.

The interviewing credential gained by many American Job Center staff, the Certified Employment Interview Professional (CEIP) from the Professional Association of Resume Writers and Career Coaches (PARW/CC) has been instrumental in the development and continued improvement of interviewing workshops available in the centers, as well as one-on- one counseling and mock interviewing between a participant and their case manager. These interview skills are geared towards the employment interview scenario, but WIOA Administration will continue to explore professional development opportunities to increase the interviewing skills of case management staff that will aid in relationship and rapport building that will increase participant trust, which is key to a successful relationship in helping an individual pursue their career goals.

#### **(C) USE OF UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI) WAGE RECORD DATA**

CT Department of Labor (CTDOL) will use the program performance scorecard and the WIOA Annual Statewide Performance Report Template to assess the progress of participants who are exiting from the WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Wagner- Peyser programs in entering or remaining in employment. The state assessment will use quarterly wage records to determine entered employment rates in the second and fourth quarters after exit for program individuals who exit with social security numbers to determine their success in entering or remaining in employment. Median earnings will also be considered to determine progress towards self-sufficiency. Local Workforce Development Boards will be responsible for following up with participants exiting from the WIOA Youth program to assess enrollment in, persistence in, and completion of postsecondary education. Connecticut has not set any additional indicators of performance.

CT State Department of Education will use local program performance to assess using the same standards used for the National Reporting System (NRS). The National Reporting System (NRS) is the accountability system for the federally funded, State-administered adult education program. It embodies the accountability requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, the Act) for the adult education and literacy program (Title II) and reporting under WIOA.

#### (D) PRIVACY SAFEGUARDS

##### **Connecticut Department of Labor**

- Information on individuals referenced for purposes of the WIOA Core Programs in the Connecticut Department of Labor’s automated One-Stop Career-Center system (CTHIRES) is considered confidential Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and may not be released or used for any purpose other than one directly connected with the administration of the programs. Information may also be released when the participant authorizes disclosure.
- Access to the system is provided upon an entity’s entrance into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Connecticut Department of Labor, which acknowledges the confidentiality and security requirements associated with the system. Moreover, every individual accessing the system must first sign an Acknowledgment of Confidential Information form, to ensure each individual is aware of such requirements.
- Finally, access to network components comprising the System is limited to authorized administrators, to ensure no unauthorized disclosure of PII. The system itself is configured to comply with Federal and State of Connecticut laws and regulations regarding the protection of confidential and PII, including but not limited to all sections of NIST SP 800-53 and IRS Publication 1075.

##### **Connecticut State Department of Education**

CSDE will ensure that program providers are compliant with all applicable laws and RFP guidelines including ADA 504 and Section 427 GEPA.

#### (7) PRIORITY OF SERVICE FOR VETERANS

In accordance with 38 U.S.C. Sec. 4215, the State will ensure that veterans and eligible spouses are given priority for the receipt of employment, training, and placement services provided under any job training program funded in whole or in part by the U.S. Department of Labor. A veteran or eligible spouse will therefore take precedence over a non-covered person if otherwise eligible to participate and receive services under the program. Depending on the type of service, a covered person shall have access earlier in time or, if resources are limited, instead of a non-covered person. For a service such as classroom training, priority of service will be applied to the selection process, up to the point at which an individual is both approved for funding and accepted or enrolled. As such, a veteran or eligible spouse would be moved to the

top of any waiting list used for the formation of the class; once a non-covered person has been approved for funding and is accepted or enrolled, he or she may not be displaced by a veteran or eligible spouse who is subsequently identified.

American Job Center staff is regularly trained on the protocols for implementing priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses, which includes training on the definition of covered persons and how priority of service is applied. Visible signage, placed prominently at or near the front desk, alerts AJC customers about priority of service provisions and encourages them to reveal their status as soon as possible.

AJC management ensures that priority of service is provided to all covered persons, which includes:

- any veteran who served at least one day in the active military, naval, or air service, and was discharged or released from service under any condition other than a condition classified as dishonorable, including those in Reserve and National Guard units activated for Federal Service; and
- any person qualifying as an “eligible spouse” on the basis of any of the following:
  - a spouse of any veteran who died of a service-connected disability;
  - a spouse of any member of the Armed Forces serving on active duty who, at the time of application for the priority, is listed in one or more of the following categories and has been so listed for a total of more than 90 days: missing in action; captured in the line of duty by a hostile force; or forcibly detained or interned in the line of duty by a foreign government or power; and
  - a spouse of any veteran who has a total disability resulting from a service-connected disability, as evaluated by the Department of Veterans Affairs; or a veteran who died while such a disability was in existence.

(Note: Spousal eligibility derived from a living veteran or service member would end if the veteran or service member loses the status that is the basis for eligibility, as it would in the case of divorce from the veteran or service member; however, a spouse who qualifies on the basis of a deceased veteran would not lose covered status through subsequent remarriage.)

Front desk and other AJC staff working with customers are trained to inquire about military service performed by either the customer or the customer’s spouse. Individuals who self-identify as a veteran or eligible spouse may receive access to appointment slots before non-covered persons and, when resources are limited, instead of non-covered persons. Where registration for a workshop is full, a seat will be made available for a veteran or covered person who wants to attend, an accommodation not extended to non-covered persons.

Individuals who fully register in CTHires are identified as veterans or eligible spouses based on their responses to required system intake prompts; veterans receive a priority-of-service advisory upon completing the registration process and then benefit from CTHires’ job search functionality, which includes a 24-hour veteran hold on job postings. AJC staff members utilize a triage form to identify customers who may not have fully registered, which helps assess whether an individual has significant barriers to employment (SBEs) or other characteristics that would qualify for one-on-one job search assistance from a Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialist. In such cases, the individual is either promptly referred or scheduled for an appointment. DVOPs receive an email alert whenever a veteran or eligible spouse with an SBE self-registers in CTHires; they will contact these individuals to inform them of JVSG and AJC services and offer to schedule an appointment. JVSG services are regularly provided at all five comprehensive centers but also may be made available at affiliate AJC locations by special arrangement.

Local Veterans’ Employment Representatives (LVERs) collaborate with AJC Business Services

teams to coordinate employer outreach and job development activities. The LVERs inform employers about the benefits of hiring veterans, and they promote the Hire VETS Medallion Program to employers interested in hiring veterans. LVERs also advise federal contractors about the requirements of the Department of Labor's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) to provide hiring preference to veterans and promote the hiring of veterans.

Ongoing monitoring of the AJCs will ensure that signage remains visibly posted and regular staff training is provided on priority of service, SBE identification, and the DVOP referral process. Program operators will be monitored for evidence that first consideration for participation was given to those veterans and eligible spouses who met the eligibility criteria for that program and, in cases where resources were limited, that no such covered persons were turned away in favor of a non-covered person. The State will also ensure that websites include language advising visitors of the veterans' priority of service provisions with regard to workforce programs, and that such information is included in contracts, sub-contracts, solicitations for grant awards, sub-grants, memoranda of understanding, and other service provision agreements to ensure compliance with priority of service by sub-recipients.

#### (8) ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Connecticut's One-Stop system currently provides and will continue to ensure physical and programmatic access to facilities, programs, services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities in a variety of ways. With respect to physical accessibility, all five of Connecticut's comprehensive One-Stop American Job Centers are designated ADA-compliant. Assistive technology is available to assist jobseekers with disabilities in each of the comprehensive American Job Centers. These technologies include electric adjustable workstations, large screen visual magnifiers, JAWS screen reader software, TTY lines for deaf or hard of hearing customers, and large-font computer keyboards in the Career Center. In addition, efforts are underway to explore how NVDA (Non-Visual Digital Access) software could be installed and managed on the public career center computers in the comprehensive American Job Centers. All five comprehensive American Job Centers provide adequate public parking for individuals seeking to use the facilities and have been determined to provide adequate accessible parking options for jobseekers with disabilities. Each of the comprehensive American Job Centers is located on a public bus route.

Implemented during the COVID-19 Pandemic, services continue to be offered and provided remotely using a variety of technology and interfaces such as Teams and Zoom. This service delivery mechanism is a complement to in-person services, and is welcomed by many customers with and without disabilities. A protocol was established to serve individuals with hearing impairments that use American Sign Language using an ASL interpretation service utilizing Zoom. This has assisted individuals with Unemployment Compensation as well as those seeking workforce assistance.

In 2021, a Consumer Contact Center unit was established to support Claimant customers of the American Job Centers with program questions or for those needing assistance filing their unemployment claims. The Consumer Contact Center is available remotely using MS Teams to speak face to face with customers that go into the five comprehensive American Job Centers for meaningful assistance. These appointments are scheduled at 20 minute intervals. The AJCs provide one workstation, privately located, that help preserve the integrity of the transactions that are performed. Consumer Contact representatives additionally explain the process of filing continued claims and advise customers of the filing procedures as well as the supports and resources available in the AJCs and partner services. Some staff members may be able to assist in the processing of unemployment claims directly, in-person, for jobseekers with disabilities who may have difficulty filing applications over the phone or via the Internet.

American Job Center (AJC) staff have been trained in how to serve individuals with disabilities.

Each AJC has a designated Equal Opportunity Representative available to assist any client with a disability who requests an accommodation. A designated statewide CTDOL Equal Opportunity Officer is also available to all staff for guidance.

Connecticut's One-Stop Certification policy includes a required assessment of accessibility of the American Job Centers, and provides a checklist as guidance for one-stop certification. This guidance, initially issued in 2017 and subsequently reissued, will be updated in PY24 by the core partners as part of the GWC's Workforce Alignment Committee. The GWC's DEI&A Committee workgroup for Persons with Disabilities conducted an accessibility review of the five Comprehensive AJCs in late 2023 and submitted a report to the Chair of the DEI&A Committee that confirmed accessibility but found opportunities for improvement and provided recommendations to the GWC. These recommendations will be shared with the committee that will update the One-Stop Certification Policy in PY24.

#### (9) ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

The State of Connecticut contracts with several separate entities to provide interpretative/translation services for English Language Learners. Services range from oral to written translation and in person or telephonic interpretation. CTDOL service providers are encouraged to follow the CT DOL Language Assistance Plan (LAP) Policy. Procedures for obtaining interpretive services are listed on CT DOL's Intranet and are accessible to all staff.

The COVID-19 Pandemic created an urgent need for the remote delivery of services. The CTDOL arranged to have services delivered using Teams and staff were able to utilize our vendor, Language Line, to offer interpretation services during the virtual appointment. More than 70 AJC staff members attended training sessions on Equal Opportunity that specifically reviewed the Language Assistance Plan and how to serve individuals who are English Language Learners.

#### IV. COORDINATION WITH STATE PLAN PROGRAMS

WIOA joint planning and coordination across programs in CT began in 2014 following passage of this Act and continues today. Many informational meetings, presentations, etc. are held across CT by state and local partners. Several workgroups were formed and some continue today as described in previous sections.

The Office of Workforce Strategy, in close collaboration with the Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) ) has led the coordination in the production of Connecticut's WIOA Unified State Plan. OWS has relationships with key senior staff from WIOA required partners and those individuals have shared their knowledge and expertise to the planning and production of the Unified State Plan. In addition, OWS conducted outreach to other "optional" partners and many responded with new ideas and plans for further coordination of services for our customers.

##### **Department of Aging and Disability Services**

The Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and Bureau of Education and Services to the Blind (BESB) have lead responsibility for developing the Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation Program content for Connecticut's Unified State Plan. OWS staff met and conferred with BRS and BESB staff on several occasions to review the status of Unified State Plan drafting and Title IV planning, to ensure alignment of focus and content during the drafting and production process.

ADS posted a draft of its Title IV plans for public comment. The State Rehabilitation Councils and Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired approved those sections of the plan, which was then received and reviewed by OWS. A joint effort between OWS and ADS staff integrated the Title IV content into the Unified State Plan draft, including intended coordination of implementation efforts going forward. As with the Title II program, the Unified State Plan specifically addresses coordination of Vocational Rehabilitation Program services for

individuals and employers, and coordinated engagement with the education system and economic development efforts.

**State Board of Education – Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education**

On July 31, 2018, President Trump signed the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act into law. This bill amends the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins IV) and this amended act is now referred to as Perkins V. The passage of Perkins V provides new opportunities to improve Career and Technical Education (CTE) and enables more flexibility for Connecticut to meet the unique needs of our learners, educators, and employers. In August 2018, Connecticut elected to submit a one-year CTE Transition Plan for the 2019–20 school year, with full implementation of the CTE State Plan under Perkins V in the 2020–21 school year covering fiscal years 2020–24. The Perkins V Leadership Work Group will reconvene in December 2024 preparatory to drafting a new CT Perkins State Plan which will cover 2025-29.

Connecticut’s vision for CTE is that all Connecticut’s students have access today to high-quality, culturally responsive guidance, teaching, and learning that will position them to graduate tomorrow as innovators equipped with adaptable, transferable skills that will contribute to the growth of Connecticut’s high-knowledge economy. During the current time period CT has worked to expand opportunities based on a vision which includes foundational commitments such as equity, quality programs and instructors, meaning partnerships, actionable data and continuous improvement and collaboration (AdvanceCTE: CTE Without Limits). This is congruent with the CT State Board Of Education's 5-year plan: Every student prepared for learning, life and work beyond school.

The CSDE’s vision demands that all Connecticut’s students have access today to flexible CTE pathways that will position them to graduate tomorrow as innovators equipped with adaptable, transferable skills that will contribute to the growth of Connecticut’s high-knowledge economy. Connecticut’s vision for education and workforce development demands schools, districts, and community colleges design rigorous pathways and programs of study from a perspective of bold innovation that fosters deep and long-lasting changes.

This new understanding of CTE, based upon collaborative partnerships, will result in students graduating with the essential knowledge, skills, and employability expertise to successfully meet the demands of Connecticut’s expanding economy.

The CSDE collaborates with outside agencies in order to braid funding, ensure cohesiveness among programs, and educate the whole child from preK–12. Interaction between programs and staff generate improved services to students, schools, and LEAs. This comprehensive thinking locates the intersections and weaves together the strategies, timelines, and funding sources from the multiple programs in order to achieve a cohesive vision.

Furthermore, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Perkins V goals align to Title IV, Part B in which 21st Century School programs can partner with in-demand fields of the local workforce or build career competencies and career readiness. This funding may provide workforce development boards with additional opportunities to collaborate and leverage resources for in-school youth services. Continued coordination with these programs will help to unify CSDE guidance.

**V. COMMON ASSURANCES (FOR ALL CORE PROGRAMS)**

The State Plan must include	Include
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<p>1. The State has established a policy identifying circumstances that may present a conflict of interest for a State Board or local board member, or the entity or class of officials that the member represents, and procedures to resolve such conflicts;</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>2. The State has established a policy to provide to the public (including individuals with disabilities) access to meetings of State Boards and local boards, and information regarding activities of State Boards and local boards, such as data on board membership and minutes;</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>3. The lead State agencies with optimal policy-making authority and responsibility for the administration of core programs reviewed and commented on the appropriate operational planning elements of the Unified or Combined State Plan, and approved the elements as serving the needs of the populations served by such programs;</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>4. (a) The State obtained input into the development of the Unified or Combined State Plan and provided an opportunity for comment on the plan by representatives of local boards and chief elected officials, businesses, labor organizations, institutions of higher education, the entities responsible for planning or administering the core programs, required one-stop partners and the other Combined Plan programs (if included in the State Plan), other primary stakeholders, including other organizations that provide services to individuals with barriers to employment, and the general public, and that the Unified or Combined State Plan is available and accessible to the general public; (b) The State provided an opportunity for review and comment on the plan by the State Board, including State agency official(s) for the Unemployment Insurance Agency if such official(s) is a member of the State Board;</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>5. The State has established, in accordance with WIOA section 116(i), fiscal control and fund accounting procedures that may be necessary to ensure the proper disbursement of, and accounting for, funds paid to the State through allotments made for the core programs to carry out workforce development activities;</p>	<p>Yes</p>

6. The State has taken appropriate action to secure compliance with uniform administrative requirements in this Act, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take appropriate action to secure compliance with the uniform administrative requirements under WIOA section 184(a)(3);	Yes
7. The State has taken the appropriate action to be in compliance with WIOA section 188, Nondiscrimination, as applicable;	Yes
8. The Federal funds received to carry out a core program will not be expended for any purpose other than for activities authorized with respect to such funds under that core program;	Yes
9. The State will pay an appropriate share (as defined by the State board) of the costs of carrying out section 116, from funds made available through each of the core programs;	Yes
10. The State has a one-stop certification policy that ensures the physical and programmatic accessibility of all one-stop centers with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA);	Yes
11. Service providers have a referral process in place for directing Veterans with Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE) to DVOP services, when appropriate; and	Yes
12. Priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses is provided in accordance with 38 USC 4215 in all workforce preparation, development or delivery of programs or services funded directly, in whole or in part, by the Department of Labor.	Yes

**VI. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR CORE PROGRAMS**

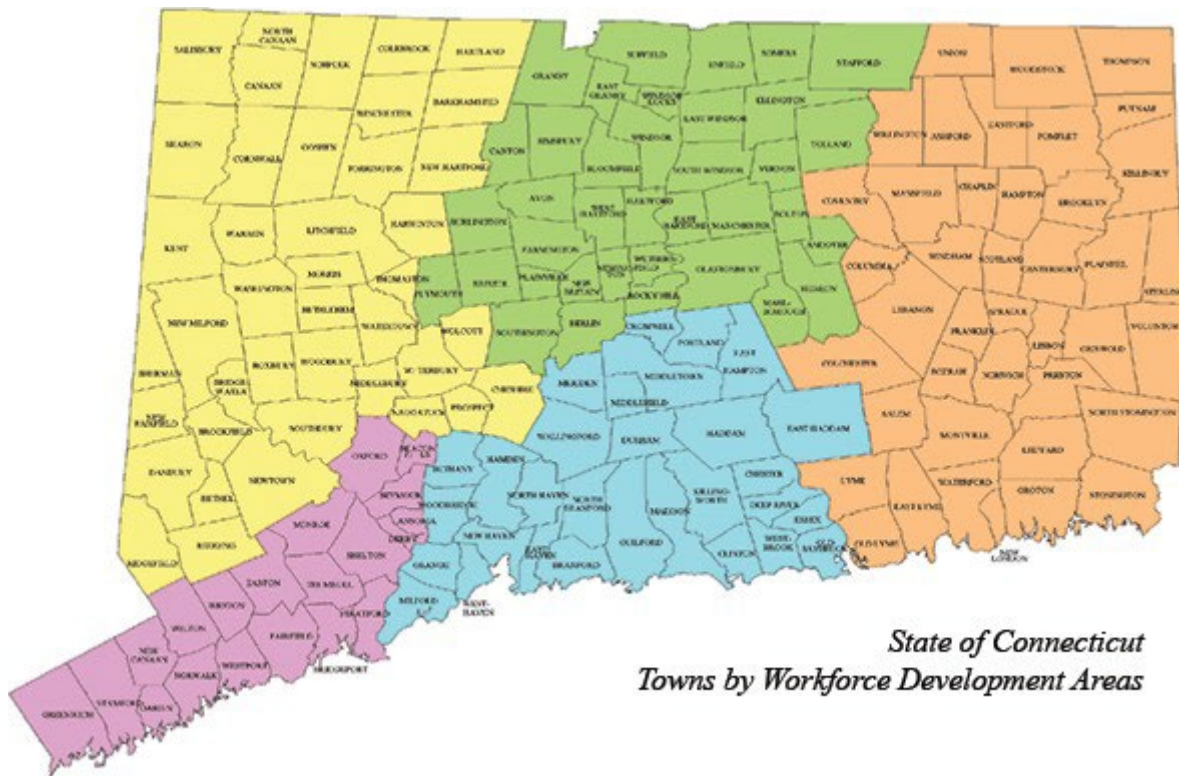
**PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES UNDER TITLE I-B**

**(a) GENERAL REQUIREMENTS**

**(1) REGIONS AND LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREAS**

Connecticut has five workforce development regions in the state. The local workforce areas are the same as the regions identified. They include the Eastern CT region, administered by the Eastern CT Workforce Investment Board, Inc., the Central region administered by Capital Workforce Partners, Inc., the South Central region administered by Workforce Alliance, Inc., the Northwest region administered by the Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board, Inc., and the Southwest region administered by The WorkPlace, Inc. Please see map on following page.

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In May, 2015, the Office of Workforce Competitiveness (OWC) issued policy and procedures to chief elected officials for the initial designation of local workforce development areas, including the requirements of “performed successfully” and “sustained fiscal integrity” as defined in WIOA. This process continued through the years as requests for designation were required to be submitted by the existing local areas’ chief elected official on behalf of the area’s local elected officials. CT DOL staff subsequently reviewed requests and chief elected officials were notified of designation by OWC, on behalf of Governor Malloy.

In February of 2022, all five workforce boards received notice their Subsequent Designation of Local Workforce Development Area under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was reviewed and approved. The notice included a memorandum signed by Governor Ned Lamont, recommending that all local areas be subsequently designated effective July 1, 2020 which is the first day after the conclusion of PY19 and the date by which all local areas met the two requirements for subsequent designation.

The first prong of subsequent designation for a local area is based on successful performance of the local area. CTDOL has reviewed the official annual outcomes reports for PY18 and PY19. We have concluded that all give of Connecticut’s local areas performed successfully.

The second program of subsequent designation is a determination that the local area maintained fiscal integrity. CTDOL has concluded that there have been no findings by the Secretary of Labor of misexpended funded by any local area.

As roles and responsibilities continue to be defined between CTDOL and the OWS, CTDOL will plan to keep OWS apprised of the results of any CTDOL-led programmatic or fiscal monitoring activities in order for OWS and the Governor’s Workforce Council to continue the review of performance and fiscal integrity.

**WIOA Local Area Designation - Appeals Process**

Pursuant to Section 106(b)(5) of WIOA and 20 CFR 683.630, if the State denies designation of a local area, the chief elected official(s) may appeal the decision through the following appeals process:

Within 14 days from the date of receipt of the notice of denial, the chief elected official(s) may file an appeal to the State Workforce Development Board by submitting in writing the following information:

- A statement that the chief elected official(s) is appealing the denial of designation;
- The reason(s) why the local area should be designated; and
- Signature(s) of the chief elected official(s).

The appeal shall be submitted in writing.

Pursuant to 20 CFR 679.290(b) and 20 CFR 683.630 (a), the State Board will provide the parties with the opportunity for a hearing, review the appeal, and make a ruling on the appeal within 60 days after the submission of the appeal. The State Board shall notify the chief elected official(s) in writing, of its decision on whether or not to approve the designation of an area as a local area under section 106(b)(3) of WIOA and 20 CFR 679.250.

In the event the State Board denies the appeal or fails to issue a decision within 60 days of the date the appeal is submitted, the chief elected official(s) may further appeal the State Board's decision or lack thereof to the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL). Pursuant to 20 CFR 683.640, appeals made to USDOL must be filed no later than 30 days after the receipt of the written notification of denial from the State. The appeal must be submitted by certified mail, with return receipt requested, to the following address:

Secretary, U.S. Department of Labor

200 Constitution Avenue N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20210,

**CTDOL Policy on Infrastructure Funding**

WIOA makes improvements to the public workforce system including a requirement that required partner programs dedicate funding for allowable infrastructure and other shared costs that are allocable to the partner and in proportion to the partner's use and the relative benefit received by the partner program.

CT DOL has issued initial guidance from the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) predecessor, Office of Workforce Competitiveness (OWC), in MEMO GP 17-02 that was delivered to the Chief Elected Officials, Workforce Board Chairs, and Workforce Board Directors, and Agency Commissioners on June 1, 2017. The Memorandum of Understanding One-Stop Infrastructure Cost Sharing Guidance referencing WIOA Sec. 121(c), 121(h), USDOL TEGL 17-16, 20 CFR 678.700 – 678.760. The Memo provided updated guidance regarding one stop infrastructure cost sharing and the development of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs). The Office of Workforce Strategy will, in collaboration with CTDOL, convene the WIOA partners to develop and issue updated Infrastructure Funding Agreement guidance and procedures in PY24. The following represents the prior approach and guidance which remains in effect.

After Memo GP 17-02, CT DOL WIOA Administration shared a policy issuance on One-Stop Center Infrastructure Cost-Sharing Agreements. The Issuance conveyed guidance for Local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs), Chief Elected Officials (CEOs), and one-stop center Required Partners to manage creation of a local infrastructure cost-allocation agreement (IFA).

This included the deadline for advising the State of an impasse in completing the agreement is given, and the deadline for submission of infrastructure budgets. Procedures were discussed whereby a State- determined infrastructure-cost allocation mechanism would be triggered if a local agreement is not reached prior to the State deadline. The appeals process for disputing the contribution required of a one-stop partner by such a State mechanism is described.

WIOA requires that the MOU include details on how the Local WDB, CEO, and one-stop center Required Partners will fund one-stop infrastructure costs for all comprehensive one-stop centers in the local area. It is recommended that any infrastructure cost-sharing agreement for affiliated-site costs be negotiated separately from the statutorily required cost-sharing agreement covering comprehensive one-stop centers. WIOA sec. 121(h) mandates that the State, through the designated authority of the Governor, provide guidance to assist local WDBs, CEOs, and one-stop partners to determine equitable and stable methods to fund one-stop center infrastructure costs. The cost-allocation methodology must be in accord with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards in 2 CFR Parts 200 and 2900. WIOA and its implementing regulations also require that the State's guidance include timelines for Local WDBs to notify the State if local infrastructure cost- allocation negotiations reach an impasse. If the Local WDB and the required partners are unable to conclude *and sign* a local infrastructure cost-sharing agreement for the ensuing Program Year before the State's deadline, WIOA gives the State no recourse but to impose an alternative State infrastructure cost-allocation mechanism. This is *not* an alternative to the local funding agreement. It is a statutory *consequence* triggered by an inability of the concerned parties in the LWDA to self-determine a funding plan.

**State Guidelines** In compliance with WIOA sec. 121(h)(1)(B)(ii) and the implementing rules at 20 CFR 678.700-678.55, as well as US Department of Labor Guidance letters, e.g. Training and Employment Guidance Letter 17-16, OWC issued the "Connecticut WIOA Infrastructure Cost Sharing Guidelines." Local MOU signatories are not bound to follow these recommendations; they may, in fact, adopt any local cost-allocation mechanism that is in accord with the Uniform Guidelines in 2 CFR Parts 200 and 2900. Nevertheless, we strongly encourage local WDBs, CEOs, and one-stop partners to develop their local infrastructure-cost allocation agreements using these guidelines.

**Notice of Impasse** An agreement must be negotiated, signed, and in effect by January 1, 2018, therefore final IFAs are due by December 1, 2017 and each program year thereafter. Local WDBs must provide a Notice of Impasse to OWC no later than November 1, 2017 for the initial implementation where local negotiations were unsuccessful. This notification may originate with the Local WDB, the CEO, or any one of the Required Partners.

**Budgets** Local budgets upon which the local infrastructure cost-allocation agreements will be based must be submitted to OWC by November 1, 2017. These will be reviewed by OWC and the WIOA Administration Unit. In the event of unsuccessful negotiations for a local infrastructure cost- allocation agreement, any budget approved by the Local WDB, CEO, and Required Partners will be used by the State as a basis for a State-imposed mechanism, as mandated by the WIOA Final Rules. If, by the State deadline for local cost-allocation agreements, there is also no locally approved infrastructure budget, the WIOA Final Rules require the State to determine that budget for the local area.

**State Infrastructure Cost-Allocation Mechanism** If, by December 1, 2017, the local infrastructure cost-allocation mechanism has not been completed, signed, and submitted to the State, the State will be statutorily compelled to impose a State infrastructure cost-allocation mechanism as prescribed by WIOA sec. 121(h) and the Final Rules in 20 CFR Part 678. The specific allocations in this mechanism will be transmitted to the LWDB, the CEO, and the one-stop Required Parties for the local area prior to the start of January 1, 2018, if feasible. The State mechanism generally makes fewer funds available than a local agreement. The U.S. Department

of Labor notes in its preamble to the WIOA Final Rules, “...while under the local-funding mechanism partner programs may contribute through any funds allowed by their authorizing statutes, under the State funding mechanism, infrastructure funds must come from administrative funds for the majority of partner programs.”

**Appeals Process** Upon receipt of the specific terms of a State infrastructure cost-allocation mechanism, any local WDB or one-stop required partner may appeal for cause, within 21 calendar days, in writing (electronic or hardcopy) the State’s determination regarding the portion of funds (or non-cash contributions) it the Local WDB or required partner is to provide. To be officially received, an appeal must fully contain evidence of the following:

1.
  - a. An introduction identifying the appellant and designating the letter as a formal appeal
  - b. Full citations from WIOA or the WIOA Final Rules in Title 29 or Title 34 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* that support the appeal.
  - c. Identify the basis for the appeal. WIOA stipulates that a State mechanism allocation determination may be appealed only if the determination is inconsistent with the requirements of WIOA sec. 121(h)(2)(E). The Final Rule at 20 CFR 678.750 further limits admissible grounds for an appeal to three possibilities. The petitioner must make a case that the State’s determination is inconsistent with:
    - i. the proportionate-share requirements in 20 CFR 678.737, or
    - ii. the cost-contribution limitations in 20 CFR 678.730(c), or
    - iii. the cost-contribution caps in 20 CFR 678.738
  - d. The letter must be signed (electronic signature is acceptable) and dated.

WIOA provides that in circumstances where the local Board is unable to reach an agreement with required partners regarding infrastructure costs that a State Funding Mechanism (SFM) will be applied.

## (2) STATEWIDE ACTIVITIES

The WIOA Administration Unit issues state policies on workforce development and statewide workforce development through the CTDOL WIOA Policy Manual at <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/WIOAPolicyManual.pdf>.

**Governor’s Set Aside Funding:** USDOL Training and Employment Guidance Letters issue allocations for WIOA funding each year including the percentages and mandatory activities under the Governor’s Reserve. The current set-aside is 15% of Connecticut’s funding, while for Rapid Response activities, it is 25% of the total allocation. The CTDOL uses these funds to support Central Office staff that administer, manage and oversee the program, contracts, performance management and finances for Connecticut’s WIOA program. On a statewide basis other uses of these funds have included support of One-Stop Center operations, technical assistance to Workforce Development Boards, support for American Job Center facilities needs, and for staff capacity building.

Once the PY allocations are determined, the Governor’s Workforce Council approves the plan. If funding allows, CTDOL also provides flexible grants to the Workforce Development Boards to conduct experimental pilot programs that meet the regional needs of employers and the workforce.

**Rapid Response:** For companies and their workers, the effects of a plant closing or layoff can be

devastating. In Connecticut, neither companies nor workers and their unions are alone in facing these changes. Connecticut's Rapid Response Team, headed by the State Department of Labor (CTDOL), exists to ease the impact of layoffs and to assure that workers are offered a full range of benefits and services. The Team is made up of representatives from the CTDOL and the local Workforce Development Boards. Support is also available from the Department of Economic & Community Development and the Department of Social Services.

The Rapid Response Team is available to conduct, prior to layoffs, "Early Intervention" sessions where employees can learn about all the free layoff transition support services that are available to assist them. Topics covered in the Early Intervention session include unemployment benefits, job search assistance, training opportunities, health insurance options, community services, and local agencies that provide help, advocacy, and support to dislocated workers and their families.

**Layoff Aversion:** the state of Connecticut has established the Shared Work program to enable employers to keep skilled employees working during slowdowns. In these instances, CTDOL pays partial unemployment benefits for reduced hours. This limits the impact of layoffs on employer unemployment taxes. Employee hours and wages cannot be reduced by less than 10 percent or more than 60 percent. Rapid Response staff market the Shared Work program to employers who are contemplating layoffs or who have laid off. Rapid Response staff reaches out to participating Shared Work employers to check on their status and make appropriate referrals to Economic Development or other resources if the employers indicated that they were continuing to struggle or have difficulty emerging from a downturn in business.

In cases involving natural disasters, rapid response activities are coordinated with CT's Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) and the local Workforce Development Boards and other state and community agencies.

In CT response to natural disasters has been led by DESPP - through its Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) - and CTDOL is engaged through that lead - this includes the Rapid Response Unit. Additionally, CT's provision of Rapid Response as it relates to natural disasters is the same as the described in policy found in the WIOA policy manual and includes the coordinating efforts of DESPP with FEMA.

In Connecticut, most TAA petitions generated by State Workforce staff are filed by the TAA Petition Coordinator. In such cases, Rapid Response staffers have contacted the company regarding all reemployment and supportive services, including TAA (if available). In most cases, Rapid Response staff members provide Early Intervention services at the employment site prior to layoff. Early intervention services include an overview of unemployment, job search assistance, health insurance options and possible training and employment services through both WIOA and TAA. The following procedures apply when the TAA program is fully operational. If worker orientations are provided prior to a TAA certification, workers are given an overview of the possible benefits that may become available should the company and/or unit of the company become certified. Workers are advised as to how workers would be notified of their eligibility under TAA if the company becomes TAA certified.

In cases where an employer does not allow Rapid Response on-site to provide information on reemployment and possible TAA services prior to layoff, or where a TAA petition has been filed without prior Rapid Response knowledge, Rapid Response staff contact the employer officials listed on the TAA petition to explain Rapid Response services and to request a list of potential TAA-impacted workers' names and addresses. Provided that the employer supplies such a list, Rapid Response staff members send a TAA-outreach letter to potentially impacted workers. In cases where the employer does not respond to this request for worker information, Rapid Response staff will query the Unemployment system to try and identify potentially impacted workers and subsequently send TAA-outreach letters to those individuals. The outreach letter advises the individual that a TAA petition has been filed, provides the US DOL TAA website where additional information on the program can be found, and describes the re-employment services that are available through our American Job Centers. Additionally, the outreach letter provides

workers who would like to hear additional information to participate in a webinar on available resources. Rapid Response staff members conduct weekly webinars on available transition services, and a description of the TAA program is discussed during the presentation. Information about TAA is available on CT DOL's website, is disseminated by Rapid Response Teams and a detailed fact sheet on TAA benefits and terms for workers is available at: [www.ctdol.state.ct.us/TradeAct/](http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/TradeAct/).

(b) ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKERS PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

1. WORK-BASED TRAINING MODELS

Training grants are available to help companies grow and maintain competitiveness by investing in training of their existing workforce. Customized training is also available as administered by the Workforce Development Boards.

CTDOL/OAT, in partnership with SDE, has expanded CTE under Perkins V, thus increasing Perkins V Pre-apprenticeship and Apprenticeship opportunities. These include work-based learning and the development of industry recognized credentials. CTDOL/ OAT has partnered with nearly 30 high schools and community colleges to credential their CTE courses and link them to the pre-apprenticeship program. Students enrolled at those schools now have the ability to enhance their theoretical knowledge with hands-on skill development. Additionally, through relationships built at these schools, CTDOL/OAT has been able to present the benefit of these credentials to school boards and encourage stable funding for Career Technical Education moving forward.

The purpose of Summer Youth Employment Programs is to expose and connect youth to career pathways through 120 hours paid work-based learning in order to build a talent pipeline that meets employer needs. The program's intent is to provide youth with career competency development and work readiness training combined with real-world experiences aligned to their interests. Work Based Learning supports and supplements academic learning and promotes development of transferable skills that will serve participants well as they transition into the professional world.

(2) REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP

**Registered Apprenticeship in Service Design and Delivery**

Apprentice candidates and employers can be connected within the AJC utilizing various programmatic business services and case management staff. Some ways this can be done include:

An employer who seeks candidates visits the American Job Center or is engaged by Business Services staff. The Business Services staff consult with the employer to see if an Apprenticeship fits their hiring needs.

The Business Services Representative makes a referral to the Office of Apprenticeship Training and the employer applies to become a registered apprenticeship sponsor for pre-apprentices and apprentices.

As a registered sponsor, this employer qualifies to be placed on the ETPL. At this point, the employer can reach out to the Workforce Development Board in the region to begin the ETPL application process. Outside of the ETPL, the sponsor can register in CTHires as well. Within CTHires, the sponsor can view resumes, post jobs, coordinate a recruitment event with Business Service Representatives, and a host of other activities available to vetted employers within the CTHires system.

American Job Center staff from all programs, and specifically WIOA or JFES, will continue to work with the employer to find potential candidates to meet their hiring needs.

On the job seeker side of the process, job seekers may join a workforce program by established



venues such as walking into the AJC, learning about program offerings, scheduling appointments or attending an orientation/intake session. Once connected to a workforce program or getting introduced to the American Job Center in general, the individual will learn about CTHires and can utilize CTHires for job searching and resume posting needs. The job seeker will work with their assigned case manager within WIOA or JFES to identify opportunities including the potential for an apprenticeship. Through a combination of efforts between case managers who have a pool of candidates with specific skills, and the matching process by working in concert with Business Services Representatives, specific individuals seeking jobs can be matched to employers seeking to hire apprentice candidates. The Office of Apprenticeship Training would then register the individual job seeker as an apprentice, or pre-apprentice, depending on the opportunity presented.

As a Registered Apprentice, the individual enrolled in WIOA programming can be supported throughout their Apprenticeship with WIOA supportive services to fund needs like books, tools, childcare, transportation, or if within local policy guidelines, needs-related payments. When the employer is registered on the ETPL, WIOA will fund the training opportunity for the participant as well.

In this capacity, the identification of the apprenticeship opportunity can work on two parallel paths, that register employers and apprenticeships that can be funded by WIOA through the ETPL process and funds for the On the Job Training opportunity, and register individual job seekers who are also eligible for WIOA as apprentices or pre-apprentices when the connection to the employer apprenticeship is made. WIOA can also then fund supportive service needs with the apprentice or pre-apprentice is enrolled in WIOA programming so the individual would not have to pay any costs out of pocket.

### (3) TRAINING PROVIDER ELIGIBILITY PROCEDURE

The procedure, eligibility criteria, and information requirements for determining training provider initial and continued eligibility, including Registered Apprenticeship programs (WIOA Section 122) includes the completion of an application (available here: <https://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/wioa-trngproviderapps.htm>). The “WIOA ETP Application” is for entities intending to apply for Connecticut’s Eligible Training Providers List (ETPL) with the following exceptions:

As specified by Section 122(a)(3) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), apprenticeship programs registered with the Connecticut Department of Labor, Apprenticeship Division and the National Office of Apprenticeship are automatically eligible to be included on the ETPL if the registered apprenticeship sponsor or approved related technical instruction provider indicates interest in having the program listed by contacting the local Workforce Development Board or CTDOL. Registered apprenticeship programs must comply with all applicable state and federal laws. WIOA’s “initial” and “continued” eligibility requirements do not apply to registered apprenticeship programs. For further information regarding apprenticeship in Connecticut, please visit: <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/progsupt/appren/appren.htm>.

Interested providers outside of apprenticeship exceptions must meet the criteria set forth in the determination of being considered an Eligible Training Provider, defined as follows: Pursuant to 20 CFR 680.410, an ETP is the only type of entity that receives funding for training services, as defined in 20 CFR 680.200 (see “Training Services for Adults and Dislocated Workers” section below), through an individual training account (ITA). An ETP and its program(s) must be included on the ETPL, must provide a program of training services (see “Program of Training Services” below), and must be one of the following types of entities:

- (i) Institutions of higher education that provide a program which leads to a recognized
- (ii) postsecondary credential (see “Definition of a Recognized Postsecondary Credential”);

- (iii) Entities that carry out programs registered under the National Apprenticeship Act (29 U.S.C. 50et seq.); or
- (iv) Other public or private providers of training services, which may include:
  - a. Community-based organizations;
  - b. Joint labor-management organizations; and
  - c. Eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities under Title II of WIOA if such activities are provided in combination with training services described at 20 CFR 680.350.

The **Training Services** considered for the ETPL must be in accordance with the following:

The definition of training services for adults and dislocated workers according to 20 CFR 680.200, types of training services listed in §680.200 (a) through (k) and in WIOA sec. 134(c)(3)(D). This list is not all-inclusive and additional training services may be provided.

- (a) Occupational skills training, including training for nontraditional employment;
- (b) On-the-job training (OJT) (pursuant to §§ 680.700, 680.710, 680.720, and 680.730);
- (c) Incumbent worker training, in accordance with WIOA sec. 134(d)(4) and §§ 680.780, 680.790, 680.800, 680.810, and 680.820;
- (d) Programs that combine workplace training with related instruction, which may include cooperative education programs;
- (e) Training programs operated by the private sector;
- (f) Skills upgrading and retraining;
- (g) Entrepreneurial training;
- (h) Transitional jobs in accordance with WIOA sec 134(d)(5) and §§ 680.190 and 680.195;
- (i) Job readiness training provided in combination with services listed in paragraphs (a) through (h) of this section;
- (j) Adult education and literacy activities, including activities of English language acquisition and integrated education and training programs, provided concurrently or in combination with training services listed in paragraphs (a) through (g) of this section; and
- (k) Customized training conducted with a commitment by an employer or group of employers to employ an individual upon successful completion of the training (pursuant to §§ 680.760 and 680.770).

A program of training services, pursuant to 20 CFR 680.420, is one or more courses or classes, or a structured regimen, that provides the services in § 680.200 (see above) **and leads to:**

- (a) An industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of a registered apprenticeship, a license recognized by the State involved or the Federal government, an associate or baccalaureate degree;
- (b) Consistent with § 680.350, a secondary school diploma or its equivalent;
- (c) Employment; or
- (d) Measurable skill gains (as defined in federal guidance, including TEGL 10-16, Change 2) toward a credential described in paragraph (a) or (b) of this section or employment.

Similarly, the classification/categorization of a Postsecondary Credential must be in alignment with the definition provided in TEGL 10-16 Change 2, defined as a credential consisting of an industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of an apprenticeship, a license recognized by the State involved or Federal government, or an associate or baccalaureate degree, as well as graduate degrees for purposes of the Vocational Rehabilitation program as required by section 103(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV of WIOA. A recognized postsecondary credential is awarded in recognition of an individual's attainment of measurable technical or industry/occupational skills necessary to obtain employment or advance within an industry/occupation. These technical or industry/occupational skills generally are based on standards developed or endorsed by employers or industry associations.

Certificates must recognize technology or industry/occupational skills for the specific industry/occupation rather than general skills related to safety, hygiene, etc., even if such general skills certificates are broadly required to qualify for entry-level employment or advancement in employment.

The definition of a Secondary School Diploma or Recognized Equivalent (pursuant to TEGL 10-16, Change 2) is one that is recognized by a State and that is included for accountability purposes under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). A secondary school equivalency certification signifies that a student has completed the requirements for a high school education. The types of recognized equivalents, for those not covered under ESEA, that would satisfy this performance indicator are those recognized by a State.

Postsecondary credentials that are acceptable and count toward the credential attainment indicator include secondary school diploma or recognized equivalent (as defined above), Associate's degree, Bachelor's degree and Graduate degree for purposes of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. (In defining "recognized postsecondary credential," WIOA sec. 3(52) does not include graduate degrees. As a result, graduate degrees do not count towards credential attainment, except for the Title IV VR programs, which are permitted to include graduate degrees as a type of recognized credential because of statutory and regulatory requirements specific to that program.)

Occupational licenses, occupational certificates, including Registered Apprenticeship and Career and Technical Education educational certificates, and other recognized certificates of industry/occupational skills completion sufficient to qualify for entry-level or advancement in employment are also included as acceptable reportable credentials for ETPL purposes.

In lieu of formal USDOL guidance on the topic, CTDOL monitors the usage of "industry recognized" credential through a review of the credentials employability (e.g. required on job descriptions) and/or employer demand acknowledged by local employers.

Credit or Non-credit Programs Offered By an Institution of Higher Education\* That Do Not Independently Result In a Credential may be included in ETPL programs as long as the single courses **fall within a career pathway**. The introduction of § 680.420 emphasizes that training services that "lead to" any of the outcomes listed at § 680.420, which includes employment, is a program of training services. Therefore, programs that are components of such a regimen may be eligible programs." Given this, WDBs may consider approving for inclusion on the WIOA ETPL programs of this nature.

To demonstrate that the single course (program) falls within a career pathway, the applying institution of higher education\* must submit a fully completed (all fields) "Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Eligible Training Providers List Program Endorsement Form" for the program, bearing the signature, printed name, and date of signature of the president of the institution of higher education. The form may not simply state "stackable credential;" the justification must clearly describe the career pathway that ultimately leads to a recognized credential under WIOA policy, and must state the title(s) of any other program or sequence of programs (or program of study/structured pathway) that must, over time, also be successfully

completed. For the “Curriculum aligned with named industry standards” field, the institution must provide a clear, comprehensive description that supports how the curriculum of the program is aligned with industry standards. Alternatively, the applying institution of higher education\* may offer (upon successful completion of the program) a recognized credential issued by an entity other than itself.

In addition, the Individual Employment Plan (IEP) of any participant attending an “endorsed” program, must, in keeping with the objectives of WIOA sec. 134(c)(2)(A)(xii)(II), describe how the program is expected to lead to skills upgrading or retraining and the achievement or retention of employment that leads to self-sufficiency. The career plan must be developed with consideration of the assessment of the participant’s skills and abilities.

After the application is completed, the Provider must register in CTHires (at times this process is facilitated by WDB staff assisting the Provider).

Information gathered during CTHires registration will include:

- (a) occupations included within the (entity’s or Registered Apprenticeship’s) program;
- (b) contact information including the name and address of the entity or Registered Apprenticeship sponsor;
- (c) the name and address of the Related Technical Instruction provider, and the location of instruction if different from the program sponsor’s address;
- (d) the method and length of instruction (e.g. hours, duration);
- (e) cost associated with curriculum, supports, materials (if applicable); and
- (f) the number of active apprentices (if applicable).

For Registered Apprenticeships, R programs that do not provide the Related Technical Instruction portion of the apprenticeship (as outlined above) may be required to provide additional information about their education provider, including the cost of the instruction (this is the only time that cost information should be requested).

If the program is already approved as a sponsor or related instruction provider through the Connecticut Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship Training the program will be added to the ETPL list in CTHires by the local Workforce Development Board in the region where the program/sponsor is located.

If the program is not an approved sponsor or related instruction provider, they must first contact the Connecticut Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship Training to seek approval.

Once an apprenticeship program is registered on the ETPL, the program will remain on the ETPL until the program is no longer registered with the Connecticut Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship Training or until the provider notifies the Apprenticeship Division, in writing, of the intention to be removed from the list.

Nationally approved Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAP) will remain on the ETPL list until:

- The RAP program notifies the state agency it no longer wants to be included on the list;
- The Program becomes deregistered under the National Apprenticeship Act;
- The Program is determined to have intentionally supplied inaccurate information; or,
- A determination was made that the RAP substantially violated any provision of Title I of WIOA or the WIOA regulations, including 29 CFR part 38

Registered apprenticeship programs are not required to submit initial or continued eligibility applications under these procedures; however they must complete the required registration process for Providers on the CTHires website. [www.cthires.com](http://www.cthires.com). Local WDB's can provide assistance in the completion of the system registration.

Registered apprenticeship programs are required to comply with all laws and rules regarding apprenticeship programs and labor laws in the State of Connecticut.

Per 20 CFR 680.480(b) all approved sponsors and related instructions providers will be notified in writing or electronically bi-annually to reaffirm their request to remain on the ETPL list.

Note: Registered apprenticeship programs, which are not required to apply for the WIOA ETPL, are subject only to certain reporting requirements as set forth in TEGl 41-14, applicable regulation, or other guidance.

For all other entities: The "WIOA ETP Application" is in Word format and may be completed on-line and printed. Follow the mailing instructions provided in the application.

### **Initial and Continued Eligibility Factors**

Pursuant to WIOA sec. 122(b)(4)(B), ETPs may receive initial eligibility for only one year for a particular program; after initial eligibility expires, ETPs are subject to application procedures for continued eligibility (see "Continued Eligibility.") The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) includes certain criteria that must be met in order ensure that a provider of programs offers the highest quality training services and is responsive to in-demand and emerging industries by providing training services for those industries (WIOA §122(b)(4)(A)). The applying entity shall describe each program of training services to be offered and provide verifiable **program-specific** performance information based on criteria established by the state (WIOA §122(b)(4)(C)) to support the entity's ability to serve program participants. Pursuant to WIOA §122(b)(4)(D)(i-iv), an entity seeking initial eligibility as a provider of training services must meet the following criteria as determined during the initial transition to WIOA:

- A factor related to indicators of performance as described in WIOA §116(b)(2)(A)(i)(I-IV) and 20 CFR 680.460(g)(1), as set by Connecticut Department of Labor ETPL policy. For PY2015 an entity's initial eligibility under WIOA (first year), the entity must document that it meets at least one of the following by submitting performance data:
  - Median Earnings (Quarterly basis) - \$3,459.00
  - Average Wage at Placement - \$9,344.00
  - Attainment of a Post-Secondary Credential - 60%
  - Completion Rate - 60%
  - Employment Rate - 65%
  - Training-related Employment Rate - 65%

For each program to be offered on the ETPL, documentation must include the program name and the most recent annual data that is available (for example, 7/1/14 - 6/30/15 or 7/1/15 - 6/30/16) for ALL individuals enrolled in the program for at least one of the factors above. The timeframe that the data is from must be stated on the documentation. If the program is new to the entity and historical data are not available, data must be tracked upon ETP approval and submitted in accordance with the requirements described at Reporting Performance Indicators."

- A factor concerning whether the provider is in a partnership with business. Consideration for satisfying this factor will include active involvement (not just

membership) in: a local Chamber of Commerce, the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA) or other local business association, Connecticut Workforce Development Board, Advisory Boards (colleges/universities), clinical partnership agreements, internships/externships with businesses, and affiliations with business associations. Submit a list of partnerships and describe the nature of the partnership.

- Other factors that indicate **high-quality** training services. If the applying entity or its programs are required by Connecticut statute to be approved by the Connecticut Office of Higher Education, State Department of Education, Department of Consumer Protection, or Department of Public Health to offer training, this Eligibility Factor will be deemed as met. For other entities, high quality may be demonstrated by providing information to show that the training services lead to any one of the outcomes listed at Program of Training Services ((a) –(d)).
- A factor concerning alignment of the training services with in-demand industry sectors and occupations. To satisfy this factor, review the in-demand occupations listed on CTDOL’s website, <http://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi/projections.asp>, and provide documentation from the site to verify the training service is specifically related to an in-demand industry sector or occupation. Otherwise, provide information and documentation to show the extent to which the training service(s) aligns with the in-demand industry sectors and occupations displayed on this CTDOL website. In-demand occupations may vary at the local level; applying providers may consult with the lead WDB.

#### Initial Eligibility Application Form

An entity may apply for WIOA ETP approval by completing the “Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Eligible Training Provider (ETP) Application.” This initial eligibility application form is available on CTDOL’s website at <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/wioa-trngproviderapps.htm>.

All fields on the initial eligibility application must be completed, including those for signatures, signatory dates, and other attestations. If a field is not applicable to the entity, “N/A” or a dash must be entered. All supporting documentation and required attachments, as specified in the initial eligibility application, must be included with the application at the time it is submitted to the WDB. Incomplete initial eligibility applications and those submitted without supporting documentation and required attachments will be returned to the entity for completion and will not be considered for review and approval by the WDB(s) until the initial eligibility application is complete.

As described in the WIOA ETP initial eligibility application, the applying entity must submit the original application form, with all required attachments and supporting documentation, to the lead WDB and, if applicable, a copy of the application must be sent to any secondary WDB(s) for review.

Lead board - the WDB for the area in which the applying entity’s headquarters (or, as applicable, main campus) is located. An entity may only select one lead WDB.

Secondary board – the WDB(s) for the local board area(s) in which any of the applying entity’s training sites for program offerings are located. If the entity is applying to list training that will be offered at a site other than at the headquarters/main campus, the applying entity must send a copy of the entire, completed ETP initial eligibility application, with all required attachments and supporting documentation, to each applicable secondary WDB.

#### Review by the WDB (Initial Eligibility)

Upon receipt of a WIOA ETP initial eligibility application, the WDB shall review the application for completeness. As described above, incomplete applications and those submitted without

supporting documentation and required attachments shall be returned to the entity for completion and will not be considered for review and approval by the WDB(s) until the initial eligibility application is complete.

The lead WDB and any applicable secondary WDB shall review each complete ETP initial eligibility application. The WDB review process shall be conducted in compliance with local board policy, as well as with applicable federal and state policies, and shall include a review for completeness, verification of application information (which must also include confirmation of

entity and program approvals, as applicable, by other state agencies), and consideration of whether the initial eligibility factors have been satisfied (see “Eligibility Factors” in this policy).

The lead WDB and any secondary WDBs must determine local approval or denial of ETP applications pursuant to federal and state policy via the process set forth by each board’s policy. Secondary WDBs must advise the lead WDB once approval or denial has been decided. For application denials at the local board level, refer to “Reason for Application Denial” in this policy.

Once the lead and all applicable secondary board approvals have been made, the lead WDB shall submit an email request to CTDOL’s WIOA Administration Unit to conduct the state-level review of the applying entity. The email must include the entity’s:

- Name (legal and any documented DBA) as stated on the WIOA ETP Application
- Address
- Provider type, as indicated on the WIOA ETP Application

The WDB will also fax to CTDOL WIOA Administration the applying entity’s “Employer Authorization for the Release of Confidential Data,” which form is available on CTDOL’s website at <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/wioa-trngproviderapps.htm>. This authorization permits CTDOL to share the specific results of the state-level review of the applying entity with the designated WDB. The WDB will then relay the information to the applying entity.

The WDB and applying entity shall provide to CTDOL any other information requested by CTDOL during the state-level review process to ensure compliance with federal and state policy.

The initial eligibility application process **continues at “Review by CTDOL.”**

### **Continued Eligibility**

Pursuant to 20 CFR 680.460, CTDOL has established this continued eligibility policy for all WIOA-approved training providers and programs. All ETPs and their programs will be reviewed biennially following their one year of initial WIOA ETP eligibility. Since applications for the WIOA ETPL were reviewed for approval on a rolling basis during the transition from WIA to WIOA, Connecticut will conduct continued eligibility determinations on a rolling basis. As with initial eligibility, decisions regarding continued eligibility will be made on a **program by program** basis. Applications must be complete and accurate.

The continued eligibility review will take the following required factors into account:

1. The performance of the ETP’s program on:
  - The performance accountability measures described in WIOA secs. 116 (b)(2)(A)(i)(I)-(IV) and the other matters required by WIOA sec. 122 (b)(2);
  - Other appropriate measures of performance outcomes determined by the state for program participants receiving training services under WIOA Title I-B, taking into consideration the characteristics of the population served and relevant economic

conditions;

- Outcomes of the programs of students in general with respect to employment and earnings as defined by WIOA sec. 116(b)(2).
  - All of these measures may include minimum performance standards.
2. Access to training services throughout the state, including in rural areas, and through the use of technology;
  3. Information reported to state agencies on federal and state training programs other than programs within WIOA Title I-B;
  4. The degree to which programs of training services relate to in-demand industry sectors and occupations in the state;
  5. State licensure requirements of training providers;
  6. Providers' offering of industry-recognized certificates and credentials;
  7. The ability of providers to offer programs of training services that lead to postsecondary credentials;
  8. The quality of the program of training services including a program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential;
  9. The ability of the providers to provide training services to individuals who are employed and individuals with barriers to employment;
  10. The timeliness and accuracy of training providers' performance reports for programs of study
    - a. Program of Study is defined by ETA as a program of training services (as defined in 20 CFR 680.420) that consists of one or more courses and leads to a credential, employment, or a measurable skill gain towards a credential.
    - b. Each state is required to submit an annual report on the performance of all of the programs of study on the state ETP list. These reports contain information on each ETP program of study, information and outcomes for all individuals in a program of study regardless of WIOA participation, and additional information on WIOA participant demographics and outcomes. Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 03-18 details the reporting requirements for states' reports on ETP performance including the ETP reporting template (ETA-9171).
    - c. The Provider must advise DOL if they have difficulty capturing and sharing any data element required for performance reporting so a resolution can be reached in a timely manner.
    - d. The Provider must capture the following (with further elements defined in the ETA-9171) for each individual in an eligible training program of study:

**i. Status**

1. Enrolled, Completed, Withdrawn or Transferred from a program of study in the reporting period.

**ii. Social Security Number**

1. The Provider must make reasonable efforts to securely capture Social Security Numbers of all individuals enrolled in a program of study in the reporting period.



2. Failure to capture Social Security Numbers will negatively impact performance results as SSNs are required for wage file matches.

**iii. Credential Attainment**

1. This includes individuals enrolled in this program of study who:
  - a. Attained a recognized postsecondary credential during the program or within one year after exit from the program; OR
  - b. Attained a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent during the program or within one year after exit AND who were also employed or enrolled in an education or training program leading to a recognized postsecondary credential within one year after exit from the program.

**iv. Exit Date**

1. Providers must capture a date that represents completion dates, withdrawals, or transfers from a program of study in the reporting period.
11. Other factors that the state determines are appropriate in order to ensure: The accountability of providers; that one-stop centers in the state will meet the needs of local employers and participants; and, that participants will be given an informed choice among providers.
  12. Compliance with the information requirements that the state has established herein which require ETPs to submit appropriate, accurate and timely information for participants receiving training under WIOA Title I-B. The information must include:
    - The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program;
    - The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program;
    - The median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program;
    - The percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent during participation in or within 1 year after exit from the program;
    - Information on recognized postsecondary credentials received by program participants;
    - Information on cost of attendance, including costs of tuition and fees, for program participants;
    - Information on the program completion rate for such participants.

In the event a Provider is noncompliant with the above listed factors, continuing eligibility may be denied. Prior to denial, CT DOL will make every effort to work with the Providers to resolve any issues or make accommodations as available. Similarly, Providers must consult CT DOL if there are any questions or concerns with eligibility in advance of the application. (See “Reasons for Removal” in this policy.)

**WIOA ETP Continued Eligibility Application Process**

### Continued Eligibility Application Form

WIOA-approved ETP entities must apply for continued eligibility *biennially* following one year of initial WIOA ETP eligibility in order to be considered for approval to remain on the ETPL. As the entity and its programs approach the continued eligibility date, the lead WDB will notify the entity by providing a “CTDOL WIOA ETP Continued Eligibility Application” (also available on CTDOL’s WIOA website) and a list of the entity’s program(s) that have expired or will soon be expiring. The lead WDB will advise all secondary boards, if applicable, as to the issuance of the continued eligibility application to the entity. The entity will have 30 days in which to submit its completed continued eligibility application to the WDB. If the application is returned within the 30 days, the entity and its program(s) will remain on ETPL during the continued eligibility review process, unless reasons for removal exist (see “Reasons for Removal” in this policy). If an application for continued eligibility is not received within 30 days, the entity may be removed from the ETPL.

The entity must submit the original continued eligibility application form, with any required attachments and supporting documentation, to its lead WDB and a copy must be sent by the entity to its secondary WDB(s) for review. All fields on the continued eligibility application form must be complete, including those for signatures, signatory dates, and other attestations. Course catalogs may not be submitted to provide answers to any of the items on the application form. If a field is not applicable to the entity, “N/A” or a dash must be entered. Any supporting documentation or required attachments, as specified in the continued eligibility application, must be included with the continued eligibility application at the time it is submitted to the WDB. Incomplete applications and those submitted without supporting documentation and required attachments will be returned to the entity by the lead WDB in receipt of it and the WDB will not complete a review or make a continued eligibility determination regarding the entity or its program(s) until a complete application has been provided.

The entity will be subject to review for compliance with applicable federal and state laws. The entity must provide to the board a completed, signed “Employer Authorization For the Release Of Confidential Data” form with the continued eligibility application. The form is available at <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/wioa-trngproviderapps.htm>.

Since training providers may apply for initial ETP eligibility or add programs at any time (“rolling basis”) in Connecticut, those with more than one ETP program may have a variety of program expiration dates, depending on when each program was applied for and approved. Therefore, continued eligibility applications for programs and providers will also be on a rolling basis. As program(s) begin to reach expiration, the lead WDB will issue to the entity a list of those program(s) in order for the entity to submit a continued eligibility application for them. Once the entity has submitted a fully-completed continued eligibility application (all items completed) and the entity has been approved through the continued eligibility process, only the following application items will be required when the entity applies to add its other programs that reach expiration in the current continued eligibility period:

- The entity’s identifying information (at page 1)
- Item 4
- Signature section

Performance reporting requirements remain applicable.

### Review by the WDB (Continued Eligibility)

Upon receipt of a WIOA ETP application for continued eligibility, the WDB shall review it for completeness. As described above, incomplete applications and those submitted without supporting documentation and required attachments shall be returned to the entity for completion and will not be considered for review and approval by the WDB(s) until the continued eligibility application is complete.

The local lead WDB and any applicable secondary WDB shall review each complete application for continued eligibility. The local WDB review process shall be conducted in compliance with local board policy, as well as with applicable federal and state policies, and shall include a review for completeness, verification of application information (which must also include confirmation of entity and program approvals, as applicable, by other state agencies), and consideration of whether all application requirements have been satisfied.

In addition to verifying application information which includes, but is not limited to, approval by the state regulatory agency (i.e., OHE, DPH, etc.) and in-demand verification, etc., the WDB(s) must consider whether the descriptions provided by the entity on the continued eligibility application for the following are sufficient:

- A description of how the entity will ensure access to training programs throughout their training site area(s), including rural areas, and, as applicable, through the use of technology.
- A description of the entity's ability to provide the training program(s) to individuals who are employed and individuals with barriers to employment.

The lead WDB and any secondary WDBs must determine local approval or denial of ETP applications pursuant to federal and state policy via the process set forth by each board's policy. Secondary WDBs must advise the lead WDB once approval or denial has been decided. For application denials at the local board level, refer to "Reason for Application Denial" in this policy.

Once the lead and all applicable secondary WDB approvals have been made, the lead WDB shall submit an email request to CTDOL's WIOA Administration Unit to conduct the state-level review of the applying entity. The email must include the entity's:

- Name (legal and any documented DBA) as stated on the WIOA ETP Application
- Address
- Provider type, as indicated on the WIOA ETP Application

The WDB will also fax to CTDOL WIOA Administration the applying entity's "Employer Authorization for the Release of Confidential Data," which form is available on CTDOL's website at <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/wioa-trngproviderapps.htm>. This authorization permits CTDOL to share the specific results of the state-level review of the applying entity with the designated WDB. The WDB will then relay the information to the applying entity.

The WDB(s) must file the entity's originally-signed continued eligibility application (hardcopy) and any of its attachments with the entity's initial eligibility application file.

The WDB and applying entity shall provide to CTDOL any other information requested by CTDOL during the state-level review process to ensure compliance with federal and state policy.

Under continued eligibility, if an eligible training provider is failing to meet criteria and information requirements, the provider must, within 30 days of being informed of the failure by CTDOL or the WDB(s), provide a written explanation to CTDOL and the WDB(s) as to the reason for the failure and provide a statement confirming that the provider has supplied accurate information. If the failure is due to undue cost or burden and CTDOL and the WDB(s) determine the provider has not substantially violated any of the requirements under 20 CFR § 680.460, CTDOL and the WDB(s) must consult and provide technical assistance to the eligible training provider.

**Review by CTDOL (Initial and Continued Eligibility)**

The state-level review process will include the following steps:

- CTDOL will review the applying entity with the following CTDOL divisions to determine if there is a record of any employment law non-compliance:
- Wage and Workplace Standards Division
- UI Tax, including Employer Status as applicable
- OSHA
- CTDOL's WIOA Administration Unit will either:
  - - inform the lead WDB that the applying entity has been approved for listing (this includes continued listing) on the WIOA ETP (the lead WDB will then inform any secondary WDB and the entity), or
    - notify the lead WDB that the review has identified substantive violations or inaccuracies.
- The lead WDB will notify the applying entity that its application cannot receive final approval until the entity and the enforcing agency have agreed to a remedy.

Under continued eligibility, if an eligible training provider is failing to meet criteria and information requirements, the provider must, within 30 days of being informed of the failure by CTDOL or the WDB(s), provide a written explanation to CTDOL and the WDB(s) as to the reason for the failure and provide a statement confirming that the provider has supplied accurate information. If the failure is due to undue cost or burden and CTDOL and the WDB(s) determine the provider has not substantially violated any of the requirements under 20 CFR § 680.460, CTDOL and the WDB(s) must consult and provide technical assistance to the eligible training provider.

### **Approved ETPs – WDB and ETP Requirements**

#### **Initial Eligibility**

Once the entity is approved for initial eligibility, the lead WDB will inform the entity and any secondary WDBs that the entity has been approved as an ETP for initial eligibility. The lead WDB (itself or assisted by secondary WDBs) will enter the entity's ETP application information into CTHires, set an expiration date and local approval, and request state-level approval in CTHires from CTDOL. All ETPs are subject to WIOA performance and reporting requirements upon entity initial eligibility approval for the ETPL, except where specifically exempt under WIOA.

#### **Continued Eligibility**

Once the entity is approved for continued eligibility, the lead WDB will inform the entity and any secondary WDBs that the entity has been approved. The lead WDB (itself or assisted by secondary WDBs) will update CTHires, reset the expiration date(s), set continued eligibility local approval and request state-level approval in CTHires from CTDOL. All ETPs remain subject to WIOA performance and reporting requirements upon entity continued eligibility approval for the ETPL, except where specifically exempt under WIOA.

### **Reasons For Application Denial (Initial and Continued Eligibility)**

The following policy applies in the event the WIOA ETP application (for initial or continued eligibility, as applicable) is not approved by the WDB or when a substantive identified violation or inaccuracies cannot be remedied as described above at the state-review level:

1. The lead WDB and any secondary WDB(s) shall deny the entity's application for ETP eligibility (initial or continued) if the application from an entity is not complete.
  2. The lead WDB and any secondary WDB(s) shall deny the entity's application for ETP eligibility if an applying entity fails to meet the minimum criteria for initial eligibility and approval as specified in this policy.
  3. The lead WDB and any secondary WDB(s) shall deny the entity's application for ETP continued eligibility if an applying entity fails to meet criteria for continued eligibility and approval as specified in this policy.
  4. The WDB(s) or CTDOL shall deny the entity's application for ETP eligibility (initial or continued) if it is determined that the applicant intentionally supplied inaccurate information.
  5. The WDB(s) or the CTDOL shall deny the entity's application for ETP eligibility (initial or continued) if it is determined a provider has substantially violated any WIOA requirements or federal or state laws.

If a WDB denies a provider's application for listing on the ETPL, the WDB shall, within 30 days of receipt of the application (initial or continued), inform the applying entity in writing and include the reason(s) for the denial and provide information on the appeals process.

If CTDOL denies an applying entity for listing on the ETPL, CTDOL shall, within 30 days of receipt of the state-level review request, inform the lead WDB and applying entity and include the reason(s) for the denial and provide information on the appeals process.

Under continued eligibility, if an eligible training provider is failing to meet criteria and information requirements, the provider must, within 30 days of being informed of the failure by CTDOL or the WDB(s), provide a written explanation to CTDOL and the WDB(s) as to the reason for the failure and provide a statement confirming that the provider has supplied accurate information. If the failure is due to undue cost or burden and CTDOL and the WDB(s) determine the provider has not substantially violated any of the requirements under 20 CFR § 680.460, CTDOL and the WDB(s) must consult and provide technical assistance to the eligible training provider.

### **Removal from the ETPL (Initial and Continued Eligibility)**

#### **Reasons for Removal**

1. WDBs or CTDOL shall remove a provider and/or program:
2. At any point it is determined that the program does not meet the minimum criteria for initial or continued eligibility listing as specified in this policy.
3. If the program has not met the minimum levels of performance set by CTDOL or the WDB for the continued eligibility process, except if failure to meet the minimum level is due to undue cost or burden, as specified in this policy.

WDBs or CTDOL may remove a provider and/or program:

1. If the entity's application for continued eligibility is not received within 30 days of notification from the WDB that the entity's period of initial eligibility has expired or will soon expire.
2. If the provider fails to timely and accurately provide all the performance data required for the entity's continued eligibility determination. Timely means within 30 days of the end of each calendar quarter or within 30 days of any specific performance data request from CTDOL or the WDB.

3. If the provider is found to have substantially violated any WIOA requirements or federal or state laws, regulations or policies. A substantial violation is defined as a violation that merits action (removal from the ETPL) based on consideration of the following:
  - a. Whether the violation represents an instance of noncompliance with a substantive statutory or regulatory restriction or requirement, rather than an instance of noncompliance with a non-substantive technical or procedural requirement;
    - i. The extent to which the violation is part of a pattern of noncompliance;
    - ii. The extent to which the provider failed to cure the violation if/when it became aware of the violation;
    - iii. Whether the violation was knowing and willful.

In determining whether a substantial violation has occurred, CTDOL will take into account exceptional circumstances beyond the provider's control, such as natural disasters, unexpected personnel transitions, and unexpected technology-related issues.

CTDOL shall remove a provider and/or program if it determines, after consultation with the WDB(s) involved, that the provider intentionally supplied inaccurate information or performance data.

If a WDB removes a program from the ETPL, the WDB must, within 10 business days of its decision, inform the entity and CTDOL in writing and include the reason(s) for the removal and provide information on the appeals process.

If CTDOL removes a program from the ETPL, CTDOL shall inform the entity and lead WDB in writing within 10 business days and include the reason(s) for the removal and provide information on the appeals process.

A provider whose eligibility is terminated under these conditions must be terminated for not less than 2 years and is liable to repay all youth, adult, and dislocated worker training funds it received during the period of noncompliance.

In order for a program to be added back to the ETPL, the provider must re• apply through the WDB. Performance data is required as part of the application process for the time period when the program was removed from the ETPL.

While a program is removed from the ETPL for continued eligibility reasons, the ETP cannot receive new training participants utilizing ITA funds for the removed programs.

Under continued eligibility, if an eligible training provider is failing to meet criteria and information requirements, the provider must, within 30 days of being informed of the failure by CTDOL or the WDB(s), provide a written explanation to CTDOL and the WDB(s) as to the reason for the failure and provide a statement confirming that the provider has supplied accurate information. If the failure is due to undue cost or burden and CTDOL and the WDB(s) determine the provider has not substantially violated any of the requirements under 20 CFR § 680.460, CTDOL and the WDB(s) must consult and provide technical assistance to the eligible training provider.

### **ETPL Appeal Process**

#### Appeals to Local Boards

This procedure only applies to appeals by training providers based on the denial of a provider's application for initial or continued listing on the ETPL or the removal of a provider or program already listed on the ETPL.

Each WDB must have a written appeals process that includes the following required provisions:

1. A provider wishing to appeal a decision by a WDB must submit an appeal to the WDB within ten (10) business days of the issuance of the denial notice. The appeal must be in writing and include a statement of the intent to appeal, description of the program in question, the reason(s) for the appeal, and the signature of the appropriate provider official.
2. The WDB appeals process must include a meeting between the WDB and the appealing provider for the purpose of effectuating informal resolution in lieu of further appeal process.

A WDB will notify a provider of its final decision on an appeal within thirty (30) days of receipt of the appeal.

### **Appeals to CTDOL**

1. This procedure applies to an appeal by a training provider based on:
  - a. Denial of eligibility by a WDB or the designated State agency under 20 CFR 683.630. This includes a CTDOL denial of the provider's application for initial listing on the ETPL as outlined in WIOA sec. 122. In addition, a provider may appeal to the Connecticut Department of Labor Commissioner if it has exhausted the appeals process of a WDB and is dissatisfied with the WDB's final decision.
  - b. Termination of eligibility or other action by a WDB or State agency under WIOA sec. 122 (c), which refers to the removal of a program already listed on the ETPL.
  - c. Denial of eligibility as a provider of on-the-job training (OJT) or customized training by a One-Stop operator under WIOA sec. 122 (h).
2. A provider wishing to appeal a WDB's final decision shall file an appeal within ten (10) days of the issuance of the WDB's decision. The request for appeal must be in writing and include a statement of the intent to appeal, description of the program in question, the grounds for the appeal, and the signature of the appropriate provider official. It must be sent to:

Commissioner Danté Bartolomeo

CT Department of Labor  
200 Folly Brook Boulevard  
Wethersfield, CT 06109

The appeal must either be actually received by or postmarked no later than the tenth day following the issuance of the decision being appealed.

1. CTDOL procedures shall include the opportunity for a hearing before impartial hearing officer(s). The CTDOL Labor Commissioner will name the hearing officer(s). The hearing officer(s) or panel shall be comprised of persons that have not had any role in the underlying decision at issue. The hearing officer(s) shall provide written notice to the concerned parties of the date, time, and place of the hearing at least five (5) business days before the scheduled hearing. Subject to the hearing officer's control, both parties shall be provided the opportunity to: present oral and written testimony; call and question witnesses; present oral and written argument; request relevant documents. Any party to a hearing shall have the right to be represented. CTDOL shall maintain a tape recording of the proceedings.
2. CTDOL will notify a provider of its final decision on an appeal in writing within (30)

days of receipt of the appeal.

3. CTDOL will promptly notify the appropriate WDB of any appeal request and any final decision.
4. A CTDOL decision under this appeal process shall be final.

(4) DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR THE PRIORITY FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS, OTHER LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS, AND INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF WIOA SEC. 134(C)(3)(E), WHICH APPLIES TO INDIVIDUALIZED CAREER SERVICES AND TRAINING SERVICES FUNDED BY THE ADULT FORMULA PROGRAM

All related WIOA policy memos including those specific to serving priority populations have been combined into a unified policy manual which is continuously updated for accuracy and content. The updated manual can be found at:

<http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/WIOAPolicyManual.pdf>.

Several methods are used to comprehensively implement and monitor priority of service to priority populations including public assistance recipients, other low-income individuals, or individuals who are basic skills deficient. These methods include program compliance monitoring, case file review and electronic case management systems. CT DOL uses the CT HIRES automated case management system which includes a database with fields to identify individuals who may be designated basic skills deficient, a recipient of public assistance, or to meet the definition of low income.

CTDOL, along with its workforce partners, continues to pursue the most effective and efficient use of its data capturing capabilities in order to determine the characteristics of the individuals being served through the workforce development system. The goal of these efforts is to better identify those individuals from priority populations who are seeking assistance in order to coordinate the most appropriate mix of programs and services through both required and non-required partner program agencies and organizations.

In addition, the CTDOL JFES and WIOA units work closely in conducting financial monitoring of the 5 WDBs for both programs. The CTDOL JFES Unit scrutinizes JFES contracts for any financial concerns related to the JFES contracts which are then passed along to the WIOA staff who conduct on-site financial monitoring at the WDB locations. This enables the JFES and WIOA programs to compare notes and ensure that expenditures are properly accounted for across the two programs.

The JFES and WIOA units have also collaborated on some training initiatives for staff in both programs from Business Engagement to Resume and Interview Training and in a forthcoming person-centered training as an annual professional development activity. JFES spearheaded much of the 2Gen approach that CTDOL will be bringing to WIOA Adult, Youth and Dislocated Worker Programs, along with the Trade program, starting in PY23 through PY24.

One of the primary goals of person-centered practices for our workforce programs will be to build trust in order to gain a more beneficial relationship with the individuals we serve, which we believe may lead to more openness around disclosing barriers. We are also striving towards making the documentation collection requests tied to eligibility more of a person-centered and individualized approach as well.

In 2022, the WIOA Administration Unit updated its Supportive Services section of the WIOA policy manual to include the provision to assist with eligibility documentation. WIOA programs relies on documents outlined in TEGL 23-19 Change 2 provided by the individual adult, dislocated worker, or youth by way of self-attestation, formal documentation, or cross-matches from external agency databases. This focus is to meaningfully reduce barriers to enrollment in WIOA programming. The



impact will be measured in future monitoring efforts to determine the level of effectiveness.

**(5) DESCRIBE THE STATE'S CRITERIA REGARDING LOCAL AREA TRANSFER OF FUNDS BETWEEN THE ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAMS**

Under WIOA 100% of funds for a fiscal year may be transferred between adult employment and training activities and dislocated worker employment and training activities, if approved by the Governor.

The Connecticut Department of Labor, in governing the transfer of funds, uses the following procedure:

The applying Workforce Board responds to a questionnaire that explains the impact the transfer will have on existing agreements for the delivery and/or coordination of WIOA One Stop Services; the impact on the employment and training needs of eligible participants in the WIOA funding stream in which funds are being transferred; and they must provide evidence that the planned transfer is consistent with your local WIOA Plan and WIOA Priority of Service requirements.

The questionnaire requires local Board approval and CTDOL, acting in coordination with authority granted by the Office of Workforce Strategy on behalf of the Governor, approval.

Connecticut's policy and criteria for transferring funds can be found in the current WIOA manual at: <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/WIOAPolicyManual.pdf>.

**(6) DESCRIBE THE STATE'S POLICY ON WIOA AND TAA CO-ENROLLMENT AND WHETHER AND HOW OFTEN THIS POLICY IS DISSEMINATED TO THE LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARDS AND REQUIRED ONE-STOP PARTNERS. TRADE ACT SEC. 239(F), SEC. 235, 20 CFR 618.325, 20 CFR 618.824(A)(3)(I).**

In 2015, Policy #15-01 "Co-Enrollment of TAA Customers into WIOA Dislocated Worker Program" was issued, which includes the provision of rapid response services for filed petitions. It was modified in 2021 and 2022 to accommodate the provisions of the 2020 final rule that made co-enrollment of TAA participants mandatory with the Dislocated Worker Program (DLW). The major change in the policy allowed for CT Department of Labor staff to enroll participants into the DLW program at the time of TAA enrollment. This reduced the number of hand-offs to other staff and effectively eliminated workers "falling through the cracks" during those hand-offs. Shortly after the policy of modified, CTDOL has continuously met or exceeded the minimum quarterly benchmark co-enrollment percentage set by the US Department of Labor (USDOL).

At each modification, one-stop partners were provided with the revised policy. In addition, training was provided to all staff (both CTDOL and partners) as required by the comprehensive consolidated review conducted by the USDOL in 2022.

**(7) DESCRIBE THE STATE'S FORMAL STRATEGY TO ENSURE THAT WIOA AND TAA CO-ENROLLED PARTICIPANTS RECEIVE NECESSARY FUNDED BENEFITS AND SERVICES. TRADE ACT SEC. 239(F), SEC. 235, 20 CFR 618.816(C)**

The strategy to ensure re-employment services to co-enrolled participants are directly governed by the CTDOL's comprehensive Employment and Case Management Policy, 14-02. The policy covers all the required elements of providing services to participants as detailed in the TAA regulations. Additionally, elements of the above-mentioned co-enrollment policy help ensure participants receive the services necessary, either through the TAA program, the WIOA

program or both.

(8) DESCRIBE THE STATE'S PROCESS FOR FAMILIARIZING ONE-STOP STAFF WITH THE TAA PROGRAM. 20 CFR 618.804(J), 20 CFR 618.305

State TAA counseling staff are in all the comprehensive American Job Centers (AJCs) and TAA Navigators assist both State and partner staff with a multitude of supportive tasks and with direct customer involvement.

In addition to the co-enrollment policy and training described in #6 above, printed materials, including posters with QR codes were placed in all the comprehensive American Job Centers and several of the affiliate offices. Additionally, on a periodic basis, Teams meetings with relevant staff are held when new or revised policies or procedures are introduced. We also maintain internet and intranet websites with detailed program information, including published policies and procedures.

TAA continues to be included in the agency MOU under the regulations implementing WIOA and is part of the formula for sharing infrastructure costs in the comprehensive AJCs.

(c) YOUTH PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

(1) IDENTIFY THE STATE-DEVELOPED CRITERIA TO BE USED BY LOCAL BOARDS IN AWARDING GRANTS OR CONTRACTS FOR YOUTH WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES AND DESCRIBE HOW THE LOCAL BOARDS WILL TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE ABILITY OF THE PROVIDERS TO MEET PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES BASED ON PRIMARY INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE FOR THE YOUTH PROGRAM AS DESCRIBED IN SECTION 116(B)(2)(A)(II) OF WIOA. FURTHER, INCLUDE A DESCRIPTION OF HOW THE STATE ASSISTS LOCAL AREAS IN DETERMINING WHETHER TO CONTRACT FOR SERVICES OR TO PROVIDE SOME OR ALL OF THE PROGRAM ELEMENTS DIRECTLY.

Out of School Youth ages 16 to 24 and In School Youth 14-21 that meet specific eligibility requirements, may qualify for the following Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act services.

Tutoring, study skills training and instruction leading to secondary school completion, including

- dropout prevention strategies;
- Alternative secondary school offerings;
- Paid and unpaid work experiences that have academic and occupational education as a component of the work experience:
- Summer employment opportunities and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year;
- CTDOL/OAT Approved Pre-apprenticeship programs;
- Internships as defined in § 680.170 of the regulations and job shadowing; and
- On-the-job training opportunities;
- Occupational skill training with priority consideration for training programs that lead to recognized post-secondary credentials that align with in-demand industry sectors or occupations;
- Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation

activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;

- Leadership development opportunities, including community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social and civic behaviors; Supportive services;
- Adult mentoring for the duration of at least 12 months that may occur both during and after program participation;
- Follow-up services for not less than 12 months after the completion of participation;
- Comprehensive guidance and counseling, including drug and alcohol abuse counseling, as well as referrals to counseling, as appropriate to the needs of the individual youth;
- Financial literacy education; Entrepreneurial skills training;
- Services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local area\*, such as career awareness, career counseling, and career exploration services; and
- Activities that help youth prepare for and transition to post-secondary education and training.

The state assists local areas in determining whether to contract for services or to provide some or all of the program elements directly. CT DOL has issued a policy which incorporates US DOL's guidance regarding administrative procurement procedures and the extent to which providers of youth services, such as the program design framework component, the fourteen program elements, and youth services delivered in a One-Stop setting, must be selected. The State of Connecticut adopted all such guidance and directed each area comply with these policies. The requirement in policy includes all fourteen elements must be accessible to participants within the region, and case managers should be informed and share with their participants the menu of options for youth. That said, an individual provider is not required to offer all of the fourteen on their own. The workforce development board is responsible for offering all fourteen among the providers procured for services.

The five workforce development boards understand Job Corps to be a viable option and include it on the roster of service providers to whom they refer young people. In addition, nearby American Job Centers provide workshops for Job Corps student employees, introducing them to a variety of job search resources and other services. In addition, state monitoring, file review and data validation evaluate local area youth policy comprehensively. Following program monitoring, best practices and areas for corrective action are identified. CT DOL will also offer technical assistance to the WDBs to assist them in meeting youth performance measures. Related youth policies can be found in the CTDOL WIOA Policy Manual.

Local boards must take into consideration the ability of the providers to meet performance accountability measures based on primary indicators of performance for the youth program as described in section 116(b)(2)(A)(ii) of WIOA when awarding youth grants or contracts. CTDOL will routinely collect the materials for procurement and review the criteria taken into account when awarding youth contracts. CTDOL will also monitor the performance of the region, including Youth performance, on a quarterly basis.

**(2) EXPLAIN HOW THE STATE ASSISTS LOCAL WORKFORCE BOARDS IN ACHIEVING EQUITABLE RESULTS FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH. DESCRIBE PROMISING PRACTICES OR PARTNERSHIP MODELS THAT LOCAL AREAS ARE IMPLEMENTING AND THE STATE'S ROLE IN SUPPORTING AND SCALING THOSE MODELS WITHIN THE STATE FOR BOTH IN-SCHOOL AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH**

Connecticut aims to support local workforce development boards (WDBs) in achieving equitable

results for out-of-school youth through various means. We leverage opportunities available across funding streams, provide technical assistance, and share guidance on best practices. Connecticut facilitates partnerships between local boards, community organizations, educational institutions, and employers to foster relationships and create programs that aim to address the needs of out-of-school youth.

Promising practices and partnership models include:

1. **Integrated Service Delivery:** The WDBs provide services across multiple agencies and organizations to provide a support system for out-of-school youth. Many WDBs collaborate with education agencies, social services, and community-based organizations to offer education and training, career counseling, mental health support, and access to basic needs like housing and transportation.
2. **Sector-Based Training Programs:** The WDBs and the Governor’s Workforce Council focus on specific industry sectors with high-demand jobs in the local economy. By partnering with employers in these sectors, workforce boards design training programs that directly align with industry needs, increasing the likelihood of employment for out-of-school youth. These training programs support apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship opportunities recognized by CTDOL OAT, such as those available under the Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative that provides students an opportunity to gain pre-apprenticeship credits while in school. For out of school youth, industry-specific training and the ability to earn while learning is offered when the alignment of the youth’s interests matches industry opportunities available within the sector partnerships.
3. **Targeted Outreach and Recruitment:** To reach out-of-school youth who may not be actively seeking employment or education, WDBs partner with community organizations, faith-based groups, juvenile justice systems, and homeless shelters to identify and engage these individuals. A goal for the coming years is to expand our WIOA funded outreach to encompass more targeted outreach efforts, such as street outreach teams and social media campaigns, to connect with youth where they are. Many WDBs are also utilizing new pathways such as TikTok to promote the message of WIOA to participants not currently involved in the Job Cent network.
4. **Supportive Services:** Many out-of-school youth face barriers such as lack of transportation, childcare, or stable housing. WDBs partner with service providers to offer supportive services that address these barriers and help youth stay engaged in education or training programs.

The state plays a crucial role in supporting and scaling these models by:

- Providing funding streams specifically targeted for out-of-school youth programs (this includes WIOA and other state-funded programs such as Jobs First Employment Services and the Connecticut Youth Employment Program).
- Offering technical assistance and training to local workforce boards on effective strategies for serving this population.
- Establishing performance metrics and accountability measures to ensure that programs are effectively serving out-of-school youth and achieving equitable outcomes.
- Encouraging collaboration and information sharing among local boards and state agency partners to identify and replicate successful practices.

For Out of School Youth, the removal of barriers that prevent successful transition to career pathways will be key to successful engagement. CTDOL will encourage the WDB’s to pay special attention to identifying and engaging individuals who experience the following barriers:

- English language learners (working closely with Adult Education/ESOL partners and contextualized learning opportunities including Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education [IELCE] and Integrated Education and Training [IET] models).
- Youth involved with the justice system (working closely with Court Support Services Division and community partners to support reduced recidivism and improved outcomes for such youth).
- Homeless, pregnant or parenting or youth (linking youth with housing and child care as available in the community, to stabilize pathways to self-sufficiency).
- Youth with disabilities (working closely with Vocational Rehabilitation partners to serve these youth in more seamless ways).

In PY17 CTDOL conducted a Youth Summit to explore ways of outreaching disconnected youth with barriers. Attendance included a wide range of state agencies, local workforce development boards and their providers, private non-profit agencies, philanthropic organizations and youth.

As of 2022, multiple cross-agency systems shared information leading to a substantial report that has identified over 41,000 disconnected youth in Connecticut are not in school, not working and or unemployed between the ages of 16-24. Due to the nature of their disconnection with the workforce system and the multiple barriers they may face, the following special considerations will be given to disconnected youth. The needs have increased in substance use and mental health supports. WIOA Administration has been working collaboratively with the WDBs to find ways to recruit more Out of School Youth and has outlined specific additional supports for Disconnected Youth in our policy manual. This policy update generally explains that there is a wide array of supports for youth.

Additionally in PY22, WIOA Administration has requested the WDBs coenroll as many participants as possible that are served in TANF/JFES programming or SNAP programming, as those systems provide cross match agreements that require no documentation on the part of the participant to WIOA. To the extent possible, we seek to do the same with the Aging and Disability Services (ADS) Agency populations as WIOA Administration and ADS partnered together on grant opportunities to serve disabled youth in a coordination. The goals of the partnering are to create a high-quality, comprehensive career pathway system will be developed and implemented that includes multiple entry and exit points that meets learners where they are, provides education, training and support services needed for career advancement, and ensures a skilled workforce that meets Connecticut's talent needs.

By providing support, guidance, and resources, states can help local workforce boards effectively serve out-of-school youth and promote equitable outcomes in education, training, and employment.

(3) DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE ASSISTS LOCAL WORKFORCE BOARDS IN IMPLEMENTING INOVATIVE MODELS FOR DELIVERING YOUTH WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING EFFECTIVE WAYS LOCAL WORKFORCE BOARDS CAN MAKE AVAILABLE THE 14 PROGRAM ELEMENTS DESCRIBED IN WIOA SECTION 129 I (2); AND EXPLAIN HOW LOCAL AREAS CAN ENSURE WORK EXPERIENCE, INCLUDING QUALITY PRE-APPRENTICESHIP AND REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP, IS PRIORITIZED AS A KEY ELEMENT WITHIN A BROADER CAREER PATHWAYS STRATEGY.

Connecticut seeks to continuously improve the services available for youth workforce investment activities and collaborates with the Governor's Workforce Council, Office of Workforce Strategy, the Workforce Development Boards and core partners and state agencies to ensure that youth services for both out of school and in-school youth are effectively implemented. CTDOL provides support and technical assistance through WIOA Youth contract management and oversight, administrative policy, data validation and monitoring and technical

assistance. Youth related policies contained in CTDOL's WIOA policy manual prioritize out of school youth, drop out recovery and post-secondary credentials.

The State ensures each of the 14 elements are made available through monitoring efforts and technical assistance. Yearly monitoring includes a complete review of local youth services and providers to ensure federal law, policy and regulations are implemented. Monitoring includes interviews with staff and participants to ensure quality youth programming is provided. Ongoing monitoring occurs every month upon a review of reimbursement or advanced requests for invoices and quarterly when an assessment of performance activity is available. Since PY22, the State has required each workforce development board to respond to a survey that captures services for Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth activities provided within the period of performance. For Youth services, CTDOL WIOA Administration gathers responses as to how the region provides all 14 elements within youth programming. This document is incorporated into the contract and monitored during the program and fiscal monitoring of the contract to ensure the activities are offered and accessible to youth participants. Monitoring has been primarily online but WIOA Administration will resume on site visits to youth providers in coordination with the workforce development boards. If any area is identified as not offering a service, or barriers to accessing a service are identified, varied levels of technical assistance will be offered to the workforce development board to address the concern through monitoring correspondence and meetings. WIOA Administration also requires the workforce boards to conduct similar monitoring efforts of their subcontractors and WIOA Administration will routinely ask for copies of subcontractor/subrecipient monitoring reports as well.

Local areas can ensure work experience, including quality pre-apprenticeship and registered apprenticeship, is prioritized as a key element within a broader career pathways strategy through a variety of strengthening partnerships. CTDOL WIOA works closely with the CTDOL Office of Apprenticeship Training (OAT) in regard to Registered Apprenticeship programming including ensuring the offering of CTDOL/OAT Approved pre-apprenticeship programs to youth. Since 2016, CTDOL OAT has partnered with all 5 WDBs to create and certify a number of traditional and non-traditional CTDOL/OAT Approved pre-apprenticeship programs.

Over recent decades a heavy focus on post-secondary education has disheartened people on their journey to the labor force with the myth that they could not become successful without a college degree or needed to forfeit pursuing professional credentialing to get one. This left employers with a shortage of skilled workers and jobseekers with degrees & skillsets misaligned with the jobs they desired, along with crippling student loan debt. In response CTDOL/OAT, has formalized the Apprenticeship/Education pathway to move individuals from multiple entry points through their educational and registered apprenticeships programs and culminating in a credentialed, stable career and a degree, if desired.

### **CTDOL/OAT Approved Pre-Apprenticeship**

In addition to Registered Apprenticeship programs, quality CTDOL/OAT Approved pre-apprenticeship programs are an integral piece of the pathway for many people young and old alike. CTDOL/OAT Approved pre-apprenticeship offers a starting point toward a successful career path and a model for employers and students that otherwise may not be aware of this approach.

A student may earn additional on-the-job credits toward a registered apprenticeship if employed, on a part time basis, after school or as part of a Work Based Learning release program that may be established by the school and a registered apprenticeship employer sponsor that is approved by CTDOL/OAT.

CTDOL/OAT Approved Pre-apprentices can carry up to 2,000 hours of on-the-job experience into their registered apprenticeship program upon graduation similar to how an Advanced Placement (AP) program is designed and recognized.

There are increasing amounts of careers that do not require a college degree yet require a

certificate or credential inclusive or exclusive of post-secondary education. Career Technical Education (CTE), enhanced in high schools with industry recognized credentials, has recently been utilized as a workforce development pipeline.

CTDOL/OAT has partnered with the State Department of Education (SDE), to begin statewide strategic planning for CTE Perkins V programming implementation. Various plans will encompass policy considerations and creation of Industry Councils at the local school district level for CTE credentialing, career exploration, career pathway development, business and industry led curricula alignment, Work Based Learning (WBL) partnerships and articulation agreements with post-secondary institutions for college credits. Through this partnership, CTDOL/OAT has expanded CTE under Perkins V, thus increasing Perkins V Pre-apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship opportunities. These include work-based learning and the development of industry recognized credentials. OAT has partnered with nearly 30 high schools & community colleges in CT to credential their CTE courses and link them to the CTDOL/OAT Approved pre-apprenticeship program array. Students enrolled at those schools now have the ability to enhance their theoretical knowledge with hands-on skill development. Additionally, through relationships built at these schools, OAT has been able to present the benefit of these credentials to school boards and encourage stable funding for Career Technical Education moving forward. Some new, exciting CTDOL/OAT Approved pre-apprenticeships include but not limited to:

Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (YMPI) - focuses on high school students in addressing the hiring needs of Electric Boat, members of the East Advanced Manufacturing Alliance (EAMA), and other manufacturers.

(4) PROVIDE THE LANGUAGE CONTAINED IN THE STATE POLICY FOR “REQUIRING ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE TO ENTER OR COMPLETE AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM, OR TO SECURE AND HOLD EMPLOYMENT” CRITERION FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(B)(III)(VIII) AND FOR “REQUIRING ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE TO COMPLETE AN EDUCATION PROGRAM, OR TO SECURE AND HOLD EMPLOYMENT” CRITERION FOR IN-SCHOOL YOUTH SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(C)(IV)(VII). IF THE STATE DOES NOT HAVE A POLICY, DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL ENSURE THAT LOCAL AREAS WILL HAVE A POLICY FOR THESE CRITERIA.

For youth who require additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment, additional assistance may be defined to include youth who are/have:

- Emancipated
- Aged out of foster care
- Previous dropouts or have been suspended five or more times or have been expelled
- Court/agency referrals mandating school attendance
- At risk of dropping out of school by a school official
- Never held a job
- Been fired from a job within the twelve months prior to application (applies to out of school youth); and
- Never held a full-time job for more than thirteen consecutive weeks (applies to out of school youth).
- Migrant Youth
- Incarcerated Parent/Guardian

- Behavior Problems at School
- Serious emotional, medical or psychological problems
- Chronic Health Conditions including addictions
- Family Literacy Problems
- Domestic, Sexual Violence or other Trauma Survivor or reside in abusive environment
- One or more grade levels below appropriate for age
- Repeated at least one secondary grade level
- Core grade point average of less than 1.5
- For each year of secondary education, are at least two semester credits behind the rate required to graduate from high school
- Cultural barriers that may be a hindrance to employment
- American Indian, Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian
- Refugee
- Homeless
- Eligible to receive free or reduced price lunch
- A foster child on behalf of whom State or local government payments are made
- Locally defined “additional assistance”

Under WIOA, local areas may define additional criterion for a youth who “requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment” however under WIOA local areas may no longer define local barriers.

Include the State definition, as defined in law, for not attending school and attending school as specified in WIOA Section 129(a)(1)(B)(i) and Section 129(a)(1)(C)(i). If State law does not define “not attending school” or “attending school,” indicate that is the case and provide the state policy for determining whether a youth is attending or not attending school.

#### (d) SINGLE-AREA STATE REQUIREMENTS

##### (1) ANY COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD THAT REPRESENT DISAGREEMENT WITH THE PLAN. (WIOA SECTION 108(D)(3).)

Connecticut is not a single area state.

##### (2) THE ENTITY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISBURSAL OF GRANT FUNDS, AS DETERMINED BY THE GOVERNOR, IF DIFFERENT FROM THAT FOR THE STATE. (WIOA SECTION 108(B)(15).)

Connecticut is not a single area state.

##### (3) A DESCRIPTION OF THE TYPE AND AVAILABILITY OF WIOA TITLE I YOUTH ACTIVITIES AND SUCCESSFUL MODELS, INCLUDING FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES. (WIOA SECTION 108(B)(9).)

Connecticut is not a single-area state.

##### (4) A DESCRIPTION OF THE ROLES AND RESOURCE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ONE-STOP



PARTNERS.

Connecticut is not a single-area state.

- (5) THE COMPETITIVE PROCESS USED TO AWARD THE SUBGRANTS AND CONTRACTS FOR TITLE I ACTIVITIES.

Connecticut is not a single-area state.

- (6) HOW TRAINING SERVICES OUTLINED IN SECTION 134 WILL BE PROVIDED THROUGH INDIVIDUAL TRAINING ACCOUNTS AND/OR THROUGH CONTRACTS, AND HOW SUCH TRAINING APPROACHES WILL BE COORDINATED. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL MEET INFORMED CUSTOMER CHOICE REQUIREMENTS REGARDLESS OF TRAINING APPROACH.

Connecticut is not a single-area state.

- (7) HOW THE STATE BOARD, IN FULFILLING LOCAL BOARD FUNCTIONS, WILL COORDINATE TITLE I ACTIVITIES WITH THOSE ACTIVITIES UNDER TITLE II. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE BOARD WILL CARRY OUT THE REVIEW OF LOCAL APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED UNDER TITLE II CONSISTENT WITH WIOA SECS. 107(D)(11)(A) AND (B)(I) AND WIOA SEC. 232.

Connecticut is not a single-area state.

- (8) COPIES OF EXECUTED COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WHICH DEFINE HOW ALL LOCAL SERVICE PROVIDERS WILL CARRY OUT THE REQUIREMENTS FOR INTEGRATION OF AND ACCESS TO THE ENTIRE SET OF SERVICES AVAILABLE IN THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM, INCLUDING COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH ENTITIES ADMINISTERING REHABILITATION ACT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.

Connecticut is not a single-area state.

(e)WAIVER REQUESTS (OPTIONAL)

1. The statutory and/or regulatory requirements the state would like to waive;

The state aims to waive the current WIOA out-of-school youth expenditure requirement of 75% to 50% for the Northwest and Southwest Workforce Development Boards: Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board and the WorkPlace, Inc. The expenditure requirement for out-of-school youth prevents the state from being responsive and agile to support all youth as Connecticut's economy recovers from a pandemic and seeks to decrease the rate of disconnection among marginalized youth. The other regions already have a presence for in school and out of school programming in WIOA (Eastern Workforce Investment Board, Inc. and The Workforce Alliance, Inc.) or the WIOA fund use exclusively prioritizes the Out of School population (Capital Workforce Partners, Inc.).

2. Actions the state has undertaken to remove state or local barriers;

To eliminate state or local barriers, the state continues to conduct a comprehensive review of existing policies and engaged in consultations with local stakeholders to identify and address obstacles hindering the effective provision of services to both in-school and out-of-school youth. For example, where funding is available, the state is supportive of new outreach and recruitment methods to find youth (such as social media campaigns and on-site locations in schools or areas where youth congregate outside of the standard brick and mortar AJC) as well as increasing supportive services and mentorship opportunities for youth. The state, in alignment with USDOL

guidance, allows funding to support eligibility needs, has expanded access in data sharing agreements from partnering agencies, and is encouraging the use of self-attestations.

3. A description of the state's strategic goal(s);

The state's strategic goal is built on foundational pillars of aligning workforce systems, serving marginalized communities, and using data to drive decision making through transparency and accountability. The state is expanding education to career pathways from high school to post-secondary education or sector based trainings. The goal for pathways is to lead to high quality, sustainable jobs that pay competitively. As an additional driver to this need, in 2022, it was identified that one in five of Connecticut's young people were either at-risk or disconnected. These are 119,000 young people who have either dropped out of school or are in danger of dropping out of school. (Report from Dalio Education, accessible online: <https://www.dalioeducation.org/report/>). As a result of this report and the foundational strategies to align workforce systems, Connecticut is focused on supporting at-risk in-school students to avoid disconnection, and leverage resources to continue to serve disconnected youth across many workforce systems including WIOA.

Our goal through this waiver request is to expand In School Programming in regions where it does not currently have a WIOA presence with the flexibility of funding to start up new programs in an equal approach as opposed to 75% of the funding on the Out of School population. As the state grows more In School programs, our goal is to reduce the number of students dropping out. Additionally, for those students who do choose to drop out for varied family, personal, or financial reasons, we aim to support those students in alternative pathways to obtain a GED and stay connected to workforce activities. We believe this dual approach can reduce the overall number of disconnected youth in our state.

4. A discussion of how the waiver complements Department of Labor priorities (i.e. expansion of apprenticeship, improved employer engagement, etc.);

The waiver request complements Labor priorities as it will create a balanced approach to youth services by engaging more youth to stay in school and avoid disconnection to education and workforce systems. Youth at risk of dropping out typically have multiple barriers to education and/or employment, including low-income youth, young parents, homeless, previously incarcerated, and youth with disabilities, so serving this population aligns with Labor, state, and Workforce Development Board goals. Access to opportunities also encompasses technology and internet access, which many families do not have to stay connected to education, and the Workforce Development Boards have already been providing this access prior to the pandemic but will leverage complementary grants to ensure students have the tools and supports to achieve their education and career goals.

The waiver aligns with Department of Labor priorities by promoting a more flexible allocation of funds, allowing for the expansion of career pathway and supportive youth programs, and enhancing employer engagement. This shift supports broader workforce development initiatives.

Specifically, this waiver request seeks to support students in the following:

- Supporting students to increase attendance in school and programming.
- Informing students of available supports and providing access to local supportive services such as access to technology or hardware, mental health, substance use, housing, basic needs, or other supports identified by need.
- Supporting and encouraging students in school and programming in order to show an increase in performance.

5. Quantifiable projected programmatic outcomes resulting from implementation of

the waiver;

Projected outcomes include increased participation of in-school youth in WIOA programs, improved educational attainment rates, enhanced job readiness, and a reduction in the overall rate of youth disconnection. The approval of this waiver has the potential to prevent high school dropouts by providing mentorship and support services including mental health or substance use resources, intervention strategies, and technology access.

As we emerge from the pandemic, many students fell further behind or dropped out altogether. Connecticut Youth are facing mental health struggles at an alarming rate, and this impacts their ability to succeed in the classroom. To respond to these emerging issues, Connecticut proposes to focus a portion of its youth services on dropout prevention for in-school youth and to serve all at-risk youth, regardless of school status.

PY24 quantifiable goals:

Based on the individuals served, the regions will strive for:

- 65% of Participants will show an Increase School Attendance (defined as fewer reported unexcused absences in a determined time period).
- 60% Engagement in support services (defined using provided hardware/technology for engagement in services or a participant's pursuit of a referred support service such as mental health, substance use, or other supports).
- 60% Increase in a Grade Level Performance (defined as a reported improvement in a report card in a subject, overall grade point average improvement, or the improvement in education functioning level from a recognized assessment test).

6. Individuals, groups, or populations benefitting, or otherwise impacted by the waiver from the waiver;

This waiver is intended to benefit at-risk youth, regardless of school status, with an emphasis on youth at risk of dropping out of high school, GED, alternative, and post-secondary education programs.

7. How the state plans to monitor waiver implementation, including collection of measurable waiver outcome information;

CTDOL has comprehensive programmatic and fiscal monitoring procedures and a performance accountability system that measures and evaluates results for participants enrolled in WIOA programs. On a monthly and quarterly basis, CTDOL will review and analyze enrollment and service levels, program expenditures, and performance outcomes in coordination and collaboration with the regional Workforce Development Boards participating in the waiver. In addition, State program monitors conduct quarterly reviews designed to assure that contract requirements are being met for all WIOA programs. On an annual basis, comprehensive compliance monitoring is conducted. These reviews include the Youth program strategies, services, and expenditure plans. The metrics outlined in this waiver request will be tracked by the Workforce Development Boards in the state's performance accountability system. Should this waiver request be granted, CTDOL will regularly monitor the impacts of this waiver authority to ensure appropriateness and effectiveness. Measurable Skills Gains will be reported when an education functioning level increase is increased or compliant attendance has continued for a full semester to define a milestone. CTDOL will report on the outcomes in the WIOA Annual Report.

8. Assurance of state posting of the request for public comment (including the dates that the state made the draft request available for public comment) and notification to affected local workforce development boards.

The state assures transparency by posting the waiver request for public comment, specifying the dates of availability for public review. Affected local workforce development boards will be notified to ensure their input is considered in the decision-making process. Electronic copies of the waiver were sent via email to local boards and one-stop operators.

**TITLE I-B ASSURANCES**

The State Plan must include assurances that:	Include
1. The State has implemented a policy to ensure Adult program funds provide a priority in the delivery of training services and individualized career services to individuals who are low income, public assistance recipients and basic skills deficient;	Yes
2. The State has implemented a policy to ensure local areas have a process in place for referring veterans with significant barriers to employment to career services provided by the JVSG program's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist;	Yes
3. The State established a written policy and procedure that set forth criteria to be used by chief elected officials for the appointment of local workforce investment board members;	Yes
4. The State established written policy and procedures to ensure local workforce investment boards are certified by the governor every two years in accordance with WIOA section 107(c)(2);	Yes
5. Where an alternative entity takes the place of a State Board, the State has written policy and procedures to ensure the alternative entity meets the definition under WIOA section 101(e) and the legal requirements for membership;	Yes
6. The State established a written policy and procedure for how the individuals and entities represented on the State Workforce Development Board help to determine the methods and factors of distribution, and how the State consults with chief elected officials in local areas throughout the State in determining the distributions;	Yes
7. The State will not use funds received under WIOA Title I to assist, promote, or deter union organizing in accordance with WIOA section 181(b)(7);	Yes

8. The State distributes adult and youth funds received under WIOA equitably throughout the State, and no local area suffers significant shifts in funding from year-to-year during the period covered by this plan;	Yes
9. If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I;	Yes
10. The State agrees to report on the impact and outcomes of its approved waivers in its WIOA Annual Report.	Yes
11. The State has taken appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance at 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 2900, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance under section WIOA 184(a)(3);	Yes

**ADULT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	70.0		70.0	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	67.0		67.0	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$5,900		\$6,000	
Credential Attainment Rate	60.0		60.5	
Measurable Skill Gains	65.0		66.0	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2024 State Plan.

**DISLOCATED PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	75.0		75.5	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	71.5		71.5	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$9,100		\$9,200	
Credential Attainment Rate	66.5		67.0	
Measurable Skill Gains	65.0		66.0	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2024 State Plan.

**YOUTH PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	75.0		75.5	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	73.5		74.0	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$3,600		\$3,700	
Credential Attainment Rate	73.5		74.0	
Measurable Skill Gains	65.5		66.0	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2024 State Plan.

**PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR WAGNER-PEYSER PROGRAM**

(EMPLOYMENT SERVICES)

(a) EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STAFF

(1) DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL STAFF THE PROVISION OF LABOR EXCHANGE SERVICES UNDER THE WAGNER-PEYSER ACT, SUCH AS THROUGH STATE EMPLOYEES, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO STATE MERIT STAFF EMPLOYEES, STAFF OF A SUBRECIPIENT, OR SOME COMBINATION THEREOF.

The state will continue to utilize state merit staff employees.

(2) DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL UTILIZE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STAFF TO ENSURE STAFF IS ABLE TO PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY SERVICES TO BOTH JOBSEEKERS AND EMPLOYERS

As funding allows, the Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) will continue to promote the professional development of its staff, leveraging state, agency, and, as applicable, federal grant funds to enhance the skills of its workforce. CTDOL will continue to pursue professional résumé writer certification for all appropriate American Job Center staff utilizing agency staff for training and test preparation. Associate Community Service Representatives on the career path to Career Development Specialist will be afforded the opportunity to obtain the credentials required for promotion to this classification. Employment Service Staff, including Business Services staff, will continue to have the opportunity to attend workforce development events such as the Conference on Serving Adults with Disabilities as well as any other relevant training, in an effort to enhance their skills. To build capacity, CTDOL will train American Job Center staff to facilitate a variety of standardized employment readiness workshops. In addition, in-service training courses offered each fall and spring by the Department of Administrative Services may be made available to Employment Service staff to enhance computer, communication, writing, public speaking, presentation and supervisory skills.

The responsibilities of Employment Services staff in the American Job Centers include: assessing customer needs, addressing potential barriers to employment, assisting customers in the development of a work search plan, conducting employment workshops, one-on-one résumé critiques and career counseling and providing appropriate referral to employment services to facilitate a customer's return to work. These tasks require staff to have well developed presentation skills for the delivery of workshops, written communications skills to document case management activities and advanced resume writing skills to deliver high quality resume critiques. Employment Services staff serving the employer community must assess training needs, analyze labor market information, identify desired skills and abilities and address the recruitment needs of employers. They must possess knowledge of the Connecticut Department of Labor's (CTDOL) programs and services for employers, as well as those offered by other agencies and organizations in order to seamlessly cross market to employers all available options throughout the entire workforce system.

(3) DESCRIBE STRATEGIES DEVELOPED TO SUPPORT TRAINING AND AWARENESS ACROSS CORE PROGRAMS AND THE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI) PROGRAM AND THE TRAINING PROVIDED FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND WIOA STAFF ON IDENTIFICATION OF UI ELIGIBILITY ISSUES AND REFERRAL TO UI STAFF FOR ADJUDICATION

The agency will continue to provide training consistent with Connecticut's coordinated workforce system efforts to ensure all staff is aware of programs and services available throughout the workforce system and AJC customers are properly referred to appropriate programs and services. AJCs will continue the practice of holding regional partner meetings where information is shared regarding the core programs. AJCs will also continue to host a separate regional meeting specifically for front line Business Services Specialists representing all core WIOA partners. This fosters a coordinated service delivery approach to serving employers and gives staff an

opportunity to share information regarding new programs and initiatives in their region.

The UI Training Coordinator as well as staff in CTDOL's Legal Unit have provided UI training to AJC staff and will continue to serve as a resource on UI matters. In the event a UI eligibility issue is detected, AJC staff will refer claimants to the UI expert in the AJC or Adjudications Unit using the UC-129 Route Slip to document the potential issue and provide adjudications staff with a mechanism for communicating the results of the referral back to Employment Services staff.

The Employment Services Operations Unit routinely collaborates with the UI Division on matters relating to the RESEA program. ES and UI staff work jointly to develop CTDOL's RESEA Grant proposal, RESEA procedural memos and training for new AJC staff, as well as refresher training for existing staff. ES Operations and UI Adjudications staff work in teams to conduct formal RESEA monitoring reviews and desk audits. The results of both RESEA and Wagner-Peyser monitoring reviews are shared with AJC staff and are used to provide technical assistance and additional formal training in groups or individually to address any deficiencies or areas of concerns.

In addition, all new hires in the AJC's receive 2-3 weeks of UI training conducted by our Agency's designated trainer. Specifically, staff are trained in the unemployment claims taking process. This includes the following: learning the initial application; issue identification that leads to the Adjudications process; reviewing a claimant's benefit payment history and releasing payments when appropriate. It should also be noted that our UI Division has also been conducting high level ReEmployCT training to veteran WIOA staff. This training will give our WIOA employees more UI knowledge when answering basic phone calls and inquiries from our customers. The UI Division will continue to cross train AJC and WIOA staff in the future with the goal of expediting a customer's UI question and reducing handoffs.

(b) EXPLAIN HOW THE STATE WILL PROVIDE INFORMATION AND MEANINGFUL ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUALS REQUESTING ASSISTANCE IN FILING A CLAIM FOR UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION THROUGH ONE-STOP CENTERS, AS REQUIRED BY WIOA AS A CAREER SERVICE

On July 5, 2022, CTDOL implemented our new, robust UI System, ReEmployCT. CTDOL emails a link to the Claimant's Guide to Unemployment Benefits to all initial unemployment claim filers. A hard copy of this guide can be printed upon request. This guide contains all necessary information related to a person's eligibility for unemployment benefits as well as a listing of the American Job Centers throughout Connecticut and information about the employment services they provide to job seekers. As a result of filing for Unemployment Insurance, UI claimants are registered with the State's employment service in the form of a registration in CTHires, the state's web-based workforce development system that provides case management and labor exchange services and the state job bank. Claimants will receive a welcome email from CTHires after filing, which explains the services available and encourages them to utilize CTHires for their job search.

Consumer Contact Center staff provide support to Claimant customers of the *American Job Centers* having program questions or needing assistance filing their unemployment insurance claim (new or continued). The Consumer Contact Center is available remotely using Microsoft Teams to speak face to face with customers that go into the five comprehensive American Job Centers for meaningful assistance. These appointments are scheduled at 20 minutes intervals. The American Job Centers provide one workstation, privately located, that help preserve the integrity of the transactions that are performed. Our representatives additionally explain the process of filing the continue claims and advise our customers of the filing procedures as well as the number of resources available in the American Job Centers and partners services.

Since the implementation of the American Job Center support in July of 2021, the Consumer Contact Center staff have assisted more than 35,272 Claimant customers.



(c) DESCRIBE THE STATE'S STRATEGY FOR PROVIDING REEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE TO UI CLAIMANTS AND OTHER UNEMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS

CTDOL administers the work test for UI claimants through the UI RESEA program. All claimants selected to participate will have a review of their UI eligibility and efforts to find work. Any claimant determined to have an eligibility issue or insufficient work search efforts will have an issue entered on his or her unemployment claim, and the eligibility issue is referred to the UI expert in the AJC for review and potential referral to the Adjudications Unit. All claimants who attend the Initial RESEA appointment will receive a customized reemployment plan, jointly developed with the RESEA representative, and be required to participate in at least one additional mandatory employment service activity. Services include referrals to RESEA Bootcamp Workshop, other employment readiness workshops, résumé critiques, career counseling, WIOA orientation sessions, or any other service available in the American Job Center.

State agency merit-based staff will continue to provide Wagner-Peyser Act funded labor exchange activities. These services include job readiness workshops on topics such as Successful Job Search Strategies, Fundamentals of Résumé Writing and Interviewing Strategies and Techniques; one-on-one career counseling, résumé critiques; employer recruitments; job readiness assessments; and Career Center services. In the Career Centers located in the American Job Centers, job seekers will be able to work on their résumés and cover letters, complete online job applications, research companies, review job postings and conduct any other business related to their job search. They will have access to copy machines, fax machines, free postage for mailing résumés and applications to employers and most importantly, in-person support from CTDOL and Workforce Development Board contractor staff that provide whatever guidance and support might be needed. Career Center customers with disabilities will have access to accessible technology, such as large screen computer monitors and visual magnifiers, screen reader software, adjustable workstations, computer keyboards with visually enhanced lettering, sign language interpreters and any other reasonable accommodation the customer might need. All American Job Centers will have a process in place that allows staff to refer customers to education and training programs as well as other resources and supportive services. Some referrals will be made "in house" to other partner agencies under the roof of the American Job Center while others may be to organizations that are located in separate venues. Trade Act clients will be co-enrolled into WIOA as a standard operating procedure. CTDOL will continue to deploy a team of Business Services Specialists across Connecticut whose sole focus is working with employers. Business Services Specialists identify employers interested in scheduling recruitment events in the American Job Centers and coordinate those events around the state. Employers with scheduled recruitments are required to post their job listings in CTHires to make their employment opportunities available to all job seekers including UI claimants. Business Services Specialists also provide in-person business consultations to identify a company's needs, promote Work Opportunity Tax Credits, and provide customized labor market information, unemployment compensation information as well as information and referral to CTDOL's Registered Apprenticeship program.

(d) DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE W-P FUNDS TO SUPPORT UI CLAIMANTS, AND THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN W-P AND UI, AS APPROPRIATE INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

1. Coordination of and provision of labor exchange services for UI claimants as required by the Wagner-Peyser Act;
2. Registration of UI claimants with the State's employment service if required by State law;
3. Administration of the work test for the State unemployment compensation system, including making eligibility assessments (for referral to UI adjudication, if needed) and providing job finding and placement services for UI claimants; and
4. Provision of referrals to and application assistance for training and education programs and resources.

CTDOL emails a link to the Claimant's Guide to Unemployment Benefits to all initial unemployment claim filers. A hard copy of this guide can be printed upon request. This guide contains all necessary information related to a person's eligibility for unemployment benefits as well as a listing of the American Job Centers throughout Connecticut and information about the employment services they provide to job seekers. As a result of filing for Unemployment Insurance, UI claimants are registered with the State's employment service in the form of a registration in CTHires, the state's web-based workforce development system that provides case management and labor exchange services and the state job bank. Claimants will receive a welcome email from CTHires after filing, which explains the services available and encourages them to utilize CTHires for their job search.

CTDOL administers the work test for UI claimants through the UIRESEA program. All claimants selected to participate will have a review of their UI eligibility and efforts to find work. Any claimant determined to have an eligibility issue or insufficient work search efforts will have an issue entered on his or her unemployment claim, and the eligibility issue is referred to the UI expert in the AJC for review and potential referral to the Adjudications Unit. All claimants who attend the Initial RESEA appointment will receive a customized reemployment plan, jointly developed with the RESEA representative, and be required to participate in at least one additional mandatory employment service activity. Services include referrals to RESEA Bootcamp Workshop, other employment readiness workshops, résumé critiques, career counseling, WIOA orientation sessions, or any other service available in the American Job Center.

State agency merit-based staff will continue to provide Wagner-Peyser Act funded labor exchange activities. These services include job readiness workshops on topics such as Successful Job Search Strategies, Fundamentals of Résumé Writing and Interviewing Strategies and Techniques; one-on-one career counseling, résumé critiques; employer recruitments; job readiness assessments; and Career Center services. In the Career Centers located in the American Job Centers, job seekers will be able to work on their résumés and cover letters, complete online job applications, research companies, review job postings and conduct any other business related to their job search. They will have access to copy machines, fax machines, free postage for mailing résumés and applications to employers and most importantly, in-person support from CTDOL and Workforce Development Board contractor staff that provide whatever guidance and support might be needed. Career Center customers with disabilities will have access to accessible technology, such as large screen computer monitors and visual magnifiers, screen reader software, adjustable workstations, computer keyboards with visually enhanced lettering, sign language interpreters and any other reasonable accommodation the customer might need. All American Job Centers will have a process in place that allows staff to refer customers to education and training programs as well as other resources and supportive services. Some referrals will be made "in house" to other partner agencies under the roof of the American Job Center while others may be to organizations that are located in separate venues. Trade Act clients will be co-enrolled into WIOA as a standard operating procedure. CTDOL will continue to deploy a team of Business Services Specialists across Connecticut whose sole focus is working with employers. Business Services Specialists identify employers interested in scheduling recruitment events in the American Job Centers and coordinate those events around the state. Employers with scheduled recruitments are required to post their job listings in CTHires to make their employment opportunities available to all job seekers including UI claimants. Business Services Specialists also provide in-person business consultations to identify a company's needs, promote Work Opportunity Tax Credits, and provide customized labor market information, unemployment compensation information as well as information and referral to CTDOL's Registered Apprenticeship program.

- (e) AGRICULTURAL OUTREACH PLAN (AOP). EACH STATE AGENCY MUST DEVELOP AN AOP EVERY FOUR YEARS AS PART OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN REQUIRED UNDER SECTIONS 102 OR 103 OF WIOA. THE AOP MUST INCLUDE:

(1) ASSESSMENT OF NEED. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS IN THE AREA BASED ON PAST AND PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL AND FARMWORKER ACTIVITY IN THE STATE. SUCH NEEDS MAY INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO: EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING, AND HOUSING.

(2) PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY IN THE STATE MEANS: 1) IDENTIFYING THE TOP FIVE LABOR-INTENSIVE CROPS, THE MONTHS OF HEAVY ACTIVITY, AND THE GEOGRAPHIC AREA OF PRIME ACTIVITY; 2) SUMMARIZE THE AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS' NEEDS IN THE STATE (I.E. ARE THEY PREDOMINANTLY HIRING LOCAL OR FOREIGN WORKERS, ARE THEY EXPRESSING THAT THERE IS A SCARCITY IN THE AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE); AND 3) IDENTIFYING ANY ECONOMIC, NATURAL, OR OTHER FACTORS THAT ARE AFFECTING AGRICULTURE IN THE STATE OR ANY PROJECTED FACTORS THAT WILL AFFECT AGRICULTURE IN THE STATE.

Connecticut is ranked the 3<sup>rd</sup> smallest state in the United States and accounts for just 0.15% of the total area of the United States. Connecticut spans 5,543 square miles while water covers 701 square miles, giving Connecticut a total land area of 4,842 square miles.

Despite its small size, Connecticut’s agricultural industry contributes over 4 billion dollars to the state’s economy and Connecticut’s approximately 5500 farms provide the state with roughly 22,000 jobs statewide per year.

Farms and crops are spread and vary throughout the state. Tobacco growers continue to be found along the fertile Connecticut River Valley.

Greenhouse and nursery products also continue to account for over 50% of Connecticut’s agricultural production while other important crops include apples and other fruits, Christmas trees, dairy products, honey, hay, maple syrup, shellfish (including clams and oysters) and tobacco.

The following chart will specify Connecticut’s top five labor-intensive crops, months of heavy activity and area of prime activity:

Crop / Commodity Groups	Period of Heavy Activity	Primary Region
Nursery, Greenhouse, Floriculture, Sod	February—August	Statewide
Vegetables	March—October	Statewide
Broadleaf Tobacco	May—October	Connecticut River Valley
Fruit, Tree Nuts, and Berries	June—October	Statewide
Christmas Trees / Short Woody Crops	April—December	Statewide

Connecticut Department of Labor’s (CTDOL’s) Foreign Labor Certification Unit continues to see a steady increase in the number of employers utilizing the H-2A Program, from 33 in PY 2016, to 52 in PY 2020 to 59 in PY 2022. CTDOL is also seeing an overall increase in the number of H2A job orders posted and the number of H2A workers requested in the last 3 seasons.

CTDOL also continues to record not a single employer utilizing the Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS) exclusively. Again, all agricultural job orders submitted to CTDOL were in relation to H-2A visa workers.

The data reflects the difficulty Connecticut farms are having in hiring local workers and the resulting increase in demand for foreign workers. In CTDOL’s previous and current outreach

experience, many employers have lost part of their local workforce to better opportunities, so an increase in the number of employers utilizing the H-2A Program and the number of workers requested through the H-2A Program is expected to continue. Due to a number of factors such as scarcity in the agricultural workforce, climate, the economy and the demand for more locally sourced food, the farming industry in Connecticut has changed significantly in recent years. Farmers are not only changing what they grow but also how they grow and how they do business. Farmers are relying on greater ingenuity, diversity and technology, an increase in agricultural cooperatives or Farmer's Co-ops and Community Supported Agriculture or CSAs, the growing of more non-traditional crops, the use of more non-traditional growing and harvesting methods, and an uptick in urban farming.

Connecticut farms have lost crops in recent seasons due to changing and/or more extreme weather patterns such as flooding and irregular temperatures. It is likely more farms will continue to experience these same losses in the future unless there's a positive change in our climate conditions.

As mentioned in the previous AOP, the lack of proper healthcare for our farmworkers is another factor affecting agriculture in the state. CTDOL continues to partner with our health care centers. Recently, we have witnessed a decline in health care delivery. Many of our clinics are citing 2 factors that are contributing to this decline – lack of funding and lack of qualified staff.

(3) AN ASSESSMENT OF THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS MEANS SUMMARIZING MIGRANT AND SEASONAL FARM WORKER (MSFW) CHARACTERISTICS (INCLUDING IF THEY ARE PREDOMINANTLY FROM CERTAIN COUNTRIES, WHAT LANGUAGE(S) THEY SPEAK, THE APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF MSFWs IN THE STATE DURING PEAK SEASON AND DURING LOW SEASON, AND WHETHER THEY TEND TO BE MIGRANT, SEASONAL, OR YEAR-ROUND FARMWORKERS). THIS INFORMATION MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT DATA SUPPLIED BY WIOA SECTION 167 NATIONAL FARMWORKER JOBS PROGRAM (NFJP) GRANTEEES, OTHER MSFW ORGANIZATIONS, EMPLOYER ORGANIZATIONS, AND STATE AND/OR FEDERAL AGENCY DATA SOURCES SUCH AS THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR (DOL) EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION.

As mentioned in prior Agricultural Outreach Plans, Agricultural workers contacted through CTDOL's outreach efforts continue to experience vulnerabilities and barriers due to language, literacy, education, immigration status, and healthcare education. Those without legal status are even more susceptible to exploitation and retaliation. It is important to remember how large a percentage of the farmworker population does not have work authorization, and that this population has not and will not, generally speaking, seek employment and training services through CTDOL's outreach efforts or at one of Connecticut's AJCs. According to Agricultural Census data from 2017, the share of crop workers not legally authorized to work in the country has grown from about 15% in 1989-91 to about 48% in 2014-16. The same survey previously indicated that about three quarters of all hired crop farmworkers are considered settled. Of the remaining 25%, about half are "shuttlers", meaning they work at a single location more than 75 miles from home, and may cross an international border to get there. The once more common migrant farmworker that moved from state to state working on different crops as the seasons advance, is now a relative rarity. This shift in migration patterns and demographics is significant. Given that immigration policies have not changed since the last AOP, farmworkers in Connecticut that lack employment authorization will continue to be hard to reach through CTDOL's outreach efforts, as both employers and farmworkers are reluctant to interact with any state or government employees, let alone seek employment and training services. A resolution or program for these workers to attain legal

status (work authorization, residency) would increase the number of participants for employment and training services, put employers more at ease when approached by SWA staff, and most importantly, lessen the exploitation and retaliation against workers.

CTDOL plans on continuing its collaborations and relationships with agencies and healthcare providers such as Community Health Services, Community Health Centers Inc., and Generations Family Health Centers, which were heavily strengthened during the recent pandemic. These three agencies/health centers (some operate more than one center) have farmworker programs, but they are experiencing an overall decrease in funding. Some of the medical conditions that agricultural workers are being diagnosed or treated for are putting a heavier strain on the system as well, which reduces funding for the other patients. Even though all agricultural workers would benefit from an increase in health education, foreign agricultural workers would benefit from an increase in health education in their countries of origin. Health education is being provided by clinical workers here stateside, but patients would benefit from greater support when they're home. There have been some cases where amputation could've been avoided or prevented, for example.

Finally, CTDOL also identifies the need for greater support regarding financial education, especially taxes and filing. CTDOL staff is often approached with questions or issues regarding taxes, filing, and refunds/payments during their visits with MSFWs. These are issues not often discussed when the focus is more on worker protections and employment and training.

**(4) OUTREACH ACTIVITIES. THE LOCAL OFFICES OUTREACH ACTIVITIES MUST BE DESIGNED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF MSFWs IN THE STATE AND TO LOCATE AND CONTACT MSFWs WHO ARE NOT BEING REACHED THROUGH NORMAL INTAKE ACTIVITIES. DESCRIBE THE STATE AGENCY'S PROPOSED STRATEGIES FOR:**

(1) Contacting farmworkers who are not being reached by the normal intake activities conducted by the employment service offices.

All outreach efforts and activities to MSFWs and agricultural employers are performed by the Outreach Worker and the State Monitor Advocate (SMA). CTDOL's Outreach Worker carries out their responsibilities, throughout the state, in a full-time capacity and both the SMA and the Outreach Worker are CTDOL merit employees.

Connecticut's highest period of MSFW activity falls between the months of March and November. During this time, the Outreach Worker visits MSFWs at their working, living, or gathering areas. The Outreach Worker provides MSFWs information on the services available at the local one-stop centers including 1.) the availability of referrals to training, supportive services, and career services, as well as specific employment opportunities, and other related services; 2.) information on the Employment Service and Employment-related Law Complaint System; 3.) information on other organizations serving MSFWs in the area; and 4.) a summary of farmworker rights, including farmworker rights with respect to the terms and conditions of employment. The Outreach Worker will instruct MSFWs to visit local one-stop centers to take advantage of the services available to them. If the MSFWs are unable to go to the American Job Center, the Outreach Worker is fully trained, prepared, and equipped to bring the services to them.

CTDOL's outreach efforts are not limited to business hours only. Workers can be visited after hours or during weekends, often in coordination with other agencies or service providers, such as the Connecticut River Valley Farmworker Health Program (CRVFHP) or the New England Farm Workers Council. (NEFWC). With the help of the SMA, the Outreach Worker has been introduced to

many of these other agencies and service providers. The Outreach Worker has both established and maintained a relationship with these entities and works in conjunction with them to assist our MSFWs.

The SMA and Outreach Worker will conduct frequent field visits to the working, living, and gathering areas of MSFWs. The Outreach Worker will discuss the SWA's provision of Employment and Training Services and other employment-related programs with MSFWs, crew leaders, and employers. The SMA will engage employers and crew leaders regarding program performance and other issues.

(2) Providing technical assistance to outreach workers. Technical assistance must include trainings, conferences, additional resources, and increased collaboration with other organizations on topics such as one-stop center services (i.e. availability of referrals to training, supportive services, and career services, as well as specific employment opportunities), the employment service complaint system, information on the other organizations serving MSFWs in the area, and a basic summary of farmworker rights, including their rights with respect to the terms and conditions of employment.

Connecticut hired a new Outreach Worker in June of 2023 in compliance with the requirements set forth in 20 CFR 653.107. The Outreach Worker will carry out their responsibilities, throughout the state, in a full-time capacity during peak season as Connecticut is deemed a non-significant state. Both the SMA and the Outreach Worker are CTDOL merit employees.

CTDOL's Outreach Worker has access to professional development activities through training sessions and conferences conducted by the National Monitor Advocate (NMA) and its office, regional ETA offices or the Regional Monitor Advocate (RMA).

Additional professional development classes and trainings are available to CTDOL merit staff. The Outreach Worker can attend all relevant complimentary trainings offered by the Connecticut River Valley Farmworker Health Program, New England Farm Workers Council, Wage and Hour, Wage and Workplace Standards, OFLC, IRS, DRS, and other organizations who are also committed to helping our farmworkers and our agricultural employers.

CTDOL's Outreach Worker has been trained in one-stop center procedures and in the services, benefits, and protections afforded MSFWs by the ES, including training on protecting farmworkers against sexual harassment, sexual coercion, assault, and human trafficking.

CTDOL's Outreach Worker will also be trained in CTDOL's Complaint System procedures and all local, state, regional, and national enforcement agencies that would be appropriate to receive referrals. The program for such training will be formulated by the State Equal Opportunity Officer, pursuant to uniform guidelines developed by ETA. The SMA will be given an opportunity to review and comment on the State's program.

The Outreach Worker has been given extensive training and technical assistance in the availability of referrals to training, supportive services, and career services, as well as specific employment opportunities, the employment service complaint system, information on the other organizations serving MSFWs in the area, and a basic summary of farmworker rights, including their rights with respect to the terms and conditions of employment since his date of hire.

The Outreach Worker has been given training and technical assistance in the availability of referrals to training, supportive services, and career services, as well as specific employment opportunities, the employment service complaint system, information on the other organizations serving MSFWs in the area, and a basic summary of farmworker rights, including their rights with respect to the terms and conditions of employment.

Connecticut's SMA and Outreach Worker attend all available conferences and/or trainings. The resource materials, technical assistance, and best practices attained at these events are shared

with American Job Center staff and periodic MSFW and Employment Service Complaint System training is provided to AJC staff to refresh their MSFW and Employment Service Complaint System knowledge.

(3) Increasing outreach worker training and awareness across core programs including the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program and the training on identification of UI eligibility issues.

The Outreach Worker also has knowledge of the Unemployment Compensation Program and has full access to the state's unemployment system, ReEmployCT. The Outreach Worker can be the first point-of-contact with a farmworker if they have a problem with their unemployment benefits. The Outreach Worker will identify the problem and make a referral to an appropriate unemployment representative who can fix the problem. The Outreach Worker also will assist some farmworkers with the data entry of their initial claim if necessary. There are provisions and protocols in place for assisting farmworkers at the local one-stop centers with their unemployment issues as well.

In addition, the Outreach Worker is familiar with job seeker services and is in contact with both Wagner-Peyser and WIOA staff in each American Job Center office across the state. The Outreach Worker is also stationed, on a weekly basis, to work in one of the busiest American Job Center locations in the state. This one-stop center generally assists many of our farmworkers in CT. The Outreach Worker has been trained in CTDOL's comprehensive workforce development case management system or **CTHires** (Connecticut Helping Individuals and Employers Reach Employment Success) and utilizes this website to register the farmworkers as Wagner Peyser participants in order for them to be eligible to receive services. CTHires is utilized by our jobseekers to search for work and training and to create a resume. Our employers utilize CTHires to both seek and hire their workforce.

CTDOL will continue to offer UI and core program training on a periodic basis to the Outreach Worker, including training on identification of UI eligibility issues. The Outreach Worker has access to core program managers and receives ETA notifications regarding program updates and/or changes.

(4) Providing State merit staff outreach workers professional development activities to ensure they are able to provide high quality services to both jobseekers and employers.

The Outreach Worker also has knowledge of the Unemployment Compensation Program and has full access to the state's unemployment system, ReEmployCT. The Outreach Worker can be the first point-of-contact with a farmworker if they have a problem with their unemployment benefits. The Outreach Worker will identify the problem and make a referral to an appropriate unemployment representative who can fix the problem. The Outreach Worker also will assist some farmworkers with the data entry of their initial claim if necessary. There are provisions and protocols in place for assisting farmworkers at the local one-stop centers with their unemployment issues as well.

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CTDOL will continue to offer UI and core program training on a periodic basis to the Outreach Worker, including training on identification of UI eligibility issues. The Outreach Worker has

access to core program managers and receives ETA notifications regarding program updates and/or changes.

(5) Coordinating outreach efforts with NFJP grantees as well as with public and private community service agencies and MSFW groups.

The SMA and Outreach Worker will continue to coordinate outreach visits to farms with CTDOL's NFJP grantee, New England Farm Workers' Council (NEFWC), Connecticut River Valley Farmworker Health Program (CRVFHP) and area Community Health Centers, and the US DOL Wage and Hour Division.

Coordination with CRVFHP and their associated Community Health Centers has been crucial in keeping Connecticut's farmworkers healthy.

Coordination with NEFWC will continue per the Memorandum of Understanding.

The Outreach Worker and SMA will also look to maintain and expand on other established relationships. Both the Outreach Worker and SMA are active in coordinating events and participating in joint meetings with various entities such as the Mexican Consulate in Boston, MA.

(5) Services provided to farmworkers and agricultural employers through the one-stop delivery system. Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for:

(A) Providing the full range of employment and training services to the agricultural community, both farmworkers and agricultural employers, through the one-stop delivery system. This includes:

- i, How career and training services required under WIOA Title I will be provided to MSFWs through the one-stop centers;
- ii, How the State serves agricultural employers and how it intends to improve such services.

Agricultural workers, job seekers, and employers have access to the same employment services available in each of Connecticut's American Job Centers (AJCs) that are available to non-agricultural workers, job seekers, and employers.

The network consists of 5 comprehensive centers and additional partner affiliate offices with partial SWA staffing. CTDOL Outreach Worker encourages workers and job seekers to visit the AJCs to take advantage of the following services:

- Computer labs with internet access, including access to CTDOL's self-service operating system/database for job seekers, employers, and partner agencies - CTHires;
- Reemployment workshops and services;
- Career planning and counseling;
- Access to labor market information;
- Recruitment assistance;
- Veteran employment and training services;
- Adult, Dislocated, and Youth Worker activities under WIOA;
- Adult Education under the Connecticut State Department of Education;
- Apprenticeship Training information;
- Vocational Rehabilitation Training under DORS (Department of Rehabilitation Services) and BESB (Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind);
- Unemployment Insurance assistance;
- Jobs First Employment Services;



- Referrals to supportive services;
- Complaint handling.

American Job Center staff is provided periodic MSFW Program and Job Service Complaint System training to refresh their MSFW and Job Service Complaint System knowledge.

The SMA will continue on-site monitoring of the AJCs to ensure compliance with the Job Service regulations and offer technical assistance as needed.

Agricultural employers can access employment services by contacting a Business Engagement Representative or by contacting the Outreach Worker or State Monitor Advocate.

Agricultural employers have had the opportunity to express their concerns and provide feedback to CTDOL during an annual meeting coordinated by the State Monitor Advocate. Due to the COVID Pandemic, this convening has been conducted virtually in recent years. The plan is to return to an in-person gathering.

(B) Marketing the employment service complaint system to farmworkers and other farmworker advocacy groups.

The Employment Service Complaint System information is provided during outreach visits and presentations to farmworkers and advocacy groups.

The SWA recently distributed an updated ES Complaint System Poster in both English and Spanish to the five AJC Offices and the five Workforce Investment Board Offices and their affiliates in January 2024 for mandatory posting in each location.

An updated ES Complaint System poster will also be posted in the NFJP office and NFJP staff will be given an overview of the complaint process and will be instructed to contact the Outreach Worker with all MFW complaints and with any Apparent Violation information.

(C) Marketing the Agricultural Recruitment System to agricultural employers and how it intends to improve such publicity.

The ARS continues to be presented to employers, but the response and concerns remain the same - a shortage of US workers and a lack of dependability from U.S. workers. Many agricultural employers in Connecticut continue to rely on the H2A Program for their labor needs.

The Outreach Worker and SMA will continue to collaborate with CTDOL's Business Engagement Representatives to better serve the needs of these agricultural employers.

Services available to all employers in Connecticut including agricultural employers consist of:

- Assistance with the placement of job orders in our Labor Exchange System (CTHires);
- Assistance with the recruitment of qualified workers;
- Mediation and interpretation assistance;
- Complaint assistance;
- Technical assistance on compliance with employment related Federal and State regulations.

(6) Other Requirements.

(A) **Collaboration.** Describe any collaborative agreements the state workforce agency (SWA) has with other MSFW service providers including NFJP grantees and other service providers. Describe how the SWA intends to build upon/increase collaboration with existing partners and in establishing new partners over the next four years (including any approximate timelines for establishing agreements or building upon existing agreements).

CTDOL and NEFWC, the NFJP grantee, have an ongoing Memorandum of Understanding regarding collaboration and exchange of referrals.

The following activities, in which the SMA was involved in PY 2022 that promoted interagency cooperation included:

- Continued cooperation with NEFWC in an effort to provide MSFWs with employment and training services in a more fluid manner while avoiding duplication of services. Some outreach visits to MSFWs at farms were coordinated with NEFWC. NEFWC is also introduced to AJC staff during MSFW Identification Training sessions, allowing them to give AJC staff an overview of the services they offer to not only MSFWs, but their family members as well. Historically speaking, CTDOL has had a statewide MOU with NEFWC, its NJFP grantee, that is reviewed and renewed on a biennial basis. The current agreement signed in place is between January 1, 2023, and December 31, 2024.
- Coordinated with Jarmoc Farms to host University of Connecticut History 1570 honor class students on a field trip on October 12, 2022. The SMA and Foreign Labor Representative coordinated a live presentation with the then director of the Connecticut River Valley Farmworker Health Program at the same University of Connecticut class the week prior to the field trip, on October 5, 2022. Students learned about the Monitor Advocate system and its history, as well as the history behind community health centers. Students from this class have been known to end up taking on social issues as either part of their careers or volunteer work.
- Continued to assist the CRVFHP and area community health centers to coordinate the provision of COVID-19 educational materials, alerting employers of assistance with planning, personal protective equipment, and vaccine availability. The SMA was also, and continues to be, a member of the CRVFHP Advisory Council, meeting with other council members at least quarterly.
- Continued to remind other SMAs and SWAs the importance of getting back out on the field to see the workers and conducting pre-occupancy housing inspections in person, not virtually.
- A former connection established with New Connecticut Farmer Alliance will allow CTDOL to assist some 350 farmworkers to apply for funds under the USDA's Farm and Food Workers Relief Program.

The Outreach Worker and SMA will continue to maintain and expand on other established relationships. Both the Outreach Worker and SMA are active in coordinating events and participating in joint meetings with various entities.

(B) **Review and Public Comment.** In developing the AOP, the SWA must solicit information and suggestions from NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other interested organizations. In addition, at least 45 calendar days before submitting its final AOP, the SWA must provide a proposed plan to NFJP grantees, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other organizations expressing an interest and allow at least 30 days for review and comment. The SWA must: 1) Consider any comments received in formulating its final proposed AOP; 2) Inform all commenting parties in writing whether their comments have been incorporated and, if not, the reasons therefore; and 3) Transmit the comments and recommendations received and its responses with the submission of the AOP.

The AOP must include a statement confirming NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations and other interested employer organizations have been given an opportunity to comment on the AOP. Include the list of organizations from which information and suggestions were solicited, any comments received, and responses to those comments.

Connecticut State Department of Aging and Disability, Connecticut State Department of Education, Connecticut State Department of Social Services, Connecticut State Department of Economic and Community Development, Connecticut's Workforce Investment Boards (The Workplace Inc., Capital Workforce Partners, Workforce Alliance, Eastern CT Workforce Investment Board, Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board), New England Farm Workers Council (WIOA Section 167 NFJP Grantee), and Connecticut River Valley Farmworker Health Program have all been afforded the opportunity to review and comment on the Agricultural Outreach Plan. None of the agencies chose to submit comments to be published nor recommendations for the AOP.

**(C) Data Assessment.** Review the previous four years Wagner-Peyser data reports on performance. Note whether the State has been meeting its goals to provide MSFWs quantitatively proportionate services as compared to non-MSFWs. If it has not met these goals, explain why the State believes such goals were not met and how the State intends to improve its provision of services in order to meet such goals.

Initial analysis of Connecticut's Wagner-Peyser MSFW Equity Ratio Indicators over the past four completed program years (PY 2019 through PY 2022) shows a considerable decrease in the number of overall registered participants, MSFW and non-MSFW. While the decrease in PY2020 could be attributed to the pandemic, the slow recovery of registered MSFW participants has been more closely tied to recent staffing turnover/retirements in the Outreach Worker and Foreign Labor Representative positions. As CTDOL has recently onboarded new staff in those positions, it will continue to strive to increase the number of registered MSFW participants in its workforce exchange system, CTHires.

Further analysis of the data is encouraging, as it shows CTDOL increasing the number of Equity Ratios met from 3 out of 8 in PY 2019 to 6 out of 8 in PY 2020. Two factors need to be taken into account with smaller states such as Connecticut: First, the seasonal nature of the jobs due to geographic location and weather, resulting in periods of inactivity for many MSFWs. The second factor is the desire of many of Connecticut's MSFWs to return to their jobs every season. A third factor worth mentioning is that one of the Equity Ratio Indicators, Individualized Career Services (ICS) is affected by the prior two factors. RESEA is one of the programs that triggers ICS, and due to the seasonal nature of the agriculture in the state, MSFWs are typically not selected for RESEA. Despite these barriers, CTDOL hopes to have found some stability in the Outreach Worker and Foreign Labor Representative positions so that it may work towards increasing the number of Wagner-Peyser participants, especially given seasonal agricultural employment has increased over the four program years, and continue to provide its employment services in an equitable manner to try to meet the Equity Ratio Indicators. The stability in these positions should also allow CTDOL's SMA to be able to provide more training/technical support and monitoring statewide, rather than filling in for certain other functions and training of staff.

**(D) Assessment of Progress.** The plan must include an explanation of what was achieved based on the previous AOP, what was not achieved and an explanation as to why the State believes the goals were not achieved, and how the State intends to remedy the gaps of achievement in the coming year.

**Annual Summary of Services to Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers  
(MSFWs) Outline of Contents  
20 CFR 653.108(s)**

The State Monitor Advocate (SMA) must prepare for the State Administrator, the Regional Monitor Advocate, and the National Monitor Advocate, an Annual Summary describing how the State provided employment services to MSFWs within the State based on statistical data, reviews, and other activities as required in this chapter. The summary must include:

- (1) A description of the activities undertaken during the program year by the SMA pertaining to his/her responsibilities set forth in this section and other applicable regulations in this chapter.

Review of the Previous Year's Agricultural Activity in the State.

USDA/NASS data for 2022 reported 5,500 farm operations in Connecticut operating on about 380,000 acres of land. According to Labor Market Information and H-2A related job orders processed, CTDOL also estimates that about 6,800 farmworkers were employed during the calendar quarter with the most activity, July through September. PY 2021 saw a slight increase in the number of employers and job orders submitted in relation to H-2A, from 56 to 61 and 108 to 122 respectively, while the overall number of workers requested saw a slight increase from 1403 to 1420. The sector continues to trend with the increase of employers submitting job orders in relation to H-2A workers, and it correlates to the conversations the Foreign Labor Representative and SMA are having with the states employers, whereby they're even losing workers without proper legal status to higher paying jobs in other industries.

CTDOL's Foreign Labor Representative, along with the State Monitor Advocate (SMA), have continued to assist in screening job seekers inquiring about the posted job orders, ensuring that qualified prospects, understood the terms and conditions of each job before being referred to a job opening.

#### Outreach

For PY 2022 CTDOL has had to deal with staffing challenges with its Outreach Worker position, due to union protections preventing the vacated position to be filled. The SMA continued to remind management and administration that the SWA was out of compliance and needed to fill the position as soon as possible. A permanent Outreach Worker was hired on 6/30/23. The Foreign Labor Representative and SMA have provided outreach to both workers and employers in the meantime, resulting in 1,262 contacts for the program year.

The SMA has continued to work very closely with the Connecticut River Valley Farmworker Health Program (CRVFHP), Community Health Services, Community Health Centers Inc, and Generations Family Health Centers despite the lessening effects of COVID-19, to keep workers connected to healthcare and health education. The SMA has also tried to establish collaboration with other stakeholders whenever possible, such as with New Connecticut Farmer Alliance. New Connecticut Farmer Alliance has been able to learn and expand their knowledge of farmworker needs, characteristics, and struggles through the SMA, but they are also responsible for distribution of some of the funds under the USDA's Farm and Food Worker Relief Program.

CTDOL staff continue to promote the integrated, and universally accessible, employment services that are offered to all customers, including MSFWs, in each of Connecticut's American Job Centers (AJC). MSFWs have access to the following services through a single delivery system: Wagner-Peyser labor exchange services such as Career Counseling, Veterans Employment and Training, Professional Resumé Critiquing/Resumé Writing, Job Search Assistance, Reemployment Workshops and Job Referrals. Other employment and training services include Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth under WIOA; Adult Education, Apprenticeship Training, Vocational Rehabilitation Training under Department of Aging and Disability Services; and BESB (Board of Education and Services for the Blind), Unemployment Insurance, Jobs First Employment Services, and Referral to Supportive Services. This universal access to core services guarantees barrier-free admission to all seekers of employment and training services, including individuals with disabilities. If an MSFW cannot, or does not wish, to visit an AJC to seek these services, assistance to access to these services is provided by the outreach worker.

Staff encouraged non-English-speaking customers to take advantage of the free English as a Second

Language (ESL) classes offered through Adult Education. This is a critical component of promoting lifelong learning and developing the basic skills needed to secure employment and pursue career growth.

Affirmative Action Plans

Regulations require SMA participation in Affirmative Action Planning only as it relates to MSFWs. Connecticut has no significant offices and therefore is not required to submit an MSFW Affirmative Action Plan. CTDOL's Affirmative Action Plan relates only to its own employees and their hiring.

- (2) An assurance that the SMA has direct, personal access, whenever he/she finds it necessary, to the State Administrator and that the SMA has status and compensation approved by the civil service classification system, and is comparable to other State positions assigned similar levels of tasks, complexity, and responsibility.

The State Monitor Advocate (SMA) position is a federally mandated position, required under 20 CFR §653.108. This individual monitors the agency for compliance with federal regulations concerning services and protections to Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFWs). The individual also advocates on behalf of the MSFW population to improve services within CT DOL, and other government and non-government agencies. The SMA is also responsible for investigating and processing MSFW complaints and the overall monitoring of the JS Complaint system within CT DOL. When necessary, he acts as a mediator between employers and farmworkers; offers technical advice to agency officials, employers and other interested parties; and serves as an MSFW representative on boards and committees of community organizations. Yumon Luis Chang has been designated as the Connecticut SMA by the State Administrator. In this role, Luis has access as needed to the administrator within the CT Department of Labor.

- (3) An assurance the SMA devotes all of his/her time to Monitor Advocate functions. Or, if the SWA proposed the SMA conducts his/her functions on a part-time basis, an explanation of how the SMA functions are effectively performed with part-time staffing.

In Connecticut, the State Monitor Advocate is a full-time position to ensure SMA functions are effectively performed. The CT SMA is part of the Performance & Accountability unit within the CT DOL.

- (4) A summary of the monitoring reviews conducted by the SMA, including:
- a. A description of any problems, deficiencies, or improper practices the SMA identified in the delivery of services;

The North Central WDB and Hartford AJC were reviewed from June 12 to June 30, 2023. A finding is being issued to the AJC for not meeting three of the eight equity ratio indicators for Wagner-Peyser services. Three findings are being issued to the SWA as follows:

- (a) Internal documentation and guides not providing a clear definition of ES complaints.
- (b) AJCs submitted quarterly complaint logs without accompanying records for said complaints.
- (c) Not having proper outreach staffing for PY 2022.

- b. A summary of the actions taken by the State Workforce Agency (SWA) to resolve the problems, deficiencies, or improper practices described in its service delivery; and

An on-site review of the Hartford AJC and services offered through its affiliate offices, overseen by the North Central LWDB and CTDOL, as well as a statewide review of Outreach and Complaint System performance for PY 2022 took place at the end of June 2023. The SWA had already acted on two of the findings at the time: providing guidance to AJCs to submit properly filled out ETA 8429's to accompany reported complaints shown

in the quarterly logs, and (b) it had already hired an Outreach Worker as of 6/30/23. CTDOL’s Complaint System Guide FAQ was updated and a Corrective Action Plan regarding further training on provision of services at the AJC level was submitted to the Regional Monitor Advocate by 12/18/23.

c. A summary of any technical assistance the SMA provided for the SWA and the Employment Service (ES) offices.

The SMA plans on continuing to provide MSFW Identification Training to all SWA staff on an annual basis. The last refresher training session was distributed on 3/20/23 to all job center directors and supervisors, which then instructed staff to review the material. Technical assistance regarding Equity Ratio Indicators was provided for SWA staff as well as the Hartford AJC on 12/13/22 and for the Willimantic AJC on 12/20/23. The SMA has also, and will continue to, involved SWA staff in meetings or trainings provided by the NMA or RMA, as well as other agencies or stakeholders.

(5) A summary of the outreach efforts undertaken by all significant and non-significant MSFW ES offices.

Connecticut is not a significant MSFW state, nor does it have any significant MSFW ES offices. Outreach efforts originate from CTDOL’s Central Office, typically performed by an MSFW Outreach Worker. Due to the vacancy in the Outreach Worker position that went unfilled until 6/30/23, outreach was conducted by the Foreign Labor Representative, who has had prior outreach experience, and the SMA. Below is a summary of the outreach log for PY 2022.

Date	Farm	Contacts	Field Check or Visit	Notes
07/20/22	Bishop's Orchard	12	FV	Outreach to 8 H-2A and 4 seasonal workers
07/27/22	Groszyk Farms	10		Outreach to 10 H-2A workers @ CHS
07/29/22	White Gate Farm	4		Outreach to 3 H-2A and 1 seasonal worker
07/29/22	CT Valley Orchards	3	FV	Outreach to 3 H-2A workers
08/03/22	Markowski Farms	10		Outreach to H-2A workers when notified of COVID outbreak
08/10/22	Vincent Farms	2		Outreach to H-2A workers and transportation to CHS
08/15/22	Markowski Farms	20		Outreach to H-2A workers at housing to discuss issues
08/23/22	Vincent Farms	5		Outreach to H-2A workers
08/23/22	Jarmoc Farms	10		Outreach to H-2A workers and medication dropped off
08/25/22	OJ Thrall	10		Outreach to employer by SMA, answered questions on regulations
08/29/22	Christian Leaf	40	FV	Outreach to 40 H-2A and seasonal workers
09/01/22	Cromwell Growers Complaint	2		Met with 2 seasonal workers to investigate complaint

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09/13/22	O J Thrall Farm	42	FV	Outreach to 42 H-2A and seasonal workers
09/23/22	Jarmoc Farms	57	FV	Outreach to 57 H-2A and seasonal workers
09/23/22	Botticello Farm	4	FV	Outreach to 4 H-2A workers
09/26/22	J.W. Anderson & Sons	1	FV	Outreach to 1 H-2A worker
09/26/22	Cromwell Growers	16	FV	Outreach to 16 H-2A Presentation about services available from them
10/12/22	Jarmac Farms	8		Outreach to H-2A and seasonal workers
10/14/22	Prides Corner Farms	48		Outreach to H-2A and seasonal workers
10/18/22	Casertano Greenhouse Farms	200		Outreach to H-2A and seasonal workers with NEFWC director and staff
10/18/22	JC Farm	0		Outreach to employer, has limited # of seasonal workers
10/18/22	White Gate Farm	3		Outreach to H-2A and seasonal workers with NEFWC director and staff
10/21/22	Holmberg Orchards	3		Outreach to H2-A Workers Presentation about services available to them
10/21/22	Gottas Farm	8		Outreach to H2-A Workers Presentation about services available to them
10/21/22	Dondero Orchards	2		Outreach to H2-A Workers Presentation about services available to them
10/24/22	Kogets Farm	6		Outreach to H2-A Workers Presentation about services available to them
10/24/22	Miller Farm	19		Outreach to H2-A and seasonal Workers Presentation about services available to them
10/24/22	Oxen Hill Farm	7		Outreach to H2-A Workers Presentation about services available to them
10/27/22	Fair Weather Farm	7		Outreach to H2-A and seasonal Workers Presentation about services available to them
04/06/23	Markowski Farms	3	FV	Outreach to 2 H-2A workers and 1 seasonal
04/28/23	Hart's Greenhouse	25	FV	Outrech to H-2A workers
04/28/23	Bonnie Plants	30		Outreach to H-2A workers and 2 seasonal
04/28/23	Holmberg Orchards	3		Outreach to H2A workers
05/04/23	Planter's Choice	5		Outreach to 5 migrant workers (from PR) with NEFWC staff
05/17/23	Clinton Nursery	52	FV	Outreach to 45 H2A workers and 7 seasonal
05/17/23	Cromwell Growers	33	FV	Outreach to H2A workers and Post-Housing Inspection Visit
05/22/23	Prides Corner Farm	184	FV	Outreach to H2A and seasonal workers with

				NEFWC staff and Generation Health Center
05/24/23	Grower Direct	41	FV	Outreach to H2A and seasonal workers
05/24/23	Lindy Farm	30	FV	Outreach to H2A workers
05/24/23	Jarmoc Tobacco	26	FV	Outreach to H2A and seasonal workers
05/24/23	Kogut Farm	5		Outreach to H2A workers and Post-Housing Inspection Visit
06/06/23	Fair Weather Farm	19	FV	Outreach to H2A and seasonal workers and Post-Housing Inspection Visit
06/06/23	Gotta's Farm	4		Outreach to H2A workers and Post-Housing Inspection Visit
06/06/23	Dondero Orchard	3		Outreach to H2A workers and Post-Housing Inspection Visit
06/06/23	Scott's Orchard	6		Outreach to H2A and seasonal workers and Post-Housing Inspection Visit
06/07/23	Blue Hill Orchard	8		Outreach to H2A and seasonal workers and Post-Housing Inspection Visit
06/16/23	Lyman Farms	8		Outreach to H2A worker and Post-Housing Inspection Visit
06/16/23	Rogers Orchards	14	FV	Outreach to H2A workers
06/16/23	CK Greenhouses	100		Outreach to H2A workers and Post-Housing Inspection Visit
06/16/23	Casertanos Greenhouses	100		Outreach to H2A workers
06/21/23	Prides Corner Farm	2	FC	Field Check and Post-Housing Inspection Visit

- (6) A summary of the State's actions taken under the Complaint System described in part 658, Subpart E of this chapter, identifying any challenges, complaint trends, tracking resolution of complaints, findings from reviews of the Complaint System, trainings offered throughout the year, and steps taken to inform and educate MSFWs, employers, and farmworker advocacy groups about the Complaint System.

During PY 2022, CTDOL continued to promote the availability of the Job Service Complaint system to Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers. The SMA received copies of the Job Service Complaint and Apparent Violations logs from each local office at the conclusion of each calendar quarter. There were no official MSFW complaints filed during PY 2022, but some apparent violations were resolved through informal resolution. An issue has been identified and a finding issued for some complaint logs being forwarded to the SMA without accompanying ETA 8429's or any other records. The SWA staff member in charge of CTDOL's Complaint System has already instructed all AJCs that ETA 8429's are required for all complaints recorded on logs.

- (7) A summary of how the SMA is working with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) sec. 167 NFJP grantees and other organizations serving farmworkers, employers and employer organizations, in the State, and an assurance that the SMA is meeting at least quarterly with representatives of these organizations. The summary should include whether the SMA has established a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the NFJP



grantee or other farmworker organizations in accordance with 20 CFR 653.108 (l).

Activities in which the SMA was involved in PY 2022 that promoted interagency cooperation included, but were not limited to:

Continued cooperation with NEFWC in an effort to provide MSFWs with employment and training services in a more fluid manner while avoiding duplication of services. Some outreach visits to MSFWs at farms were coordinated with NEFWC. NEFWC is also introduced to AJC staff during MSFW Identification Training sessions, allowing them to give AJC staff an overview of the services they offer to not only MSFWs, but their family members as well. Historically speaking, CTDOL has had a statewide MOU with NEFWC, its NJFP grantee, that is reviewed and renewed on a biennial basis. The current agreement signed in place is between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2024.

Coordinated with Jarmoc Farms to host University of Connecticut History 1570 honor class students on a field trip on October 12, 2022. The SMA and Foreign Labor Representative coordinated a live presentation with the then director of the Connecticut River Valley Farmworker Health Program at the same University of Connecticut class the week prior to the field trip, on October 5, 2022. Students learned about the Monitor Advocate system and its history, as well as the history behind community health centers. Students from this class have been known to end up taking on social issues as either part of their careers or volunteer work.

Continued to assist the CRVFHP and area community health centers to coordinate the provision of COVID-19 educational materials, alerting employers of assistance with planning, personal protective equipment, and vaccine availability. The SMA was also, and continues to be, a member of the CRVFHP Advisory Council, meeting with other council members at least quarterly.

Continued to remind other SMAs and SWAs the importance of getting back out on the field to see the workers and conducting pre-occupancy housing inspections in person, not virtually.

A former connection established with New Connecticut Farmer Alliance will allow CTDOL to assist some 350 farmworkers to apply for funds under the USDA's Farm and Food Workers Relief Program.

- (8) A summary of the statistical and other MSFW-related data and reports gathered by SWAs and ES offices for the year, including an overview of the SMA's involvement in the SWA's reporting systems.

CTDOL has both the SMA and Outreach Worker positions structured within its Performance & Accountability unit, responsible for providing support to CTDOL's Workforce Development Business System, CTHires, as well as generating reports, providing technical support to agency programs and departments, and performing both program and administrative functions for Foreign Labor Certification (FLC), Equal Opportunity (EO) / Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the MSFW Program. The SMA is able to source and analyze performance data consistently without issues due to this structure. All MSFW registrations are reviewed, and corrected if necessary, on a quarterly basis prior to data submission to ETA.

- (9) A summary of the training conducted for SWA personnel, including ES office personnel, on techniques for accurately reporting data.

The SMA provided a refresher MSFW training session on 3/20/23. Further follow-up training will take place when updates to the Complaint System take place. Data reporting will be at the center of the training, as Equity Ratio Indicators are an expected topic.

- (10) A summary of activities related to the Agricultural Outreach Plan (AOP) and an explanation of how those activities helped the State reach the goals and objectives described in the AOP. At the end of the 4-year AOP cycle, the summary must include a synopsis of the SWA's

achievements over the previous 4 years to accomplish the goals set forth in the AOP, and description of the goals which were not achieved and the steps the SWA will take to address those deficiencies.

### MSFWs

For PY 2022, the SMA has accompanied the Foreign Labor Representative on most of the pre-occupancy housing inspections to provide outreach to employers and help them understand some of the housing requirements, as well as some of certain shortfalls within said requirements. The overall goal is to convince employers to go above and beyond on certain regulations that end up affecting the workers in the housing, which the employers may not realize. If seasonal workers are present during these visits, the Foreign Labor Representative and SMA make sure to speak to them about services available at Job Centers and provide them with MSFW Informational Cards—containing contact information for the SMA and OW, U.S. Wage & Hour, NEFWC, Statewide Legal Services, and a number of Community Health Centers, amongst others. The Foreign Labor Representative (assisting in the Outreach Worker role) and SMA also continued contact with NEFWC staff several times in the off-season to provide Workforce Information Services, assist workers with questions, and refer workers to the AJC for further services. During the work season, the SMA, Foreign Labor Representative, and NEFWC staff met and planned outreach visits to workers at participating farms, as well as new ones unfamiliar with our programs.

### Employers and Others

The Foreign Labor Representative and SMA have continued to establish and develop their relationships with participants of the H2-A Program through frequent outreach visits and phone contact, offering the employers assistance with the screening of qualified (when applicable) workers during recruitment, providing technical assistance for compliance with Wagner-Peyser regulations and Federal/State employment laws, and acting as a resource and support system on employment related issues. The Foreign Labor Representative and SMA have also reached spoken to employers not utilizing the Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS), educating them on the State Monitor Advocate System, the services available through the CTDOL, and the services and protections available to MSFWs. The Foreign Labor Representative and SMA were approached by another employer this season, under the recommendation of another employer that files job orders in relation to H-2A. This allowed the Foreign Labor Representative and the SMA to advocate and recommend the employer exceed some of the antiquated minimum requirements when it comes to housing regulations.

CTDOL has also continued to collaborate with the Puerto Rico SWA in the recruitment of job seekers to fill the positions generated by agricultural employers in Connecticut. In cases where a worker from Puerto Rico completed his/her employment contract and the employer was pleased with their performance, CTDOL and local DOL offices in Puerto Rico made note of the successful match and attempted to recruit that same individual for the same employer in the following year, thus reducing the burden of constantly retraining individuals and alleviating some of the stress that workers experience in unfamiliar working and living environments.

During PY 2022 the SMA continued his close collaboration with the Connecticut River Valley Farm Worker Health Program (CRVFHP), but has shifted his focus of collaboration to the Community Health Centers and staff providing services to MSFWs due to recent managerial changes at the CRVFHP.

Other activities in PY 2022 included assisting new SMAs with regulatory issues and advocacy, always promoting relationship building with other agencies and stakeholders. The SMA has also tried connecting different stakeholders together to benefit MSFWs, such as New Farmer Alliance with AHEC, UConn Health, and the CRVFHP, or Yale School of Public Health with CTDOL and

CRVFHP. The SMA and Foreign Labor Representative have also continued to educate University of Connecticut students about farmworkers and their plight when hosting their History 1570 class at a farm outing.

11. For significant MSFW ERS offices, a summary of the functioning of the State’s staffing program under 20 CFR 653.111

CTDOL did not have any AJCs designated as Significant MSFW ES Offices for PY 2022.

(E) **State Monitor Advocate** The plan must contain a statement confirming the State Monitor Advocate has reviewed and approved the AOP.

Connecticut’s SMA has reviewed and approved CTDOL’s Agricultural Outreach Plan.

**WAGNER-PEYSER ASSURANCES**

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service is co-located with one-stop centers or a plan and timeline has been developed to comply with this requirement within a reasonable amount of time (sec 121(e)(3));	Yes
2. If the State has significant MSFW one-stop centers, the State agency is complying with the requirements under 20 CFR 653.111, State Workforce Agency staffing requirements;	Yes
3. If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser Act services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I; and	Yes

<p>4. SWA officials:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Initiate the discontinuation of services;</li> <li>2) Make the determination that services need to be discontinued;</li> <li>3) Make the determination to reinstate services after the services have been discontinued;</li> <li>4) Approve corrective action plans;</li> <li>5) Approve the removal of an employer’s clearance orders from interstate or intrastate clearance if the employer was granted conditional access to ARS and did not come into compliance within 5 calendar days;</li> <li>6) Enter into agreements with State and Federal enforcement agencies for enforcement-agency staff to conduct field checks on the SWAs’ behalf (if the SWA so chooses); and</li> <li>7) Decide whether to consent to the withdrawal of complaints if a party who requested a hearing wishes to withdraw its request for hearing in writing before the hearing.</li> </ol>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>5. The SWA has established and maintains a self-appraisal system for ES operations to determine success in reaching goals and to correct deficiencies in performance (20 CFR 658.601).</p>	<p>Yes</p>

**WAGNER PEYSER PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	66.0		67.0	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	63.0		64.0	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$6,700		\$6,800	
Credential Attainment Rate	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Measurable Skill Gains	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Effectiveness in Serving Employers” is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2024 State Plan.

**ACT PROGRAMS  
(a) ALIGNING OF CONTENT STANDARDS**

Connecticut adopted the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) for Adult Education released by the United States Department of Education Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE). These content standards align closely with the Connecticut Core Standards (CCS).

All Connecticut adult education Providers are required to use the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education (CCRS) or the English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards in aligning all academic content and activities. The CSDE's policy requires that CCRS standards are evident in all content and curriculum in Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Educational Development (GED) and Credit Diploma Programs (CDP). All Connecticut teachers must show evidence that they have been trained in using the Math or English Language Arts CCR Standards, and all English as a Second Language teachers must provide evidence that they have been trained in using the ELP Standards in curriculum. As a requirement for AEFLA funding, eligible applicants who do not meet this criterion must make provisions to do so. Connecticut has a policy that all adult education providers have their Adult Basic Education (ABE)/General Educational Development (GED) and Credit Diploma subject teachers trained in using the CCRS in their curriculum.

The English Language Proficiency Standards (ELP Standards) are intended to address the urgent need for educational equity, access and rigor for adult English language learners (ELLs). The standards are essential to ensuring adult ELLs receive the focused and effective instruction they need to access states' academic content standards for college and career readiness. To that end, the ELP standards emphasize the academic language needed by adult ELLs to engage with and meet state-adopted content standards. When the language demands inherent in state-adopted academic content standards are better understood, we can deliver more effective instruction to our adult ELLs. The ELPS were identified to help ensure that all adult ELLs can obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency. Connecticut now requires ESL curriculum and instruction to be aligned with the ELP standards, which are derived from the CCRS.

Connecticut has committed to use of the CCRS and ELPS in all adult education classes. CSDE continues to make training available for newly hired teachers and to provide training for lead teachers in alignment of resources and lesson review to the CCRS and ELPS. Technical assistance is ongoing for this effort. All AE teachers are required to be trained and CSDE has increased accessibility to the training through online and on-demand options to ensure all teachers can access training.

CSDE has also added an implementation level of training that is available to all new and previously standards-certified instructors.

**(b) LOCAL ACTIVITIES**

**ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY ACTIVITIES (SECTION 203 OF WIOA)**

The State of Connecticut will award multi-year Program Enhancement Project for Adult Education (PEP) grants to eligible providers through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process to enable providers to develop, implement and improve adult education and literacy activities. The CSDE will use the same grant announcement and application process to ensure that all eligible providers have direct and equitable access to apply for these grants under WIOA. The CSDE will publish and post on the CSDE Request for Proposals and the Adult Education Federal Legislation and Grants webpages. In addition, a notice of the RFP will be e-mailed to all current grant-funded eligible

applicants and other interested parties, as defined under eligible agencies of the RFP. A bidders' conference will be publicly advertised with the Notice of Availability. At the bidders' conference, CSDE staff will be available to provide information on the proposal application procedures, proposal format and funding requirements. During the RFP process, the CSDE will also provide a technical assistance session for potential applicants on the permissible use of Integrated Education and Training and Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education funds while reinforcing the requirements of the nationally recognized integrated training approach described in the IET Design Toolkit (American Institute for Research (AIR)).

Agencies that are eligible for funding through the CSDE, provided they have demonstrated effectiveness, may include: LEAs; community-based organizations or faith-based organizations; volunteer literacy organizations; institutions of higher education; public or private nonprofit agencies; libraries; public housing authorities; other nonprofit institutions that have the ability to provide adult education and literacy activities to eligible individuals; a consortium or coalition of the agencies, organizations, institutions, libraries or authorities described above; and a partnership between an employer and an entity described above. All eligible applicants will go through the same application and review process and have direct and equitable access to apply and compete for title II grants and contracts, including WIOA Sections 225 (Corrections), 231 (Comprehensive) and 243 (IELCE). Grants will be awarded to agencies that have demonstrated effectiveness in providing adult education and literacy activities to individuals who: have attained 17 years of age, are not enrolled or required to be enrolled in a secondary school under Connecticut state law; and who are basic skills deficient, do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and have not achieved an equivalent level of education; or are an English language learner (ELL).

The CSDE will require entities that intend to apply for the Program Enhancement Projects (PEP) grant to submit a Letter of Intent to Apply so CSDE can review program eligibility. Submission of a Letter of Intent will not obligate the organization to submit a proposal for funding nor does it guarantee that an eligible applicant will receive funding.

A total of nine priority areas will be funded under this multi-year grant cycle. Applicant agencies will be able to apply for more than one priority area within the application. The proposal must be prepared in accordance with the proposal guidelines and requirements outlined in the RFP. Proposals not meeting all requirements will not be reviewed. Each priority area for which the agency is applying must have a project plan, which includes all the elements listed in the priority area specifications and the priority area planning documents.

Local grants will be distributed based on the ability to meet the requirements of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) purposes outlined in the WIOA and have demonstrated effectiveness in: (1) assisting adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and economic self-sufficiency; (2) assisting adults who are parents or family members to becoming a full partner in the educational development of their children; (3) assisting adults in completing high school; (4) promoting transitions from adult education to postsecondary education and training through career pathways; (5) assisting immigrants and ELLs to improve reading, writing, math, speaking, and comprehensive skills in the English language; and acquiring an understanding of American government, individual freedom and responsibilities of citizenship.

The CSDE will make funding available to eligible providers in each of the five Service Delivery Areas (SDA) in Connecticut. The Department, in conjunction with each WDB, will assess service delivery area (SDA) needs and WDB goals. Eligible providers will select the appropriate priority area when drafting and submitting the RFP to the CSDE. The RFP will be published for at least six-weeks to allow sufficient time between RFP distribution and proposal submission to the CSDE. RFPs will be evaluated by a review team comprised of interagency staff and experts in each priority area. Interagency participants will include representatives of the CSDE, the WDB, One-

Stop partners, and Vocational Rehabilitation partners. The review team will evaluate each proposal using a standardized evaluation form based on required federal, state and regional criteria published in the RFP (including the considerations listed in the WIOA, Title II, Section 231). An internal edit check will be conducted by CSDE staff to ensure compliance with the requirements of Title II of the WIOA, all applicable laws and RFP criteria.

The CSDE will use the following process to distribute funds to approved applicants: not less than 82.5 percent of the grant funds shall be used to award grants and contracts under Section 231 of the WIOA and to carry out Section 225 of the WIOA (Programs for Corrections Education and Other Institutionalized Individuals); not more than 20 percent of such amount shall be available to carry out Section 225; not more than 12.5 percent of the grant funds shall be used to carry out State Leadership activities under Section 223 of the WIOA; and not more than 5 percent of the grant funds, or \$85,000, whichever is greater, shall be used for administrative expenses of the eligible agency. All allowable costs for the federally funded Adult Basic Education program are defined in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-87. This document will be used to determine reasonableness, allowability and allocability of costs. All costs must be supported by source documentation.

Using the evaluation criteria published in the RFP, proposal reviews will involve a standardized evaluation process, which includes the following items: the eligible provider's response to RFP requirements; the accuracy of the itemized budget in meeting line item limits and definitions; the provision of adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities; workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster; and the considerations listed in the WIOA, Title II, Section 231(e) (listed below).

The weight of each consideration in the evaluation process will be defined in the RFP. Evidence required to support each consideration has been defined and is printed within parentheses with the corresponding consideration. The assessment of each grant application will involve an intense evaluation of the ability of the eligible provider to meet the literacy needs of the area and to comply with the expectations and statutes described within the WIOA. The review process and scoring rubric will consider the following 13 considerations:

1. The degree to which the eligible provider would be responsive to:
  - a. regional needs as identified in the local plan under the WIOA, Title II, Section 108 (as evidenced by a description of regional needs and how the applicant will be responsive to those needs); and
  - b. serving individuals in the community who were identified as most in need of adult education and literacy activities, including individuals with low literacy skills or who are ELLs (as evidenced by an objective statement of need accompanied by a recruitment and retention plan which targets these individuals).
2. The ability of the eligible provider to serve eligible individuals with disabilities, including eligible individuals with learning disabilities (as evidenced by an objective statement of need accompanied by a recruitment and retention plan which targets these individuals)
3. Past effectiveness of the eligible provider in improving the literacy of eligible individuals to meet state-adjusted levels of performance for the primary indicators of performance described in the WIOA, Title II, Section 116, especially with respect to eligible individuals with low literacy (as evidenced by meeting or exceeding performance measures based on documentation from the Literacy, Adult and Community Education System (LACES) and annual reviews for previously funded providers, and as evidenced by comparable objective performance measures which demonstrate successful student outcomes for new eligible providers).

4. The extent to which the eligible provider demonstrates alignment between proposed activities and services and the strategy and goals of the local plan under the WIOA, Title II, Section 108, as well as the activities and services of the One-Stop partners (as evidenced by description of proposed activities and strategies and goals and how the provider plans to align them).
5. Whether the eligible provider's program is of sufficient intensity and quality; based on the most rigorous research available so that participants achieve substantial learning gains; and uses instructional practices that include the essential components of reading instruction (as evidenced by a program design suitable to achieve applicable performance measures— appropriateness of program design may be demonstrated by past performance of successful outcomes or documentation of a similar program design and associated outcomes).
6. Whether the eligible provider's activities, including whether reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, and English language acquisition instruction delivered by the eligible provider are based on best practices derived from the most rigorous research available and appropriate, including scientifically valid research and effective educational practice (as evidenced by program design and/or curriculum).
7. Whether the eligible provider's activities effectively use technology, services and delivery systems, including distance education in a manner sufficient to increase the amount and quality of learning and how such technology, services and systems lead to improved performance (as evidenced by program design and/or curriculum and the accessibility of hardware and software applications as appropriate).
8. Whether the eligible provider's activities provide learning in context, including through integrated education and training, so that an individual acquires the skills needed to transition to and complete postsecondary education and training programs, obtain and advance in employment leading to economic self-sufficiency, and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship (as evidenced by program design and/or curriculum which focus on skills needed for postsecondary education and training, the workplace and citizenship).
9. Whether the eligible provider's activities are delivered by well-trained instructors, counselors, and administrators who meet any minimum qualifications established by the state, where applicable, and who have access to high-quality professional development, including through electronic means (as evidenced by appropriate degrees, certifications and trainings).
10. Whether the eligible provider's activities coordinate with other available education, training and social service resources in the community, such as by establishing strong links with elementary schools and secondary schools, postsecondary educational institutions, institutions of higher education, local WDBs, One-Stop Centers, job training programs, social service agencies, business, industry, labor organizations, community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and intermediaries, for the development of career pathways (as evidenced by formal collaborations and the commitment of the provider to assess and address the literacy and non-literacy support services of participants).
11. Whether the eligible provider's activities offer flexible schedules and coordination with federal, state, and local support services (such as child care, transportation, mental health services and career planning) that are necessary to enable individuals, including individuals with disabilities or other special needs, to attend and complete programs (as evidenced by program schedules and documentation of support services available).
12. Whether the eligible provider maintains a high-quality information management system that has the capacity to report measurable participant outcomes (consistent with the



WIOA, Title II, Section 116) and to monitor program performance (as evidenced by prior participation in or a commitment to participate in the eligible agency's Connecticut Competency System and Connecticut Adult Reporting System and to submit comprehensive, timely and accurate data).

13. Whether the local areas in which the eligible provider is located have a demonstrated need for additional English language acquisition programs and civics education programs (as evidenced by area demographic data) and Section 203 of the WIOA (the Adult Education and Literacy Activities).

The CSDE will require eligible providers receiving grant funding to carry out corrections education or education for other institutionalized individuals and use the grant funds to operate the following adult education programs/activities: ABE instruction is designed for adults seeking a high school diploma who are functioning below the secondary school level and lack the basic reading, writing and numeracy skills necessary to function effectively as workers, parents and citizens. Instruction can be individualized or offered in a classroom or a learning lab. Persons completing ABE are prepared to benefit from secondary level instruction.

Connecticut strongly supports providers in their efforts to increase literacy in all its forms across the state. State and Federal funding is used to provide classes intended to raise literacy levels for Multi-Language Learners (MLLs) through ESL classes and adults who are designated academically deficient as identified through CASAS testing. Use of the College Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) or the English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards is required of all adult education providers and emphasis is placed on the ability of all adult education programs to demonstrate evidence of students' measurable skill gains. For students whose academic levels show the ability to participate in services which allow them to earn a high school credential, each adult education provider must offer at least one of the three pathways to a high school diploma which Connecticut supports: the Credit Diploma Program (CDP); General Education Development (GED); National External Diploma Program (NEDP).

Connecticut Adult Education services are made available to individuals who are not in the workforce or who are in low-paying jobs due to not having a high school credential or who are not proficient in the English language. These individuals in need of adult education and literacy services receive those services at no cost due to significant State funding as well as their ability to apply for federal dollars. In addition to instruction in English for Multi-Lingual Learners (MLLs), Connecticut offers Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes and three pathways to a high school diploma: General Education Development (GED) preparation, the Credit Diploma Program (CDP) and the National External Diploma Program (NEDP) which all lead to either a local district or Connecticut State high school diploma.

In addition to academic literacy, Connecticut supports Digital Literacy by making the Northstar program available to all adult education providers free of charge. In addition, funding is provided specifically for professional development and support for technology in the classroom. A library of resources is maintained for use by teachers, and ongoing technical support is available to all adult education providers.

### **Adult Basic Education (ABE)**

Adult Basic Education (ABE) instruction is designed for adults seeking a high school diploma who are functioning below the secondary school level and lack the basic reading, writing and numeracy skills necessary to function effectively as workers, parents and citizens. Instruction can be individualized or offered in a classroom, or a learning lab. Persons completing ABE are prepared to benefit from secondary level instruction.

ABE educational functioning levels are as follows:

- ABE Level 1
- ABE Level 2
- ABE Level 3
- ABE Level 4

**Adult Secondary Education (ASE)** Connecticut Adult Education offers three distinct pathways for adults to attain a high school diploma:

**1. Adult High School Credit Diploma (AHSCD):** The AHSCD program is a prescribed plan, process and structure for earning a required number of academic and elective credits. The provider must be an LEA or RESC. Credits toward a local diploma must be obtained through a prescribed plan. Each provider/town can enhance the basic AHSCD program but must adhere to the minimum state requirements: 1) use certified teachers and counselors; 2) adhere to CSDE requirements regarding assessment, enrollment, accountability and reporting; 3) meet required credit standards; and 4) ensure that a one credit course offers a minimum of 48 instructional hours. An adult who successfully completes the required credits of the AHSCD program is awarded a high school diploma by the providing LEA or RESC.

**2. General Educational Development (GED):** Adults who have not completed high school must demonstrate, through an examination, the attainment of academic skills and concepts normally acquired through completion of a high school program. Applicants for this examination must be at least 17 years of age and officially withdrawn from school for at least six months. Individuals who pass the GED Tests are awarded a Connecticut State High School Diploma. GED instructional programs, provided throughout the state in local school districts and a variety of other instructional sites, help individuals to prepare for this rigorous examination.

**3. National External Diploma Program (NEDP):** This program provides a secondary school credential designed for adults who have gained skills through life experiences and demonstrated competence in a particular job, talent or academic area. The NEDP is an online portfolio assessment program that offers no classroom instruction. An adult who successfully completes the portfolio assessment, as required, is awarded a high school diploma by the providing LEA or RESC.

Adult Secondary Education (ASE) programs must integrate functional life and employability skills into the curriculum, incorporate technology into the instructional process, and provide comprehensive counseling, transition and support services in collaboration with other community or human services organizations.

ASE educational functioning levels are as follows:

- ABE Level 5
- ABE Level 6

### **Workplace Adult Education and Literacy Activities**

Connecticut is focused on creating robust partnerships with educators that focus on aligning curriculum with the needs of Connecticut employers and industries. The Connecticut Department of Education (CSDE) Adult Education Unit members serve on the Boards of Directors on most Connecticut Workforce Development Boards (WDBs). CSDE works to strengthen the relationship between adult education providers and the WDBs through engaging on multiple levels.

Workforce Education Services Programs will provide workforce preparation skills, including literacy instruction, employability skills, career exploration and development, and links to employment, employment services and other options in order to respond to the evolving needs of the business community and promote individual self-sufficiency. Workforce readiness

programs offer instruction to support transition to work, entry-level employment, and reentry into the workforce for unemployed individuals.

In addition, Connecticut adult education providers must each have on staff a Career Navigator who has participated in training activities sponsored by World Education contracted through CSDE. Each provider must have on file a systemic plan for Career Navigation that describes how the organization will work to increase awareness of career opportunities, workplace education and training opportunities through the American Job Centers and academic content intended to allow all students to engage in opportunities statewide.

**Family Literacy Activities:**

Connecticut provides federal funding for Family Literacy programs. It is mandatory that these activities are of sufficient intensity and quality to make sustainable improvements in the economic prospects for a family and also better enable parents or family members to support their children's learning needs. Connecticut adult education provides adult education and literacy activities that lead to readiness for postsecondary education or training, career advancement, and economic self-sufficiency. Connecticut requires participating programs to provide all four components of a family literacy program: Adult Education, Early Childhood Education, Parenting Education, and Parent and Child Together (PACT) time. Providers must incorporate instruction and activities that lead to increased involvement in children's education such as helping children more frequently with their schoolwork or increasing contact with their children's teachers to discuss school education and having more involvement in the children's school. This instruction is designed to increase involvement in children's literacy and include reading to children, visiting a library or purchasing books or magazines for children.

**English Language Acquisition Activities:**

English language acquisition programs are designed to assist eligible individuals who are English-language learners achieve competence in reading, writing, speaking and comprehension of the English language as listed in the NRS educational functioning level table as ESL 1-6. Instruction is provided for adults who are not proficient in the English language or whose native language is not English. ESL programs assist individuals to improve their English skills in order to find or maintain employment, attain citizenship, become more involved with their children's schooling and make greater use of community resources. Instruction is provided in English as a unifying means of serving the broad ethnic diversity of limited-English-speaking adults which represents 120,195 people in Connecticut or 4.4% of the State's population

**Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE):**

Connecticut provides educational services to English language learners who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, that enables these adults to achieve competency in the English language as well as to acquire the basic and more advanced skills needed to function effectively as parents, workers, and citizens in the United States. Services provided include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition, instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation, and also offer workforce training.

The term "integrated English literacy and civics education": means education services provided to ELLs who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries that enables such adults to achieve competency in the English language and acquire the basic and more advanced skills needed to function effectively as parents, workers, and citizens in the United States. Such services shall include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation and may include workforce training.

IELCE programs must contain the following: contextualized instruction in literacy and English language acquisition, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, naturalization procedures, civic participation and U.S. history and government; program design and goals that focus on preparing adults for employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency; curriculum focus on skills that will provide information and support in the skills necessary for the workplace; coordination with the local workforce system and activities provided in combination with integrated education/training (IET) activities; improvement of literacy skills including speaking, reading, writing and numeracy in order to provide learners with the skills to apply English and mathematics accurately and appropriately in a variety of home, community, workplace and academic settings; opportunities for experiential learning in which participants are actively engaged in community pursuits are included in the program design; utilization of research-based instructional models that have proven effective in teaching individuals to read, write and speak English effectively; collaboration with community agencies that offer services to limited English proficient populations; and embedding technology literacy into the core curriculum. Additional program activities directly related to the use of these funds include: participation in career pathways exploration and distance-learning activities that impact competence in the workplace; integration of various hand-held technologies into classroom work, including tablets and smart phones; creation of video oral histories; exposure to basic math vocabulary and interpretation of charts, tables and graphs; knowledge of the American education system with special focus on addressing the needs of families new to the U.S. school system; and cross-cultural perspectives, civic responsibility, democracy topics and independent projects.

Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education also provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement. Adult education providers are encouraged to prepare students for careers related to these areas of focus and to provide opportunities for experiential learning in which participants are actively engaged in community pursuits.

### **Integrated Education and Training (IET)**

The CSDE will continue to assist the DOL with expanding the development and implementation of the IET delivery model offering industry-recognized credentials. Adult Education programs will work with WDB areas to provide IET training to Jobs First Employment Service (JFES) clients who receive Temporary Family Assistance (TFA). Programs must demonstrate a commitment to provide appropriate support services to students enrolled in the integrated pathway program. These services may include, but are not limited to, tutoring or other academic supports, college navigation support, career planning, transportation assistance, and/or childcare.

Once grants are awarded, mid-year and year-end evaluative reports will require that program providers submit a current program profile, which will ensure that all projects have met the standards established by the eligible entity (CSDE) and that all goals have been achieved.

Projects not meeting the established standards will be identified for the CSDE's intervention, which may include onsite technical assistance, a decrease in funding or the elimination of funding.

### **Special Rule**

Each eligible agency awarding a grant or contract under this section shall not use any funds made available under this title for adult education and literacy activities for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are under the age of 16 (17 in Connecticut) and are enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under State law, except that such agency may use such funds for such purpose if such programs, services, or activities are related to family literacy activities. In providing family literacy

activities under this title, an eligible provider shall attempt to coordinate with programs and services that are not assisted under this title prior to using funds for adult education and literacy activities under this title for activities other than activities for eligible individuals.

**(c) CORRECTIONS EDUCATION AND OTHER EDUCATION OF INSTITUTIONALIZED INDIVIDUALS**

Each eligible agency using funds provided under programs for correctional education and other institutionalized individuals to carry out a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution must give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participation in the program.

The CSDE will reserve no more than 20 percent of its federal grant received under the WIOA to provide programs for correctional education and education for other institutionalized individuals as described in Section 225 of the Act. Funding under Section 225 will include the following correctional institutionalized settings: prisons, jail reformatories, detention centers, halfway houses, community-based rehabilitation centers or other similar institutions designed for the confinement or rehabilitation of criminal offenders. The CSDE shall also require that each eligible provider using grant funds under Section 225 to carry out a program for criminal offenders in a correctional institution shall give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participation in the program.

Additionally, each provider must offer at least one of the following programs:

- **Adult Education and Literacy:** Program shall be designed to provide academic instruction and educational services BELOW the postsecondary level that increases an individual's ability to: 1) read, write, and speak in English and perform mathematics or other activities necessary to attain a high school equivalency credential, function on the job, in the family and in society; 2) transition to postsecondary education and training; and 3) obtain employment.
  - Adult Basic Education (ABE): A program of academic instruction and education services below the secondary level that increase an individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English and perform mathematics necessary to attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent.
  - Adult Secondary Education (ASE): A program of academic instruction and educational services at the secondary level that increase an individual's ability to read, write, and perform mathematics necessary to attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent.
- **English as a Second Language (ESL):** An English language acquisition program shall be designed to assist eligible individuals who are English-language learners achieve competence in reading, writing, speaking and comprehension of the English language to eligible individuals with educational functioning levels at a particular literacy level as listed in the NRS educational functioning level table as ESL 1-6. Participation in ESL activities also must be designed to lead to the attainment of a secondary school diploma or its equivalent.
- **Workforce Preparation:** Workforce preparation program shall be designed to include activities/services to individuals needing to acquire a combination of basic academic skills, critical thinking skills, digital literacy skills and self-management skills, Participation in workforce preparation activities also must be designed to lead to employability skills and the development of competencies in using resources and information, working with others, and understanding systems to successfully transition to and complete postsecondary education, training and employment.
- **Integrated Education and Training:** An IET program shall be designed to provide adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement. Required IET components are: 1) adult

education and literacy, 2) workforce preparation activities, and 3) workforce training. Instruction is based on occupationally relevant materials for the purpose of educational and career advancement. Participation is intended for eligible individuals at all skill levels, including adults with low academic skills.

- **Peer Tutoring Services:** Program shall be designed to provide extensive training for specified offenders to serve as peer tutors in adult education and career and technical education classes.
- **Transition to Re-entry Initiatives and Other Post-release Services:** Program shall be designed to provide services/activities to assist with reducing recidivism.

(d) INTEGRATED ENGLISH LITERACY AND CIVICS EDUCATION PROGRAM  
DESCRIBE HOW THE ELIGIBLE AGENCY WILL, USING THE CONSIDERATIONS SPECIFIED IN SECTION 231(E) OF WIOA AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 CFR 463 SUBPART C, FUND ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS TO ESTABLISH OR OPERATE INTEGRATED ENGLISH LITERACY AND CIVICS EDUCATION (IELCE) PROGRAMS UNDER SECTION 243 OF WIOA. DESCRIBE HOW ADULT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS, INCLUDING PROFESSIONALS WITH DEGREES AND CREDENTIALS IN THEIR NATIVE COUNTRIES, ARE SERVED IN IELCE PROGRAMS.

Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) activities assist individuals who must be able to read and communicate in English in order to understand and navigate governmental, educational, workplace systems and key American institutions. The term "Integrated English literacy and civics education" means education services provided to ELLs who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries that enables such adults to achieve competency in the English language and acquire the basic and more advanced skills needed to function effectively as parents, workers, and citizens in the United States. Such services shall include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation, and may include workforce training. For the purpose of educational and career advancement, IELCE also provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce readiness activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster.

The CSDE will award Section 243 IELCE funding as a part of its adult education program enhancement project grants through a multi-year competition in accordance with Sec 231(c) of WIOA. Applicants may choose to apply for 243 funds in combination with applying for AEFLA comprehensive funds or as a standalone application. All providers must align instruction to the CCR Standards for Adult Education and/or English Language Proficiency Standards. In addition, they must provide opportunities for experiential learning in which participants are actively engaged in community pursuits. Recipients of IELCE funds must provide at least one IET option. Not all students are required to be enrolled in IET to participate. The program design and goals should focus on improving literacy skills and preparing adults for employment in in-demand industries and occupations that leads to economic self-sufficiency and integrates with the local workforce development system. It is expected that all classes are of sufficient intensity and quality so that students achieve substantial learning gains and relevant performance measures.

Since the WIOA requires an intentional connection to the workplace, to careers and to the workforce system (employers, WDB, Chambers of Commerce, etc.) for IELCE programs, the CSDE will continue to work with the DOL to expand its Integrated Education and Training (IET) model offering industry-recognized credentials to integrated IELCE programs. Adult Education programs will work with WDBs in local workforce areas to provide assistance to local programs. Applicants for IELCE funding must maintain an active collaboration with the Department of Labor and the associated local American Job Centers (AJCs). A representative of each provider must regularly attend local WDB Board and Business Services meetings. In addition, a program representative must attend all federal grant meetings required by the CSDE. The CSDE will provide professional

learning opportunities for program staff in the areas of academic instruction, digital literacy, workforce readiness and IELCE.

The CSDE will hold meetings with grantees regarding the requirements of the program and provide mandatory professional development sessions for IELCE instructors and staff on integrating career awareness, workforce skills and career pathways. Eligible providers will design programs that deliver the activities under the WIOA including the integration of literacy and English language instruction with occupational skill training, including promoting linkages with employers. Eligible providers must demonstrate their ability to prepare ELLs for unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency, and how they will integrate the program with the local workforce development system to carry out the activities of the program.

DESCRIBE HOW THE INTEGRATED ENGLISH LITERACY AND CIVICS EDUCATION PROGRAM UNDER SECTION 243(A) OF WIOA WILL BE OFFERED IN COMBINATION WITH INTEGRATED EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES FOUND IN 34 CFR SECTION 463.36.

Through the plan that each provider is required to have in place for use of IELCE funding they must provide activities that prepare learners for work and career pathways integrating digital literacy, career exploration and workforce readiness into the curriculum. Providers are encouraged to explore bridge programs as a means of supporting learners in the transition to Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education + Training (IELCE + T) programs, as appropriate. The IET component must have a curriculum that includes the three required, concurrent elements of IET: adult education and literacy; workforce preparation; and workforce training. The curriculum must provide high-quality content, activities, and materials that are occupationally contextualized with a single set of learning objectives (SSLOs) that integrate the adult education content/state-level standards, occupational skills, and workforce preparation activities to guide integrated instruction.

DESCRIBE HOW THE INTEGRATED ENGLISH LITERACY AND CIVICS EDUCATION PROGRAM UNDER SECTION 243(A) OF WIOA WILL INCLUDE INSTRUCTION IN LITERACY AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND INSTRUCTION ON THE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CITIZENSHIP AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION.

Each IELCE program includes instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation and also instruction in literacy and English language acquisition. By design IELCE serves high intermediate and advanced ESL students including professionals with degrees and credentials from native countries. Civics Education objectives include developing an understanding of the responsibilities of citizenship, American history and government, and assistance in navigating governmental, educational and workplace systems. Providers make use of instructional materials which incorporate civics and citizenship, finance, and math modules as well as career exploration and workplace skills. Instruction prepares students for activities such as voting and participation in community activities. Programming adapts to the needs and interests of the students by providing instruction as requested, such as how to respond to a jury summons and serve on a jury if called to do so.

*DESCRIBE HOW THE INTEGRATED ENGLISH LITERACY AND CIVICS EDUCATION PROGRAM UNDER SECTION 243(A) OF WIOA WILL BE DESIGNED TO PREPARE ADULTS WHO ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS FOR, AND PLACE SUCH ADULTS IN, UNSUBSIDIZED EMPLOYMENT IN IN-DEMAND INDUSTRIES AND OCCUPATIONS THAT LEAD TO ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY.*

Connecticut adult education providers that offer IELCE through their federal grants must provide curriculum and instruction designed to make students aware of careers that align with their interests and abilities. The Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) provides detailed labor

market information which is used to provide students with current information on careers, what is required to attain the career and average salary. Students are encouraged to create accounts in CTHires, the CTDOL one-stop center for career assessment, resume building, training opportunities, market trends and job postings. Links are provided to career resources such as O\*Net available from the U.S. Department of Labor.

Each provider has on staff a Career Navigator whose role is to provide students with resources and information on selecting a career and developing a plan for the postsecondary education and or training needed for entry into that industry. Career Navigators work with their counterparts in the American Job Centers to provide students who are eligible to work with information on subsidized training and other services designed to move individuals forward to family-sustaining careers.

*DESCRIBE HOW THE INTEGRATED ENGLISH LITERACY AND CIVICS EDUCATION PROGRAM UNDER SECTION 243(A) OF WIOA WILL BE DESIGNED TO INTEGRATE WITH THE LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM AND ITS FUNCTIONS TO CARRY OUT THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PROGRAM.*

Adult education providers align the instruction with the priority career pathways of their local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs). Connecticut boards focus on advanced manufacturing, healthcare and IT. An example of the IET component of ongoing IELCE programs includes workforce preparation related to healthcare careers: Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA); Medical Office Assistant (MOA); and Central Sterile Processing Technician (CSPT). Entry to careers in manufacturing includes instruction in the skills required for entrance into the Manufacturing Pipeline program offered by multiple WDBs. Providers partner with local community colleges to provide instruction which in some cases gives students the opportunity to earn college credits as well as certificates of completion and preparation for licensing exams.

#### (e) STATE LEADERSHIP

DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE THE FUNDS TO CARRY OUT THE REQUIRED STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES UNDER SECTION 223 OF WIOA

Description of Required Activities:

1. The CSDE will work with other core programs and One-Stop partners to ensure that adult education and literacy activities are in alignment and to develop career pathways which provide access to employment and training services for individuals in adult education and literacy activities. The CSDE will collaborate with the DOL to assist local providers in partnering with One-Stop Centers to develop career pathways and provide access to employment and training services. Professional development will be provided to local programs, including orientation to adult education programs and services for One-Stop partners and other agencies.

CSDE recently contracted with World Education to provide a series of trainings to ensure that each adult education provider has a trained Career Navigator available to work with all students. CSDE will continue to foster connections between the Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) as well as the Connecticut Department of Labor to create intersection with their Career Navigators. Bi-monthly meetings will be held with adult education Career Navigators and School Counselors to share information and assist adult education providers in awareness of available services and to create opportunities for cross-agency collaboration. CSDE maintains a listserve of all Career Navigators and regularly shares information on job and training opportunities provided by the WDBs. Recently, a presentation by LevelALL has resulted in all adult education providers receiving access to the resources available through that partnership for career awareness and development as well as in making the transition to postsecondary education and training.

The CSDE will ensure that training and technical assistance will address meeting regional needs and demonstrating alignment between proposed activities and services with core partners. It will also assist local programs in becoming familiar with the regional/state plan to determine



how it affects their programs. The CSDE will also work with local programs to establish stronger linkages with partners such as local schools, WDBs, One Stop centers, and job training programs.

2. Connecticut has instituted high quality professional development programs to improve instruction. Training will be provided related to the specific needs of adult learners and information about models and promising practices will be disseminated.

To enhance program quality and ensure continued progress in meeting the Core and Additional Indicators of Performance, the CSDE shall award one or more grants to eligible providers to deliver State Leadership activities, primarily professional development activities, with funds made available under this subtitle. In order to meet the various needs of our state, the CSDE may enter into partnerships with other states and/or the federal government in order to collaboratively fund projects that will meet individual needs and accomplish common goals. The CSDE shall not use more than 12.5 percent of the funds awarded under this subtitle for State Leadership activities. The CSDE will deliver a majority of its State Leadership and professional development services through the Adult Training and Development Network (ATDN). The CSDE's professional development model supports the implementation of the goals of Connecticut's Adult Education State Plan and consists of professional development basics and activities related to the implementation of career pathways.

3. The CSDE will provide technical assistance to local grantees in: the development and dissemination of instructional and programmatic practices based on scientifically valid research, available and appropriate, in reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, English language acquisition, distance education, staff training and content standards; the role of eligible providers as a one-stop partner to provide access to employment, education, and training services; and assistance in the use of technology, including staff training, to eligible providers, especially the use of technology to improve system efficiencies. Although providers find serving students with low literacy skills, who are ELL, or individuals with disabilities, including learning disabilities, as their strength, providers need assistance with curriculum materials and teaching strategies/best practices for students who are non-literate in their native language and with developing a scope and sequence curriculum for low level literacy skills and individuals with disabilities. In addition to providing more resources for math instruction, the CSDE will also provide technical assistance in serving adults with special learning needs and disabilities, including disability awareness sessions, resource and instructional materials, accommodation and instruction planning workshops, train-the-trainer sessions, referral information, and virtual consultation concerning program issues.

The CSDE will conduct program monitoring and evaluation to ensure compliance with federal and state funding requirements and to determine the effectiveness of programs in meeting the needs of the adult population and will disseminate information about models and proven or promising practices within the state. The CSDE has in place a data reporting system for each local provider. LACES can measure performance outcomes. The CSDE has developed a formalized follow-up and reporting process to report on the core indicators of obtaining or retaining employment and entering postsecondary education according to the National Reporting System (NRS) requirements. The follow-up and reporting process includes a memorandum of agreement for data sharing with other state agencies, including the DOL wage information system. The CSDE will participate in the statewide data system, which will assist the CSDE in working seamlessly with other partners while protecting the privacy rights of individuals. To provide the core service of performance and cost information for the WIOA, Title II, Section 231 providers to the One-Stop system, the eligible agency will develop a report which includes each program's success in meeting the state-adjusted levels of performance. This data will assist potential clients in identifying an appropriate adult education or literacy program in the local area.

DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE THE FUNDS TO CARRY OUT PERMISSIBLE STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES UNDER SECTION 223 OF WIOA, IF APPLICABLE

Description of Permissible Activities:

1. The CSDE will provide training and technical assistance to local programs in technology applications, translation technology and distance education, including professional development to support the use of instructional technology. Training and technology assistance to local programs in technology applications, especially in the area of Web-based communication (social media, phone apps, etc.) will be provided, as well as assistance in finding access to computers.
2. The CSDE will develop and disseminate curricula, including literacy curricula combined with the College and Career Readiness Standards where reading comprehension is tied to prior knowledge and is a critical component in the classroom and workplace. The dimensions prioritize cultivating students' knowledge base through reading and writing about content-rich material.
3. The CSDE will develop content and models for integrated education and training and career pathways. Connecticut Competency System (CCS) training sessions will be offered to both adult education and the workforce development community. The CCS is an integral part of the CSDE's career pathways, standards-based framework utilizing the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) to connect curriculum, assessment, and instruction that is able to capture progress made by adult education learners.
4. The CSDE will provide assistance to eligible providers in developing and implementing programs that achieve the objectives of this title, including meeting the state-adjusted levels of performance. The CSDE will provide technical assistance in implementing the CCS for appraisal, instruction and assessment in a life-skills and an employability context, including new teacher training, CCS Facilitator training, and One-Stop partner staff training, as well as the ordering and dissemination of CASAS curricula materials used in conjunction with the Connecticut Competency System. LACES will collect student demographic, attendance, assessment and outcome information for each student in the adult education program. LACES generates statewide and local demographic and performance assessment reports used for program planning, management and accountability. Data from the system allows the State to assess the effectiveness of local programs by measuring performance outcomes.
5. The CSDE will continue to partner with community colleges and other institutions of higher learning to assist adults to transition to postsecondary education and training. Training and technical assistance will be provided on effective methods of transitioning students. The CSDE will ensure that training and technical assistance will be provided, especially in areas such as employer engagement, the institution of career counselor position, and/or enhanced job responsibilities for current staff emphasizing transitions. The CSDE will also provide assistance in the implementation of training programs that assist adults in obtaining economic self-sufficiency.
6. The CSDE will work with the DOL to expand its Integrated Education and Training (IET) delivery model offering industry-recognized credentials to Integrated EL/Civics programs. Training and technical assistance will be provided to local grantees for the integration of literacy and English language instruction. CSDE will provide activities for the integration of literacy and English language instruction with occupational skill training, including promoting linkages with employers. The CSDE will assist local programs by sharing effective models, assisting local programs in engaging employers, and how to partner successfully with other agencies to place students in employment.

7. The CSDE will provide technical assistance and training to promote workplace adult education and literacy activities by identifying curriculum frameworks and aligning rigorous content standards that specify what adult learners should know and be able to do in the areas of reading and language arts, mathematics, and English language acquisition; and taking into consideration the following: 1. State-adopted academic standards. 2. The current adult skills and literacy assessments used in the state or outlying area. 3. The primary indicators of performance described in the WIOA, Title II, Section 116. 4. Standards and academic requirements for enrollment in non-remedial, for-credit courses in postsecondary educational institutions or institutions of higher education supported by the state. CCRS have been incorporated into all workshops in math, reading and writing. Working with ELA students in the area of workplace training is still needed. The CSDE will work with local programs to identify a variety of curricula for workplace training.
8. The CSDE will develop and pilot strategies for improving teacher quality and retention. Training staff will provide sessions on learning styles and needs, facilitating adult learning, planning for instruction, and monitoring student progress.9. The CSDE will assist in the development and implementation of programs and services to meet the needs of adult learners with learning disabilities or ELLs. Connecticut will continue to be a member of the New England Literacy Resource Center, part of World Education. The membership provides professional development for teachers and administrators on evidence-based practices; on college and career readiness, ESOL instruction, learner persistence, using curriculum standards, integrating technology in instruction, program design and management.
9. The CSDE continues to support initiatives for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. The Adult Education unit will continue to meet regularly with directors from all adult education providers and share information and opportunities for discussion to assist leaders in their efforts to make their organizations more inclusive. The Racial Equity Taskforce, which includes representation from the CSDE will discuss ideas and initiatives for directors' meetings. The vision of the Racial Equity Taskforce is that all adult education staff will engage in self-examination and concrete actions to reduce bias in their organizations as a demonstration of their commitment to and recognition of the work we all need to do on the journey to racial equity and justice. The goal of our work is to create adult education programs where equity is the norm and where social justice is promoted. In addition to regular meetings and discussions, adult education directors will engage yearly in a summer book read which provides bi-weekly meetings to discuss how the material in assigned chapters applies to and guides our work in adult education.
10. The CSDE will continue to work closely with the certification office to recruit and retain qualified adult education teachers and provide training for adult education directors on the CT teacher evaluation process.

(f) ASSESSING QUALITY

**Performance Accountability**

Performance Accountability assesses the effectiveness of grantees in achieving continuous improvement of adult education and literacy activities. The performance outcome measures shall consist of the following core indicators:

1. The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program;
2. The percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program;
3. The median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment

during the second quarter after exit from the program;

4. The percentage of program participants who obtain either a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within one year of exit from program. A participant who has attained a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent is included in the percentage of participants who have attained a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent only if the participant also is employed or is enrolled in an education or training program leading to a recognized postsecondary credential within one year after exit from the program ;
5. The percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains, defined as documented academic, technical, occupational, or other forms of progress, towards such a credential or employment; and
6. The indicators of effectiveness in serving employers established pursuant to clause (iv)

Setting Targets: Each fiscal year, the CSDE negotiates proposed target percentages for each of the core indicators of performance with the U.S. Department of Education Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE). Each local eligible program is responsible for meeting or exceeding the negotiated performance targets. Each program shall analyze progress towards meeting the targets on an ongoing basis. Each program must utilize the approved standardized assessments that provide the framework needed to measure program effectiveness CSDE will continue to hold monthly professional development sessions for local program directors and data administrators to strengthen their knowledge of the data to continually progress toward meeting performance targets.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

To improve the quality and effectiveness of adult education programs, the CSDE will conduct two evaluation processes: an annual desk audit for all providers, and an onsite monitoring evaluation for selected providers.

#### **Onsite Monitoring**

Each year, an onsite monitoring evaluation will be conducted for a minimum of 25 percent of federally funded adult education programs to determine the effectiveness of adult education and literacy programs and activities. All newly funded programs will be monitored, as will all programs that had noncompliance or RFP requirement issues during the previous year's monitoring. These evaluations shall, at a minimum, consist of assessing the following areas:

- a) Compliance with all applicable laws and RFP guidelines, including ADA 504 and Section 427 GEPA;
- b) Program management and operations, including scheduling and locations, as well as staff credentials;
- c) Outreach, recruitment and retention practices, including individuals with multiple barriers to education;
- d) Curriculum and instruction and use of technology;
- e) Support services including counseling and transition services;
- f) Professional development opportunities;
- g) Student intake, assessment and documentation procedures;
- h) Documentation of the program's ability to assist adults in gaining employment, achieving self-sufficiency, and/or developing family literacy practices;

- i) i) Documentation of the program's progress in meeting the performance measures set for each applicable Core Indicator of Performance;
- j) j) Documentation of the program's ability to meet the Additional Indicators of Program Quality.

Written reports of the onsite monitoring will be given to programs monitored. During the visit, local programs will have to submit a corrective action plan for any deficiencies noted. The CSDE will observe classes and talk with teachers and program staff to determine if ideas from professional development are being implemented.

### **Desk Monitoring**

For the annual desk audit review, each provider will submit an assessment of Performance Measures and individual program goals, as well as an annual expenditure report including all relevant fiscal records to facilitate an effective audit. Each program will also be required to submit data containing all program and student information stored in LACES, including demographic, assessment and outcome data for each student enrolled. If a local program does not meet its outcome measures, it must complete a corrective action plan outlining how to make necessary improvements.

CSDE will regularly review all grants for their respective technical assistant regions and provide guidance to the directors. All grantees will submit both mid-year and end-of-year reports, which will be reviewed by the consultants. These reports align to federal and state outcomes and performance expectations which will provide opportunities for programs to reflect and highlight areas of growth and innovation. The forms include sections that each grantee must respond to specific to the grant requirements listed in the RFP regardless of which priority area they have applied for funding. Each provider will report on a plan for recruitment, retention as well as transition and other support services they plan to offer to participants.

- **Accountability Practices**
  - Adhere to the Connecticut Competency System (CCS) Policy and Guidelines
  - Utilize of TOPSpro Enterprise system
  - Ensure that appropriate staff are trained in LACES and that staff follows the policy and procedures outlines in the LACES Users' Guide
  - Ensure that all teachers are trained in the College and Career Readiness Standards or English Language Proficiency Standards
  - Provide professional development opportunities for program staff in the areas of reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, English language acquisition, technology, and staff training
- **Integration with the Local Workforce Development Board and One-stop Partner**
  - Describe how the provider is aligning services to the local WDB plan
  - Review the required Interagency Collaboration between your provider agency and the local WDB and provide a status update
  - Describe how your agency is providing access to career and training services to students through the local one-stop partner and promoting concurrent enrollment
- **Performance Accountability**
  - Complete the chart comparing 2021-2022 proposed state targets for % achieving MSG and your agency % achieving MSG and provide a reflective summary of program performance
- **Priority Area Specifications**
  - Describe one outstanding accomplishment, promising practice or program highlight related to the priority area

- List the project objectives identified in your project plan and the current successes toward meeting those objectives
- If your program did not meet its anticipated enrollment or goals for this priority area, describe the primary barriers that prevented the program from meeting its anticipated enrollment or goals and how your program plans to address those barriers.

**Professional Development**

The CSDE will provide professional development through the Adult Training and Development Network (ATDN) to local programs to improve program quality. Instruction will be designed to (1) improve instruction in the essential components of reading instruction; (2) instruction related to the specific needs of adult learners; (3) instruction provided by volunteers or paid personnel; and (4) dissemination of information about models and promising practices. Participants will be asked to evaluate the training sessions to determine if the sessions fit their needs. Changes are made to future workshops based on those evaluations. Onsite monitoring and evaluation of local instructional practices will be completed to determine if professional development is being implemented.

The CSDE will provide performance outcome targets and meet the expected levels of performance demonstrated by Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) for adult education and literacy activities authorized under Title II for the period of July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2028. The CSDE will meet the U.S. Department of Education proposed target percentages for each given year to reflect programs' progress toward continuous improvement in performance.

**ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM CERTIFICATIONS**

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The plan is submitted by the State agency that is eligible to submit the plan;	Yes
2. The State agency has authority under State law to perform the functions of the State under the program;	Yes
3. The State legally may carry out each provision of the plan;	Yes
4. All provisions of the plan are consistent with State law;	Yes
5. A State officer, specified by title in the certification, has authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the plan;	Yes
6. The State officer who is submitting the plan, specified by the title in the certification, has authority to submit the plan;	Yes
7. The agency that is submitting the plan has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan; and	Yes
8. The plan is the basis for State operation and administration of the program	Yes

**ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM ASSURANCES**

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The eligible agency will expend funds appropriated to carry out title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) only in a manner consistent with fiscal requirements under section 241(a) of WIOA (regarding the supplement-not-supplant requirement);	Yes
2. The eligible agency will ensure that there is at least one eligible provider serving each local area, as defined in section 3(32) of WIOA;	Yes
3. The eligible agency will not use any funds made available under title II of WIOA for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are not “eligible individuals” within the meaning of section 203(4) of WIOA, unless it is providing programs, services or activities related to family literacy activities, as defined in section 203(9) of WIOA;	Yes
4. Using funds made available under title II of WIOA to carry out a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution, the eligible agency will give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participation in the program.	Yes
5. The eligible agency agrees that in expending funds made available under Title II of WIOA, the eligible agency will comply with sections 8301 through 8303 of the Buy American Act (41 U.S.C. 8301-8303).	Yes

**AUTHORIZING OR CERTIFYING REPRESENTATIVE**

<b>APPLICANT’S ORGANIZATION</b>	<b>Enter information in this column</b>
Applicant’s Organization	Office of Workforce Strategy
<b>PRINTED NAME AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE</b>	<b>Enter information in this column</b>
First Name	Kelli-Marie
Last Name	Vallieres, PhD
Title	Chief Workforce Officer
Email	kelli-marie.vallieres@ct.gov

The purpose of the GEPA is to ensure that, in designing their projects to be carried out with federal funds, applicants address equity concerns that may affect the ability of certain potential beneficiaries to fully participate in the project and to achieve high standards. Consistent with program requirements and its approved application, an applicant may use the federal funds awarded to it to eliminate barriers it identifies. Section 427 of the GEPA affects all applicants for grant awards under this program. In order to receive funding under this program, all applicants for grants must include information in their applications to address this provision. Applicants must complete the GEPA Attestation form.

The statute highlights six types of barriers that can impede equitable access or participation: gender; race; national origin; color; disability; or age. Grants will be awarded based on applicant's description of steps to be taken to overcome these barriers based on local circumstances, and determined whether these or other barriers may prevent students, teachers, etc., from access or participation in the federally-funded project or activity. Description should include assurances that, in designing their projects, applicants for Federal funds address equity concerns that may affect the ability of certain potential beneficiaries to fully participate in the project and to achieve to high standards.

Onsite monitoring evaluations will be conducted for a minimum of 25 percent of federally funded adult education programs to determine the effectiveness of adult education and literacy programs and activities. All newly funded programs will be monitored, as will all programs that had noncompliance or RFP requirement issues during the previous year's monitoring. These evaluations shall, at a minimum, consist of assessing the following areas: a) Compliance with all applicable laws and RFP guidelines, including ADA 504 and Section 427 GEPA; b) Program management and operations, including scheduling and locations, as well as staff credentials; c) Outreach, recruitment and retention practices, including individuals with multiple barriers to education; d) Curriculum and instruction and use of technology; e) Support services including counseling and transition services; f) Professional development opportunities; g) Student intake, assessment and documentation procedures; h) Documentation of the program's ability to assist adults in gaining employment, achieving self-sufficiency, and/or developing family literacy practices; i) Documentation of the program's progress in meeting the performance measures set for each applicable Core Indicator of Performance; j) Documentation of the program's ability to meet the Additional Indicators of Program Quality.

Written reports of the onsite monitoring will be given to programs monitored. During the visit, local programs will have to submit a corrective action plan for any deficiencies noted. The CSDE will observe classes and talk with teachers and program staff to determine if ideas from professional development are being implemented.

For the annual desk audit review, each provider will submit an assessment of Performance Measures and individual program goals, as well as an annual expenditure report including all relevant fiscal records to facilitate an effective audit. Each program will also be required to submit data containing all program and student information stored in LACES, including demographic, assessment and outcome data for each student enrolled. If a local program does not meet its outcome measures, it must complete a corrective action plan outlining how to make necessary improvements.

### **Section 223 State Leadership**

- Continues under section 223 State leadership
- Retains not more than 12.5% set aside
- Mandates funds be used for four required activities
- Continues to allow permissible activities
- Encourages collaboration to avoid duplication and maximize impact



- States may use up to 12.5% of allocation for Section 223 activities
- States must use funds for required activities
- States may also use funds for other activities that are of statewide significance
- States must follow procurement rules of the State
- Funds may be used to pay for State staff discharging leadership activities with proper documentation

**Required Activity 1:**

Alignment of adult education and literacy activities with other core programs and one-stop partners to implement strategies identified in the Unified or Combined State plan as described in section 223(1)(a).

- Including development of career pathways to provide access to employment and training services for adult education participants

**Required Activity 2:**

Establish or operate high quality professional development programs to improve adult education instruction including:

- incorporating essential components of reading instruction
- instruction related to specific needs of adult learners
- instruction provided by volunteers or other personnel
- dissemination of information about models and promising practices

**Required Activity 3:**

Provision of technical assistance to local providers receiving funds including –

- Development and dissemination of instructional and programmatic practices based on best available research in reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, English language acquisition, distance education, and staff training
- Role of local providers as one-stop partners
- Assistance in use of technology including staff training and improving efficiencies

**Required Activity 4:**

- Monitoring and evaluation of the quality of and improvement in adult education
- Dissemination of information about models and proven or promising practices within the State

**Permissible Activities**

- Lists 12 illustrative activities including :
- Resource centers, technology instruction investments, curriculum development, model development, achieving performance objectives, transition to postsecondary, content standards, and more....
- Includes other activities of statewide significance that promote the purposes of the adult education program

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	28.0%		28.0%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	29.0%		29.0%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	4,700		4,700	
Credential Attainment Rate	30.0%		301.0%	
Measurable Skill Gains	30.0%		30.0%	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

*“Effectiveness in Serving Employers” is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2024 State Plan.*

**2024-2027 STATE PLAN REQUIREMENTS FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION**

Program-Specific Requirements for State Vocational Rehabilitation (Combined or General)

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA.

(A) State Rehabilitation Council. All VR agencies, except for those that have an independent consumer-controlled commission, must have a State Rehabilitation Council (Council or SRC) that meets the criteria in section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable, has (select A or B):

[checkbox] (A) is an independent State commission.

**[X] (B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council.**

A.2 In accordance with Assurance 3(b), please provide information on the current composition of the Council by representative type, including the term number of the representative, as applicable, and any vacancies, as well as the beginning dates of each representative’s term.

<u>Council Representative</u>	<u>Current Term Number/Vacant</u>	<u>Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.</u>
SILC	2 / 0	1/2019
Community Provider	2/ 0	1/2019

<b>Business</b>	<b>1/3</b>	<b>11/2023</b>
<b>Parent Advocacy Org.</b>	<b>2/ 0</b>	
<b>Former BRS Consumer</b>	<b>1/ 0</b>	<b>1/2024</b>
<b>Client Assistance Program</b>	<b>2/ n/a</b>	<b>1/2019</b>
<b>VR Counselor</b>	<b>1/ 0</b>	<b>11/2023</b>
<b>Disability Advocacy Group</b>	<b>1/ 0</b>	<b>1/2019</b>
<b>Section 121 Tribal</b>	<b>2/ n/a</b>	<b>1/2019</b>
<b>Workforce Board</b>	<b>1/ 0</b>	<b>3/2022</b>
<b>Department of Education</b>	<b>2/ 0</b>	<b>1/2019</b>
<b>BRS VR Director</b>	<b>2/ 0</b>	<b>6/2023</b>

A.3 If the SRC is not meeting the composition requirements in section 105(b) of the Rehabilitation Act and/or is not meeting quarterly as required in section 105(f) of the Rehabilitation Act, provide the steps that the VR agency is taking to ensure it meets those requirements.

n/a

A.4. In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(21)(A)(ii)(III) of the Rehabilitation Act, include a summary of the Council’s input (including how it was obtained) into the State Plan and any State Plan revisions, including recommendations from the Council’s annual reports, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction and other Council reports.

**The State Rehabilitation Council routinely meets with the leadership of the VR program, including regular attendance of the Director of BRS at SRC meetings. The BRS Director has consistently presented and engaged in dialogue with the SRC related to matters of priority and the challenges faced by the VR program. This providing of data and insight, coupled with the experiences and perspectives of the SRC members and those they represent, has formed the basis for development of recommendations. The SRC State Plan committee drafted the recommendations below and availed them to the greater Council for comment. The recommendations were then presented to the BRS Director for review and clarification in December of 2023. Following this discussion, the recommendations were finalized and approved by the SRC and subsequently submitted to BRS for inclusion into the VR portion of CT’s Unified State Plan.**

**Recommendation 1: The relationship between the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and the State Independent Living Council (SILC) and Centers for Independent Living (CILs) should continue to be fostered and, if feasible with respect to VR budget constraints, for financial resources be invested in order to enable the SILC to engage in capacity-building and enhance its organizational structure so that it may work to improve the provision of independent living services life skill supports, peer and family mentoring,**

and services to unserved and underserved consumers within key geographic areas. This will improve the employment outcomes of individuals with disabilities.

In addition, explore increasing the collaboration between Regional VR offices and the CILs to improve independent living outcomes impacting VR outcomes for consumers.

**Recommendation 2:** The Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) capacity to adequately support the consumers of BRS and increase the sustainability of CRPs statewide needs to be examined. The expansion of provider capacity to serve individuals with most significant disabilities who need customized employment or employment that required a level of customization must also be considered. Current availability of CRPs around the state to ensure that individuals have choices in how and where they receive services is limited and must be addressed.

The current model of support and fee schedule for direct service must be analyzed and adjusted to assist CRPs in the recruiting and onboarding of new staff, facilitating of training for employment specialists, and with other non-directly reimbursed services such as administrative overhead. Investments should be made to assist CRPs manage their perpetually high attrition rates and support the training of the direct service providers. This will ultimately benefit the individual's receiving services.

**Recommendation 3:** Individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program including those with the most significant disabilities who are minorities, have communication challenges, and individuals with disabilities served through components of the statewide workforce development system.

A review of plain language materials (translation/interpretation), accommodations and/or assistance in completing documents, applications, etc., as well as an emphasis on staff trained in working with individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) and communication barriers should be explored. Additionally, an understanding of the need for BRS, vendors/providers, and employers to provide accommodations that individuals may need (as required by the ADA), in particular, looking at cultural competencies and diversity in disability education and experience.

Further exploration with identifying information and referral sources regarding external comparable benefit programs and other stakeholders (such as LEAs, DDS, DSS, DMHAS, etc.), that would significantly assist in contributing to successful outcomes would be useful.

**Recommendation 4:** The vocational rehabilitation program should explore solutions to address administrative and infrastructure issues related to the recruitment and retention of VR counselors. Individuals with experience, training, and knowledge about working with individuals with ID, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), mental health disabilities, and those with more significant and other co-occurring disabilities should be targeted for recruitment. Aspects of Transitional Planning for individuals exiting secondary education - the continued development and implementation of streamlining orientations and eligibility to ensure consumer engagement with an ultimate goal of successful employment upon exiting services must also be considered.

**Recommendation 5:** The vocational rehabilitation program is consumer-driven, with consumer needs at the core of services, policy, and any training for BRS staff. Offices and services need to be fully accessible, and staff/counselors available for individuals walking

**in and seeking in-person support. Virtual services should be the exception rather than the rule and based on consumer preference and needs with consumer satisfaction surveys offered to examine the outcomes of these interactions (from start to finish). Options for a hybrid (some meetings in person/other meetings virtually) or both virtual and in-person customer service should be explored in order to address the different modes of communication that make virtual meetings challenging and other challenges that make in-person meetings difficult.**

A.5 Provide the VR agency's response to the Council's input and recommendations, including an explanation for the rejection of any input and recommendations.

**Recommendation 1: The Bureau agrees that opportunities to support and improve the relationship between the VR program, the SILC and CTs 5 Centers for Independent Living (CIL) should be pursued. The Bureau hopes to achieve this through the leveraging of the CILs subject matter expertise into the service delivery and capacity- building models of our currently awarded and future Disability Innovation Fund grants. The Bureau also intends to contribute Innovation and Expansion (I and E) funds to support SILC Operations over the next two years. Lastly, the Bureau intends to continue discussions with the SILC and CILs to develop opportunities to employ additional I and E funds aimed at the expansion of capacity and services in the areas of self-advocacy training, peer and family mentoring, and financial literacy training.**

**Recommendation 2: The Bureau agrees that the sufficiency of Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) resources represents a persistent and central challenge to the VR program. Sustainable access to high quality community-based employment services and supports is essential to the long-term success of the BRS service delivery model and to the consumers it serves. We agree that the plight of CT CRPs must be formally analyzed and strategies to assist in the remediation of the issues that jeopardize access to these essential service providers developed and implemented to the extent possible.**

**Recommendation 3: The Bureau agrees that the VR program must remain vigilant in its work to ensure equal access to staff, materials and services. BRS will continue to support employers through the provision of disability awareness training and other forms of consultation that will aid them in delivering appropriate disability-specific and culturally appropriate workplace accommodations to VR program consumers. The leveraging of the resources of community partners and those with shared consumers remains a vital strategy of the program.**

**Recommendation 4: The Bureau agrees that the effectiveness of the VR program's approach to recruiting should be examined. It must be noted that staff recruitment remains under the purview of the CT Department of Administrative Services and is tightly controlled by state-level policies and procedures. Recent recruitment efforts, however, have not yielded the desired results and this has contributed to the Bureau's persistent vacancy rates within the VR Counselor ranks which underscores the need for new strategies to be developed and employed. The Bureau agrees that staff knowledgeable with respect to various forms of disability and the issues that present, as well as in approaches to working with students and youth are critical to program success. To that end the Bureau remains committed to providing intensive post-inductive training and supporting further education of staff to close knowledge and experience gaps.**

**Recommendation 5: The Bureau remains committed to facilitating hours of operation across all offices that ensure open public access to the VR program and staff. BRS remains committed to maximizing and availing the use of technology to increase access and efficiency but will not do so at the expense of necessary in-person assessment of program applicants, high-quality meetings or delivery of services. Consumer choice will be respected whenever feasible in determining the method (virtual vs. In-person) of service delivery. Ongoing consumer satisfaction surveys and qualitative internal reviews of case records will be employed to evaluate the effectiveness of interactions.**

**None of the recommendations have been rejected.**

**(b) Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). Section 101(a)(15), (17), and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to provide an assessment of:**

**(1) The VR services needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, including:**

- (A) Individuals with the most significant disabilities and their need for Supported Employment.**

**In FFY 2020 and 2021 BRS, under the advisement of the State Rehabilitation Council, commissioned Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) to conduct a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) to examine the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities including their need for supported employment and to assist the Bureau with establishing goals and priorities. Utilizing the results and recommendations from the CSNA in collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Services, BRS has identified barriers that need further expansion and improvement to better serve individuals with disabilities.**

**Barriers to employment for those with significant disabilities were reported to be different than those of the general population of individuals with disabilities. Recurring themes that emerged in this area include Job Preparedness, Transportation and Physical Challenges, Long-Term Support and Coordination, and Perceptions and Limited Opportunities:**

- **Lack of job preparedness was cited as one of the primary barriers and was considered more pronounced for this group than for other individuals with disabilities. Having little to no work experience, lacking job skills, and lacking job search skills, such as the ability to create a resume, were reported to be challenges that are very difficult to overcome for individuals with significant disabilities.**
- **Physical challenges were also noted by study participants as a key barrier to employment for people who with the most significant disabilities, particularly the need for disability-accommodating transportation. Individuals with significant disabilities are more likely to be heavily dependent on family members for transportation and additional physical support, according to key informants.**
- **Individuals with significant disabilities were also reported to be more likely to have multiple diagnoses and require coordination among various counselors and medical professionals. This need for additional services, along with the need for more intense family support, and more long-term support, such as Supported Employment, were noted as serious challenges. These challenges are further**

**complicated when combined and pose unique difficulties for those with significant disabilities.**

- **Negative perceptions about employing individuals with significant disabilities can also stand in the way of successful employment according to study participants. These perceptions and other factors contribute to a lack of suitable positions for those with significant/most significant disabilities.**

**While barriers to employment for those with significant disabilities were reported to be different from those of the general population of individuals who have disabilities, the differences were much less notable regarding barriers to services. Recurring themes that emerged in this area include transportation and staffing.**

- **Among the areas where some differences exist was the issue of transportation. Those with significant disabilities were reported to face heightened challenges regarding transportation and mobility.**
- **Staffing issues were also identified by key informants as barriers for those with significant disabilities. Diminished capacity due to staffing vacancies has made accessing services challenging.**
- **The need for further training for counselors was noted as being a key staffing issue. Informants noted that BRS counselors could benefit from advancing their skills used to evaluate and determine capabilities of individuals with significant and the most significant disabilities.**
- **The disability types likely to be classified as most significant and require long-term supports (communications, intellectual disabilities/developmental disabilities, and mental health impairments) represented 85% of BRS consumers in 2020 (a 5% decrease since 2014). The disability type comprising the largest proportion served by BRS was mental health impairment, and yet the agency's rehabilitation rate for individuals with mental health impairments was the lowest of all disability categories (35%) besides Visual Impairments (16%). Individuals with most significant disabilities represented 42% of BRS consumers in 2020, a decline from 60% in 2014. Sixty individuals with most significant disabilities received Supported Employment services from BRS in 2020, down 54.89% since 2014. The rehabilitation rate for individuals receiving Supported Employment services declined from 51% to 41%.**

- (B) **Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program.**

**The CSNA identified those who are unserved or underserved by the VR program to include individuals on the autism spectrum, those who are Deaf or hard of hearing, those with criminal histories, and those who are highly educated/highly functioning.**

**Recurring themes that emerged in barriers to employment within the unserved and underserved populations are language and cultural barriers, job preparedness, perceptions and awareness, and inappropriate placement:**

- **Barriers to ethnic minorities tend to be like the barriers for the general population of individuals with disabilities, but language barriers and other cultural issues sometimes exacerbate those barriers. Both partners and staff identified Spanish-speaking clients and individuals who need ASL interpreters as oftentimes being underserved due to a lack of multilingual staff and interpreters. That leads to difficulties completing applications, communicating with counselors, scheduling appointments, etc. In addition to language barriers, some cultures are reluctant to acknowledge disabilities due to social pressures and family dynamics. This can be a barrier to employment for some immigrant communities. A lack of job preparedness has also been identified as a main barrier to this population. Having little/no work experience or job skills and needing more education and training are challenges that, as previously mentioned, are worsened by language barriers.**
- **Negative perceptions of others continue to play a role. When examining the role intersectionality plays when seeking employment, ethnic minorities may face unjust social stigmas from both their ethnic background and their disability, which increase common barriers.**
- **Key informants reported that individuals who are highly educated and/or those who are highly functioning are often underserved in that they are frequently directed toward positions that are below their education or training.**

**Recurring themes that emerged in barriers to services within the underserved and underserved populations are perceptions and awareness, transportation, staffing issues, and bureaucratic issues:**

- **Perceptions from/about individuals with disabilities and ethnic minorities serve as a barrier to service. As previously mentioned, some cultures are reluctant to acknowledge disabilities/seek support services due to cultural values and stigma. This is a significant barrier to services as a lack of awareness and negative community perceptions may deter individuals from seeking help, particularly if cultural values already deter them from doing so.**
- **A lack of public transportation is a significant barrier that has been identified once again. This includes limited access to affordable and easily accessible transportation options.**
- **Issues with staffing also significantly affect services. Both partners and staff identified Spanish-speaking clients and individuals who need ASL interpreters as oftentimes being underserved due to a shortage of multilingual staff and interpreters. That leads to difficulties completing applications, communicating with counselors, scheduling appointments, etc. Individuals who are not given the proper information and tools in their native language are not able to fully engage in the process.**
- **Bureaucratic issues were also mentioned by partners, specifically in gaining access to translators for Spanish-speaking client and for those who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Not all BRS offices have interpreters on staff. When agencies need access to interpreters last minute, different fees and rates make hiring them expensive.**



**The CSNA also identified barriers in agency performance to the unserved and underserved population:**

**Race/Ethnicity-** While close to two-thirds of White (66%) and Asian (64%) cases were closed rehabilitated in 2020, Black and Latino cases were lower, 40% and 45% respectively, which could be an indicator of cultural and language barriers to services for these populations. American Indian cases had the lowest rates of rehabilitation at 25%.

**Other unserved/underserved-** In the past, the BRS has identified individuals with psychiatric and developmental/intellectual disabilities, those with autism spectrum disorder, and those transitioning from school to post-secondary education or work as unserved or underserved. More recently, BRS staff has identified individuals with language barriers, mental health challenges, criminal records, and those with autism spectrum disorder as being unserved or underserved. This shows there may have been some improvement in services offered to those previously mentioned groups. However, individuals with autism spectrum disorder seem to remain underserved.

- (C) Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the workforce development system.

**Many study participants from the CSNA reported being unaware of the services provided by American Job Centers. Among those who were familiar with AJCs, barriers to services cited included unfamiliarity with AJC locations, slowness and inconsistency of services, insufficient staffing and hours of operation, and inadequate staff training:**

- Informants noted that the location of the AJCs is a critical factor for success. As in the past, it was noted that centers that were in the same location or proximate to VR counseling services enjoyed greater utilization and successful results. Study participants indicated that this remains true. In contrast, ACJs in less accessible areas and those not in the vicinity of BRS or Community Partner offices are largely under-utilized.
- Lack of consistency was noted as a barrier in this area. There is a generally acknowledged lack of uniformity across the state.
- Training AJC staff to work with individuals with disabilities would help to improve services and outcomes. Co-location with BRS offices and more convenient access to AJCs across the system is also recommended. Improved collaboration and sharing of resources, including staff resources, between the workforce centers and BRS (regardless of physical locations) would serve clients well and help to ease the issue of slow service and frustration among clients.

**With more than half of all BRS survey respondents indicated that AJC's could improve by focusing on services for and training staff on how to work with individuals with disabilities, there seems to be a consensus that AJCs need to do more to focus on working with individuals with disabilities. Client survey responses support this statement: a full 67% of clients reported that they have never used the services of AJCs.**

(D) Youth with disabilities including students with disabilities and their need for pre-employment transition services. Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under IDEA.

**Recurring themes that emerged in barriers to employment within the population of students with disabilities are lack of job preparedness, negative perceptions, transportation, and poor life and social skills:**

- **A lack of job preparedness was consistently reported in the CSNA as one of the main barriers to employment for youth in transition. This includes not having job skills, little to no work experience, and not having sufficient education or training. BRS staff mentioned much of the training the students receive is too simple and does not properly prepare them for the workforce. When that occurs, students may have unrealistic expectations about what the job entails and are unprepared. Once students are hired, there is sometimes limited on-the-job training and support.**
- **Another barrier in this population was various perceptions about youth in transition. Employers' perceptions about hiring individuals with disabilities are one example. Furthermore, some families do not see the value/importance of youth working or have different perceptions and worries about the impact of employment on Social Security benefits, thereby discouraging their children from seeking employment. In addition, a difficult home life and lack of family support can serve as a barrier to participation and success in the CT's Pre-ETS program which has been named Level Up .**
- **Transportation issues continue to be a barrier for transition-aged youth. Many youths in transition struggle with obtaining proper state IDs. In addition, many rely on family members to drive them to their jobs; however, that responsibility can be difficult for family members working full time.**
- **Life skills and poor social skills have been identified as another barrier for this population. Some youths are not receiving the proper life skills training or services (time management, organization, etc.) during high school, leaving them ill-prepared once they graduate. In addition, many individuals in this age range struggle with self-esteem and insecurities that can be exacerbated by having a disability, recurring themes that emerged to services within the population of students with disabilities include scheduling and coordination issues, lack of technology options and lack of engagement or the development of meaningful relationships with VR program staff:**
- **Scheduling and coordination issues among staff and youth are significant barriers to services. To begin, many counselors do not work with youth in the summer but waiting until the fall slows services due to the bureaucratic issues of processing new clients. In addition, there tends to be poor coordination and transition from youth to adult**

**services. Without proper follow-through and transition to adult services, students graduate high school and no longer receive supports, which can be difficult for them.**

- **A lack of options for the use of technology to communicate with BRS staff has been identified as a barrier. Providing additional platforms such as social media, texting, special apps, and online groups could improve communications and services.**
- **A lack of engagement is also a barrier to services. While schools differ, some do not advocate for the Level Up program and do not encourage students to participate. Some students are unaware of the services offered or feel they do not need them. In addition, there needs to be better partnerships and engagement between educators, counselors, and students. When counselors do not spend time developing meaningful relationships and fully learning client needs, long-term success is undermined.**

**BRS significantly increased the number of transition Plans developed (+87%) for youth over the three-year period from 2014–2016. This corresponded to a 47% decrease in the average number of days from eligibility to Plan (compared to a 38% decrease agency-wide) and a simultaneous increase, from 18% to 25%, in the proportion of agency plans accounted for by youth. However, in the following 5 years, the number of transition plans developed decreased significantly from 769 in 2016 to 380 in 2020 (-57%). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student participation in 2020 must be considered when contemplating this decline. This decline corresponded with a 20.5% decrease in the average number of days from eligibility to plan (compared to a 17.5% decrease agency-wide) and a decrease of 3% in the proportion of agency plans accounted for by youth cases (from 25% to 22%).**

(2). Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State.

**Two recurring themes emerged with respect to barriers to CRP services:**

**Staffing issues continue to be the main barrier to services for CRPs in Connecticut. Staff turnover for CRPs is high because they tend to be understaffed, underpaid, and underfunded. As a result, many CRPs do not have enough staff to provide clients the full range of needed services. While some clients reported positive experiences, others said some staff members display need for improvement. This may be a result of understaffing and high turnover. Support is worse for clients who need additional language services because there are insufficient bilingual staff members. As a result, clients who speak another language are limited to the few CRPs that have staff who can meet their needs.**

**Awareness is another common barrier to services among clients. Clients seem to be confused regarding the difference between the BRS, CRPs, AJCs, and other programs.**

Study participants suggested that ongoing training programs and case management services that focus on basic life skills, social skills, and other specific quality-of-life skills would improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

**The CNSA indicated that the relationship between BRS and CRPs is better now than it was in the past, due to recent structural changes. However, additional changes should be considered to create a truly collaborative approach and eliminate any sense that BRS and CRPs are competing against one another for ‘placements’.**

**As in the past, the quality of CRP counseling was reported to be inconsistent and to vary widely across offices. The challenges of high staff turnover and insufficient numbers of counselors continue to exist. CRP informants indicated low pay and high stress as key reasons for these issues.**

**(F.) Business Services and Relations**

**Recurring themes that emerged related to relationships with and services to employers included the impact of bureaucracy, awareness/perceptions, and lack of education and training:**

**Business leaders reported having little patience for slow-moving and passive bureaucratic agencies. Interview participants indicated that their primary need regarding recruiting and hiring people with disabilities is to have direct access to a counselor or community partner, an individual resource who can assist them throughout the entire process.**

**Lack of awareness among business leaders and employers is one of the main barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities. Key informants noted that employers often do not know about BRS or the CRPs in their area. Negative perceptions were also identified as barriers to employment.**

**Lack of education and training within Connecticut businesses is a barrier as well. It was reported that business leaders and their employees often do not understand the needs of individuals with disabilities or how to meet those needs. In addition, many employers are unfamiliar with legal issues, are uncertain of their responsibilities, and lack experience in relation to hiring individuals with disabilities.**

**Lack of education and training for counselors is a similar barrier. It was reported that it is difficult for counselors to keep themselves up to date on trends, opportunities and shifts in the business world. It was noted that many counselors do not have time to stay on top of the continual changes in the business environment and the world of work. It was suggested that counselors be provided with tools to help them better understand the business landscape on an ongoing basis.**

**Similar to the last CSNA, very few employers participated in surveys, interviews, and focus groups. The employer responses received cannot be generalized across all employers or potential employers. These responses are presented for consideration in strategies to work with employers and assess their recruiting and hiring needs.**

(c) Goals, Priorities, and Strategies. Section 101(a)(15) and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe the goals and priorities of the State in carrying out the VR and

Supported Employment programs. The goals and priorities are based on (1) the most recent CSNA, including any updates; (2) the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and (3) other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107 of the Rehabilitation Act. VR agencies must

- (1) Describe how the SRC and the VR agency jointly developed and agreed to the goals and priorities and any revisions.

**The Bureau, in collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), conducted a comprehensive statewide assessment of the rehabilitation needs of people with disabilities and identified five major goal areas. The goals and priorities listed are derived from this assessment and will be used to carry out the Supported Employment and Vocational Rehabilitation programs. BRS and the SRC are jointly in process of developing a new needs assessment that will identify statewide barriers. The next CSNA will take place in 2024 and new goals and priorities will be based on the results of that assessment. Both BRS and the SRC are aware that other areas for improvement were identified in the CSNA and will not be ignored by either. Highest priority goals will be addressed first as described below.**

**Each of the goal areas contains a set of priority areas that the Bureau could address in the coming year. We cannot address every issue identified as a need but attempted to build goals broad enough to address the major themes. Priority areas were chosen based on their frequency of occurrence in the assessment. These goals have been developed to address the ongoing implementation of WIOA.**

- (2) Identify measurable goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs and the basis for selecting the goals and priorities (e.g., CSNA, performance accountability measures, SRC recommendations, monitoring, other information). As required in section 101(a)(15)(D), (18), and (23), described under each goal or priority, the strategies or methods used to achieve the goal or priority, including as applicable, description of strategies or methods that:
  - (A) Support innovation and expansion activities
  - (B) Overcome barriers to accessing VR and supported employment services
  - (C) Improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, post secondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services); and
  - (D) Improve the performance of the VR and Supported Employment programs in assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve quality employment outcomes.

**Goal 1. Based on the recommendations of the 2021 CSNA, to improve the employment outcomes and quality of services to Individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities, Including their Need for Supported Employment**

**Priority 1A. Maximization of SE funds.**

**Strategy. In an effort to expend SE funds, BRS has trained all existing staff and has**

included SE plan development and service provision as a component of our post-inductive training protocol.

**Measure.** BRS has created an internal monthly management report that details trends and usage of SE funds. Usage levels will be examined against the goal of full expenditure of SE grant awards.

**Priority 1B.** Partner with DDS and SDE to develop and implement Customized Employment (CE) services statewide.

**Strategy.** Execute a Multi-Departmental agreement to collaborate in the implementation of a training program designed to prepare and certify state agency and provider agency staff in the principles and provision of CE services. Then, to subsequently offer purchase of service contracts to provider agencies who have staff that have become certified. Consider an establishment grant to provide the necessary direct technical assistance and field support to providers of CE.

**Measure.** A sufficient number of BRS staff will be trained to develop adequate institutional expertise in the principles and provision of CE services. Certification of a sufficient number of provider staff within contracted provider agencies to ensure statewide access of CE to VR/SE consumers.

**Priority 1C.** Reduce the number of individuals in subminimum wage employment in CT through the provision of VR/SE services.

**Strategy.** Collaborate with external partners to develop a service delivery model that will encourage and appropriately support individuals in making the informed choice to pursue Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) as an alternative to subminimum wage employment. BRS was awarded the Disability Innovation Fund, Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) grant in September of 2022 made available by the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration. BRS has branded this grant CT Pathways to Integrated Employment (CTPIE).

**Measure.** Divert 356 youth who are contemplating subminimum wage employment and assist 114 adults who are in subminimum wage employment to pursue CIE.

**Priority 1D.** Maximize available resources to implement an organizational structure and staffing pattern necessary to deliver timely and high-quality VR Counseling and services.

**Strategy.** Fully implement the intended staffing pattern of BRS VR, including emphasis on the onboarding and post-inductive training of frontline VR counseling and direct service staff and the retention of existing staff.

**Measure.** Successfully recruit for and fill 100% of the 58 combined vacant and to be established positions open as of January 2024. Reduce overall vacancy rate to less than 10% by the onset of PY 2025.

**Goal 2.** Based on the recommendations of the 2021 CSNA, to improve the employment outcomes and quality of services to Individuals with Disabilities from Different Ethnic

**Groups, Including Needs of Individuals who have been Unserved or Underserved by the VR Program.**

**Priority 2A. Increase participation of Spanish speaking consumers in VR.**

**Strategy. Allocate .5FTE of a Central Office Consultant to carry out the recommendations of a 2022 needs assessment completed by the University of Connecticut to better serve this population. Recommendations included expanding services, as well as increasing communication access within BRS offices. The need to establish programs to bridge the gap in accessing vocational rehabilitation services for Spanish speakers is documented in this needs assessment. Using an establishment authority to achieve this is being explored.**

**Measure. Increase participation in VR by Spanish speaking consumers as demonstrated by numbers served by 2025.**

**Priority 2B. To increase the number of deaf and hard of hearing consumers attending college with the support of VR**

**Strategy: BRS began a five-year pilot project where the Community College caps will be waived for any VR client who uses American Sign Language and plans to attend NTID, RIT, or Gallaudet University to meet their Employment Goal. This pilot began in the fall of 2023 and will go through the spring of 2028.**

**Measure. Increase the number of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing receiving services to attend college by 30% by 2028.**

**Priority 2C. Increase participation of Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers in VR.**

**Strategy. Per the 2021 CSNA it was found that there is a need to establish programs to bridge the gap in accessing vocational rehabilitation services for individuals who utilize American Sign Language as a primary mode of communication. Using an establishment authority to achieve this is being explored.**

**Measure. Increase participation in VR by ASL users as demonstrated by numbers receiving accessible VR services by 2025.**

**Goal 3. Based on the recommendations of the 2021 CSNA, to improve the employment outcomes and quality of services to Individuals with Disabilities Served Through Other Components of The Statewide Workforce Development System.**

**Priority 3A. Increase co-enrollment and the number of BRS consumers jointly served by WIOA core partner programs.**

**Strategy. Develop, implement, and allocate resources to the BRS Work Opportunities Team (WOT). The role of WOT is to leverage local labor market information to understand employer needs, identify career pathway training programs available through Regional Workforce Development Boards (WDB), connect and ensure access of BRS consumers to these programs.**

**Measure. Increase participation of VR consumers in Workforce System career pathway programs by 30% by 2025.**

**Priority 3B. Partner with WDBs to connect students with disabilities to Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLE).**

**Strategy. Assign a full-time statewide Project Coordinator to work toward the goal of expanding WBLEs facilitated by WDBs.**

**Measure. Increase the number of Pre-Employment Transition Consumers receiving WBLE services from a WDB by 10% annually.**

**Priority 3C. To increase Workforce System partner consumer's access to VR services.**

**Strategy. Co-locate BRS field staff in all AJC/WDB facilities on a regular basis.**

**Measure. Maintain a routine and accessible presence under the terms of Memoranda of Understanding and Infrastructure Cost Agreements with each of CT 5 Regional Workforce Development Boards.**

**Goal 4. Based on the recommendations of the 2021 CSNA, to create effective partnerships with business and CRPs designed to advance employment for Connecticut citizens with disabilities.**

**Priority 4A. To expand the availability of and access to Industry Specific Training Programs (ISTP) for VR consumers.**

**Strategy. Assign one full-time Project Coordinator to act as a primary liaison to businesses in developing, implementing, and monitoring ISTPs statewide.**

**Measure. Increase VR consumer participation in ISTP by 20% by 2025.**

**Priority 4B. To increase employer comfort and willingness to consider hiring individuals with disabilities.**

**Strategy. Leverage visibility generated through participation in the Governor's Workforce Council and its Person's with Disabilities sub-committee to offer Disability Sensitivity and Awareness training to Regional Employment Sector Partnership (RSP) leaders.**

**Measure. Provision of Windmills training by the qualified BRS WOT to Regional RSPs.**

**Priority 4C. To increase capacity, decrease the impact of ongoing attrition, and improve quality of CRP services, and ensure sustained access to CRP services.**

**Strategies. Avail an updated CRP Handbook to contracted provider organizations and the consumers they serve to build common expectations concerning the details of VR service provision. Offer joint training opportunities to frontline VR and CRP staff. Consider utilizing Innovation and Expansion funds to develop an easily accessible training curriculum that can be utilized by CRPs to aid in the post-**



introductory training and onboarding of new staff, as well as to serve as an ongoing reference material.

**Measure.** Conduct pre and post strategy implementation surveys of CRPs to determine value of the implementation of these strategies. Refine approach accordingly.

**Priority 4D.** Increase and sustain access to CRP services statewide

**Strategy.** Conduct specific needs assessment of CRP organizations throughout CT to further examine causes and impacts of high staff turnover rates, barriers to providing high quality and accessible services, benefits of advance training and staff certifications, sufficiency of service reimbursement rates, and issues leading to potential insolvency. Include specific recommendations to address issues and impacts illustrated through the assessment.

**Measure:** This needs assessment being conducted and recommendations being implemented to the extent possible based on availability of VR program resources.

**Goal 5.** Based on the recommendations of the 2021 CSNA, to improve employment outcomes and quality of services to transition-age youth with disabilities.

**Priority 5A.** To increase the number of students (ages 10 to 24) receiving earlier access to, and enhanced transition resources and services.

**Strategy.** Through the Disability Innovation Fund Pathways to Partnership Grant, enter into a MOU with CSDE, LEAs and the Centers for Independent Living to help children (ages 10-13) and youth (ages 14-24) with disabilities through innovative activities aimed at achieving independent living, self-advocacy and competitive integrated employment (CIE) in growing CT career pathways.

**Measure.** Outreach and engagement will be met when no less than 2,000 students with disabilities (ages 10-24) are provided access to existing transition resources and services by September 2025. This number is in addition to the current number of students receiving transition resources and services.

**Priority 5B.** To increase the number of students receiving Pre-ETS.

**Strategy.** Increase the number of VR counselors and implement Assistant Counselor positions dedicated to the provision of Pre-ETS services. Reduce the Counselor to school system ratios to increase access to Pre-ETS and permit greater local grassroots outreach.

**Measure.** Year over year increases in students with disabilities receiving Pre-ETS services.

**Priority 5C.** To increase the number of students receiving Pre-ETS that apply for VR services.

**Strategy.** Implement regional Project Coordinator positions to improve statewide consistency of access and services, as well as to directly coordinate referral flow with school systems. Create regional Youth Service Units that will each include a VR

supervisor, VR Counselors, VR Pre-ETS dedicated Counselors and an assistant counselor. Coupled and assigned VR Counselors and VR Pre-ETS Counselors to defined catchment areas to tandemly work with school systems statewide. This is intended to promote a seamless “hand off” from pre-ETS/high school transition services to post-secondary VR services.

**Measure.** Increase the number of students with disabilities receiving Pre-ETS services that apply for VR services by 50%.

**Priority 5D.** To develop comprehensive professional and leadership development opportunities for educators and VR professionals.

**Strategy.** Through the Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) Pathways to Partnership/BRIDGE CT grant develop comprehensive professional and leadership development opportunities in collaboration with key partners that allow educators, VR professionals, and other service professionals to learn about and implement evidence-based practices that support the understanding and delivery of transition resources and services to students with disabilities and their families.

**Measure.** No later than October 2024, 4 trainings will be developed. For the remainder of the grant (ending September 2028), additional trainings will be developed and provided based on data collected on the effectiveness of the initial 4 trainings.

**Priority 5E.** To improve access to life skill development training.

**Strategy.** Identify service providers equipped to offer developmental stage and age-appropriate training designed to build skills that can assist in the remediation of issues related to poor self-esteem and alleviate insecurities that manifest when planning for or entering employment. Consider leveraging Innovation and Expansion funds to increase access and test proficiency and value of non-traditional service providers.

**Measure.** Pilot test implementation of life skill development training within a minimum of one BRS Region.

**(d) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals.** For the most recently completed program year, provide an evaluation and report of progress for the goals or priorities, including progress on the strategies under each goal or priority, applicable to that program year. Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe:

- (1) Progress in achieving the goals and priorities identified for the VR and Supported Employment Programs.

Although the CSNA was completed in 2021, inordinately high staff vacancy rates and significant delays in recruiting and hiring replacement staff prevented BRS from implementing solutions to many of the identified needs until recently. These delays in implementation have rendered evaluation of progress for many of strategies noted above as at this time premature.

**Goal 1.** Based on the CSNA, to Improve the employment outcomes and quality of services

**to Individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities, Including their Need for Supported Employment**

**Priority 1A.** BRS initiated these actions during PY 2023. Reporting on progress is not yet feasible.

**Priority 1B.** During PY 2022 and PY 2023 to date 158 provider staff have become certified in CE. During this same time period BRS has executed CE services contracts with 26 provider agencies.

**Priority 1C.** The SWTCIE/CTPIE demonstration project has completed its planning year and is currently in the process of implementing pilot year services with several only having been in place for a few months. At present, there are currently 31 consumers enrolled in the CTPIE project.

**Priority 1.D.** BRS provides Foundations of CT VR, a year-long series of in-service training mandatory for new staff and available to staff for refresher training. This includes a broad array of topics pertaining to VR such as: Foundations of CT VR Training, trainings on specific populations, independent living, transition, and community rehabilitation services. A variety of training methods are utilized to assure that training activities are diverse enough to address individual learning styles.

The Bureau developed an integrated program of training, education, and development activities for staff to gain the necessary skills, knowledge, and experiences to improve the quality of services and the number and quality of employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

BRS has engaged in an outreach campaign, including increased social media and website presence, to generate greater interest and to increase the number of individuals applying for open positions within the Bureau.

BRS has partnered with George Washington University in development of a Staff Recruitment and Retention plan and as a result developed and implemented an Employee Engagement Survey. Results of survey have identified key areas related to improvement and activities are planned to address specific areas of need. Identified areas include:

- Staff input on key decisions and hearing field-level staff input.
- Exploring and securing key tools and equipment needed to effectively complete the job of VR Counselor.

**Goal 2.** Based on the CSNA, to improve the employment outcomes and quality of services to Individuals with Disabilities from Different Ethnic Groups, Including Needs of Individuals who have been Unserved or Underserved by the VR Program.

**Priority 2A.** BRS has funded and received a needs assessment report from the University of Connecticut, which makes specific recommendations to improve access and services for individuals with disabilities who primarily communicate in Spanish. BRS has contracted with a marketing and outreach agency to create materials and media specifically targeted to outreach to Spanish speaking individuals with disabilities and family members, encouraging them to apply for services. The availability of resources to initiate an Establishment project will be assessed during PY 2024.

To improve and increase contracted employment services for consumers who speak Spanish, BRS continues to procure employment services through Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) with an emphasis on providing services to these populations using “Communication Mitigation Services”. BRS began these new employment services in October 2018. Under this contract, several CRPs in each catchment area are required to have staff fluent in Spanish who can provide two new services created specific to these populations: Communication Assessment Services and Communication Support Services in addition to all the mainstream CRP employment services. CRPs who do not have staff fluent in Spanish are to provide the mainstream CRP employment services with assistance of a third-party Interpreter or Staff Interpreter.

BRS also continues to provide a “Work Readiness Training Program” (WRTP), which is a series of four (4) modules covering preemployment, job development, informational interviewing, and job shadowing in Spanish.

**Priority 2B.** This is the first academic year under this pilot project so results will be assessed in PY 2024.

**Priority 2C.** To improve and increase contracted employment services for Deaf consumers who use American Sign Language (ASL), BRS continues to procure employment services through Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) with an emphasis on providing services to these populations using “Communication Mitigation Services”. BRS began these new employment services in October 2018. Under this contract, several CRPs in each catchment area are required to have staff fluent in American Sign Language who can provide two new services created specific to these populations: Communication Assessment Services and Communication Support Services in addition to all the mainstream CRP employment services. CRPs who do not have staff fluent in ASL are to provide the mainstream CRP employment services with assistance of a third-party Interpreter or Staff Interpreter.

BRS also continues to provide a “Work Readiness Training Program” (WRTP), which is a series of four (4) modules covering preemployment, job development, informational interviewing, and job shadowing in American Sign Language.

The availability of resources necessary to initiate an Establishment project will be assessed during PY 2024.

**Goal 3.** Based on the CSNA, to improve the employment outcomes and quality of services to Individuals with Disabilities Served Through Other Components of The Statewide Workforce Development System.

**Priority 3A.** In FFY 2023, 62 VR consumers participated in Workforce System career pathway training programs.

**Priority 3B.** During FFY 2023 WDB’s facilitated 97 WBLEs in partnership with BRS.

**Priority 3C.** Under existing Infrastructure Cost Agreements BRS co-locates staff within 22 WDB facilities.

**Goal 4.** Based on the CSNA, to create effective partnerships with business and CRPs designed to advance employment for Connecticut citizens with disabilities.

**Priority 4A.** Throughout FFY 2023 BRS maintained active Industry–Specific Training Program contracts with the following vendors/Host Employers:

- Viability/Mohegan Sun
- Viability/Walgreens Retail Stores
- Viability/Travelers
- Viability/Walgreens Distribution Center
- Viability/Advance Auto Distribution Center
- Ability Beyond/Walgreens Retail Stores
- Ability Beyond/Wyndham
- Ability Beyond/CVS
- Ability Beyond/CVS Pharmacy
- Viability/Travelers
- Western Connecticut State University/Digital Accessibility

During FFY 2023, 89 VR consumers participated in BRS sponsored ISTPs.

**Priority 4.B.** In FFY 2023 the BRS WOT delivered Windmills, Disability Sensitivity and Awareness training to 12 distinct audiences. This included WIOA core partner programs, Chambers of Commerce, stakeholder CT Departments and businesses.

**Priority 4.C.** Although having consistently availed the CRP Handbook to CRPs and engaged in efforts to collaborate with CRPs as needed, BRS has not yet initiated the actions listed under this priority. Reporting on progress is not yet feasible.

**Goal 5.** Based on CSNA, to improve employment outcomes and quality of services to transitioning youth.

**Priority 5A.** The Disability Innovation Fund, Pathways to Partnership/ BRIDGE CT grant is at present in its planning and development year. Impact and results will be assessed as it progresses throughout the Project period.

**Priority 5.B.** In FFY 2023 BRS provided Pre-ETS services to 2,514 students with disabilities.

**Priority 5C.** In FFY 2023, there were 329 students with disabilities that received Pre-ETS services who applied to the VR program.

**Priority 5.D.** The DIF Pathways to Partnership/BRIDGE CT grant is presently in its planning and development year and evaluation of impact is premature at this time. BRS has, however, met quarterly with SDE and representatives from the Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs) to continue providing current transition information. This group now includes the Department of Developmental Services Education Liaisons and Transition Consultants.

BRS has met at least quarterly with SDE on the Connecticut Transition Task Force (TTF), which includes representatives from a multitude of State Agencies, stakeholder entities, and Consumers/Individuals with Disabilities, to continue providing current transition information. The TTF supports the SDE in its efforts to inform and guide students with disabilities, families, school districts, and state and community

organizations to facilitate the progression from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, competitive integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation.

**BRS participates at least quarterly with the SDE on the Connecticut Transition Community of Practice (CT CoP), to continue providing current transition information. Additionally, BRS, SDE and the CT CoP maintain partnership with the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT:C), a Technical Assistance Center co-funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), focused on supporting States to improve opportunities and outcomes for students and youth with disabilities.**

**<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Special-Education/Secondary-Transition>**

**Priority 5E. BRS has the goal of developing this project in PY 2024 with a target for implementation of a pilot in one BRS region during PY 2025.**

(2) Performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA for the most recently completed program year, reflecting actual and negotiated levels of performance. Explain any discrepancies in the actual and negotiated levels.

**In PY 2022, The Bureau's negotiated level of performance for MSG rate was 52.5%. BRS achieved 44.6%, 7.9% below expectations. BRS believes there are two primary contributors to this issue: (1) the implementation of an edit check feature within the Bureau's primary Caseload Management Information System, Libera System 7. For PY 2022, the benchmark set for MSG (52.5%) was based on historical data gathered from a period prior to the implementation of this internal control. The introduction of these edit checks has improved validity and reliability of MSG reporting but has also reduced the Bureau's overall achievement related to this metric; (2) the impact of high counselor and field support vacancy rate. During PY 2021 and 2022 BRS experienced a substantial amount of counselor attrition and was managing an inordinately high number of VR Counselor and support staff vacancies. The gathering of necessary supporting documentation was a significant challenge at that time as staff unfamiliar with specific circumstances of consumers being served were often assigned responsibility for data input.**

**This issue was further complicated by the rapid onboarding of new staff and assignment to cases after only receiving limited training regarding the expectations for the proper recording of certain data, such as enrollment and MSG, into the case record. BRS has since focused on training staff to more accurately report in these areas and has added enrollment and MSG to counselor performance evaluation metrics. Field staff are now provided with monthly reporting around MGSs for ongoing monitoring. Along with this, BRS has implemented an internal control protocol as a part of the Bureau's QA process that targets and reviews cases with reported MSGs to ensure that supporting documentation is in the file.**

**The second performance indicator that was below the negotiated target was "Percent of Participants employed 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter After Exit". The negotiated level of performance in this area for PY 2022 was 49.7% and the Bureau achieved 42.2%, 7.5% below expectations. Employment in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter after exit is not typically a problem with BRS. Historical**

averages have this number typically above 50%. BRS believes that performance in this area was related specifically to a data processing error that occurred back in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of PY 2022. The CT Department of Labor (DOL), who supplies BRS a file inclusive of necessary information to calculate this metric, had major issues with the transmission of data that quarter. This issue resulted in BRS requesting an extension for submission of the RSA 911 Report. BRS was ultimately able to exchange the file with DOL and subsequently complete the submission of the 911 report. In the aftermath of the program year completion, however, BRS discovered that there were zero entries for participants employed in Q3. This is believed to be the sole cause for missing the PY 2022 negotiated target of 49.7%. BRS has since worked to correct the transmission issues with DOL and implemented edit check process screens to ensure that data is properly populated in this section of the 911 Report. BRS does not believe this issue will recur in the future.

- (3) The use of funds reserved for innovation and expansion activities (sections 101(a)(18) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act) (e.g., SRC, SILC).

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) received funding to support efforts to assist BRS in assessing programs and services provided to vocational rehabilitation consumers. The SRC incurs travel expenses to in-state meetings and the cost of sign-language interpreters, when needed.

When desired by the Council, I & E funds are utilized to send an SRC delegate to attend out-of-state conferences for the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) and the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). BRS has supported the SRC's effort to develop and print informational materials concerning the VR program for distribution to employers and other stakeholders. Funding was provided during 2023 for this endeavor and the materials have been produced.

BRS has also utilized I and E funds to support the Statewide Independent Living Council in a manner consistent with the FFY 2024 SILC Resource Plan.

**(e) Supported Employment Services, Distribution of Title VI Funds, and Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services.**

- (1) Acceptance of title VI funds:
- (A)  VR agency requests to receive title VI funds.
  - (B)  VR agency does NOT elect to receive title VI funds and understands that supported employment services must still be provided under title I.
- (2) If the VR agency has elected to receive title VI funds, Section 606(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act requires VR agencies to include specific goals and priorities with respect to the distribution of title VI funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services. Describe the use of title VI funds and how they will be used in meeting the goals and priorities of the Supported Employment program.

**1. If Supported Employment funding is exhausted future obligations for ongoing supports for this population will be encumbered against General VR funds from that**

**point forward. The funds will be utilized in accordance with federal regulations and limited to on the job supports for individuals with the most significant disabilities.**

**2.Supported Employment funding will be used for ongoing services for youth until it is exhausted. SE services timeframe up to 24 months; under special circumstances if jointly agreed to by the individual and vocational rehabilitation counselor, the timeframe can exceed the 24 months.**

**Extended Services:**

**1.Services can be provided for a period up to, but not to exceed 4 years to youth under the age of 25 with the most significant disabilities expending supported employment funds only; and**

**2.As the need for SE is established and funding identified for extended services, VR plans can be amended to Supported Employment Plans.**

**3.Utilization of short-term plans as a means towards assuring better opportunities for transitioning youth who are expected to be in our system for longer periods of time.**

(3) Supported employment services may be provided with title 1 or title VI funds following placement of individuals with the most significant disabilities in employment. In accordance with section 101(a)(22) and section 606(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe the quality, scope, and extent of supported employment services to be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities; and the timing of transition to extended services.

**For transition to Extended Services, BRS will work with relevant State Agencies, private non– profit organizations and our other partners to transition consumers from Supported Employment funding to the identified provider of the extended services funding as soon as the funding is available, and transition is appropriate. The timeframe of Supported Employment funding will vary, based on the needs of the individual consumer, but will generally not exceed 24 months in length.**

(4) Sections 101(a)(22) and 606(b)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act require the VR agency to describe efforts to identify and arrange, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services. The description must include extended services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including the provision of extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities in accordance with 34 CFR 363.4(a) and 34 CFR

361.5(c)(19)(v). Extended Services:

**Services can be provided for a period up to, but not to exceed four years to youth or until a youth turns 25 with the most significant disabilities expending Supported Employment funds only.**

**Prior to WIOA, funding for these services was not permitted for youth with disabilities. Once a youth turns 25, they are transitioned over to Adult Extended Services.**



All Bureau services are authorized and provided based on the individual needs of the consumer. BRS will work with relevant state agencies, private non-profit organizations and our other partners to transition consumers from Supported Employment funding to the identified provider of the extended services as soon as the funding is available, and transition is appropriate.

**Coordination and Collaboration:**

BRS oversees one of the three state-funded extended services programs. The Bureau is engaged in facilitating systemic changes in how supported employment services are delivered in the community. The Bureau works with relevant State Agencies, private non-profit organizations and other partners to transition consumers from the Supported Employment funding to an appropriate extended services program.-

(g) **Annual Estimates.** Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require all VR agencies to annually conduct a full assessment of their resources and ability to serve all eligible individuals before the start of the Federal fiscal year. In accordance with 34 CFR § 361.29(b), annual estimates must include the following projections:

(1) Estimates for next Federal fiscal year

(A) VR Program

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under VR Program	Costs of Services using Title I Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
NA	4,700	4,700	\$10,500,000	NA

According to the most recent US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, Connecticut had 3,582,236 residents who were non-institutionalized in 2022. There were 2,207,845 persons between 18-64 years of age. 9.8% or 217,350 of these individuals had a disability (+/- 0.3 margin of error). Census data from 2022 also shows that Connecticut had 413,776 non-institutionalized persons with disabilities ages 16 and over and of that number, 27.3% were employed. The remaining 72.6% were unemployed.

These statistics reveal that a considerable number of persons with disabilities in the State of Connecticut are not working. A measurable number of these individuals may be transition-aged youth. In addition, a portion of 27.3% of persons with disabilities who are employed may be underemployed. Some of the individuals may also require services to attain or retain employment consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choices.

These statistics make it difficult to accurately estimate the number of potentially eligible consumers of VR services. That number is many times more than BRS has historically

served or has the resources to currently serve. For-Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2023, the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) served 4,121 eligible consumers in Individual Plans for Employment (IPEs) under general VR funds. This represents a 6% increase from FFY 2022 when 3,877 consumers received services in IPEs under general VR funds. This number is commensurate with the increases that we have experienced with new applications over the past two years and demonstrates continued growth and reestablishment of the VR program's infrastructure and capacity post- pandemic.

For BRS, FFY 2021 marked a multi-year low in both the number of new applications for VR services as well as the overall number of consumers assisted. Lingering effects of the pandemic continued to create apprehension within our existing consumer base, referral sources, and potential applicants. As a result, BRS only took in 1,577 new applications for VR services when our historic annual average has been typically closer to 3,000 individuals. In addition to a lack of new applications, some portion of BRS' existing consumer base elected not to engage in or even pause available VR service provision.

Adding to this lag, BRS was faced with an atypical and significantly impactful amount of attrition within the VR program. Impending changes in the State of CT employee retirement benefit plan inspired a historic number of employees across CT government to retire, including several within the VR program's Designated State Agency (DSA) and within the Bureau itself. Internal to BRS, the departure of staff ranged across several roles and key dependencies, including administrative personnel, Regional Director, VR Supervisor, and VR Counselors. Externally, within the DSA, the retirements of a Fiscal Administrative Manager and Human Resources Manager set into motion an unprecedented amount of attrition that resulted in a nearly complete loss of staff assigned to support the VR program in the areas of financial management, accounting, contract administration, facilities/operations support, recruitment, and personnel management. With limited capacity to recruit and refill positions evident across the DSA and CT government itself, the Bureau experienced a persistent and inordinately high vacancy rate. Such loss of institutional knowledge and diminishment of staff capacity put enormous pressure on BRS administration and field staff alike in managing existing cases. In turn, this hampered ability to conduct outreach, manage new applications, and generate plans for VR services.

Since FFY 2021, BRS has prioritized the rebuilding and expansion of the Bureau's organizational structure and capacity with the intention of reestablishing our consumer base. BRS continues to remain engaged in a comprehensive outreach campaign utilizing a multi-modal approach to spreading the word about both VR services for prospective recipients in Connecticut and employment opportunities within the Bureau. BRS has used all forms of media including TV, radio, and print to increase awareness of the availability and benefits of VR services. Updates have been made to our Website and a "Contact Us" section was added allowing individuals to reach out to BRS online. Since beginning this, over 1,500 individuals have reached out and this has resulted in an additional 214 new applications for VR services.

BRS has also placed an enormous effort in rebuilding counselor capacity. Hiring and training have been ongoing and our overall vacancy rate has been reduced. Added field-level resources have enabled BRS to increase new applications from our pandemic low of 1,577 to 2,238 (42%) in FFY 2023. This has also resulted in BRS generating 1,884 new IPEs in FFY 2023 which is 45% higher than our FFY 2021 low (1,303). As of FFY 2024

**Q1, BRS is 5.4% ahead of FFY 2023 with new applications and 21% ahead with IPE development.**

**On top of this effort, in FFY 2022, BRS created dedicated Youth Services Units within each of its three geographical Regions, which included the addition of 8 dedicated Transition Counselors. These counselors have a primary focus on helping to better facilitate the migration of our Pre-ETS students into VR services. Prior to this addition, BRS' was converting less than 25% of our Pre-ETS population into VR services. In FFY 2023 BRS had 329 Pre-ETS students enter into VR services, a 176% increase from FFY 2021 (119). As of FFY 2024 Q1, BRS is 30% ahead of FFY 2023's YTD performance in this area. At present, the Bureau is recruiting to markedly expand staffing resources by creating a fourth Youth Services Unit dedicated to the Transition-aged youth with disabilities population. The intended statewide staff pattern dedicated to serving and supporting the services to these populations will increase to a total of 18 Counselor positions.**

**As BRS progresses through FFY 2024 and in to FFY 2025, it is anticipated that the continued expansion of our consumer base will be exponential. BRS anticipates that 4,700 consumers will be served in Individual Employment Plans (IPEs) under general VR funds in FFY 2025. This represents a 15% increase over FFY 2023 and moves BRS closer to historic averages.**

**In addition to the adult VR services forecasted to be provided to individuals in IPEs', the Bureau expects to provide Pre-Employment Transition services to 2,600 students who are either eligible or potentially eligible for vocational rehabilitation with an estimated 2,000 receiving paid services, and the remaining 600 receiving services provided directly by VR staff.**

**Total VR program purchase of services (POS) costs for all consumers in FFY 2023 was \$9.1M. This figure represents \$253K increase over FFY 2022 expenditures and a \$2.1M increase when compared to FFY 2021, which represents a 2 year increase of 29.6%. For the past two fiscal years, the Bureau has been working aggressively on the reconstruction of an active consumer base more consistent with historical norms. As efforts begin to align with outreach along with a return to healthier staffing patters, BRS anticipates continued growth in purchase of services.**

**Thus far in FFY 2024, the Bureau has expended \$2.4M in POS through the first quarter. This is 4.3% higher than the first quarter of FFY 2023 and a 9% increase in comparison to the first quarter of FFY 2022. New applications for VR services in the first quarter are up 5.4% from FFY 2023 and up 74 % when compared to our multi-year low in FFY 2021. BRS continues to focus on our network of Community Rehabilitation Providers and seeking opportunities to increase capacity, strengthen the quality of services and improve timelines for service provision. With this effort and the efforts listed above, BRS projects FFY 2024 final expenditures to be \$9.8M for POS of those served under IPE.**

**For FFY 2025 the Bureau anticipates continued growth and forecasts a POS expenditure of \$10.5M in general VR services for those under IPE utilizing Title I funds. With the additional expenditure of \$2.5M related to the provision of Pre-**

**Employment Transition POS, a total anticipated cost of POS of \$13M is projected for FFY 2025.**

(B) Supported Employment Program.

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under Supported Employment Program	Costs of Services using Title I and Title VI Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
NA	55	55	\$80,000	NA

**During FFY 2023 BRS purchased services for 21 consumers eligible for Supported Employment funding utilizing \$30,923. This expenditure represents 40% decrease from FFY 2022. BRS attributes much of this decline to the turnover of counseling staff and training necessary to identify consumers in need of supported employment services at the time of IPE development.**

**We continue to provide training and resources to increase staff procedural awareness on this topic. We have developed a targeted quality assurance review specific to supported employment cases and have implemented this via random sampling on cases to ensure compliance. Supported Employment details have been added to the monthly VR reports distributed to the field showing a regional breakdown of SE cases for monitoring. BRS has also implemented a Customized Employment Program with a package of services that lead consumers likely to be in need of SE to these services. The Bureau was also awarded the Disability Innovation Fund, Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment grant. This demonstration project has been named CT Pathways to Integrated Employment (CT-PIE) and is designed to create service delivery models and pathways for consumers to be diverted to CIE as an alternative to subminimum wage. Efforts in all of these areas are expected to create measurable increases in the number of Supported Employment cases being served by the Bureau. Despite best efforts however, the reductions in the Bureau’s overall consumer base combined with requirements implemented under WIOA to set aside 50% of Supported Employment funding for youth, will continue to make full liquidation of the full annual SE grant award difficult.**

**Based on current initiatives and projected growth in the overall consumer base, BRS is forecasting that 40 consumers will be served under Supported Employment funds in FFY 2024 expending \$60,000. With the efforts outlined above, this number is expected to increase to 55 consumers in FFY 2025 with an estimated expenditure of \$80,000. In combination with the 4,700 individuals projected to receive services under general VR funds, the total number of individuals who could be served in IPE’s for FFY 2025 is 4,755.**

(g) Order of Selection.

**[X] The VR agency is not implementing an order of selection and all eligible individuals will be served.**

[check box] The VR agency is implementing an order of selection with one or more categories closed.

\* VR agencies may maintain an order of selection policy and priority of eligible individuals without implementing or continuing to implement an order of selection.

Pursuant to section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act, this description must be amended when the VR agency determines, based on the annual estimates described in description (f), that VR services cannot be provided to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for and are determined eligible for services.

(1) For VR agencies that have defined priority categories describe—

- (A) The justification for the order

**The bureau is not in an Order of selection.**

- (B) The order (priority categories) to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services ensuring that individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities.

**Whether in an Order of Selection or not, the Bureau has assigned all applicants to an OOS category as a means of determining the distribution of the programs' collective caseload across priority categories of disabilities. The priority categories assigned are based on level of significance of disability. "Level of significance of disability" means one of the following: Priority Category 1, "Most Significant Disability"; Priority Category 2, "Significant Disability"; or Priority Category 3, "disabled" as set forth below. Individuals with disabilities shall be served first, based on significance of disability and second, by date of eligibility in the following priority order:**

- 1. Priority Category 1: "Most Significant Disability" means an eligible individual who meets the following criteria:**
  - a. Meets criteria for "Significant Disability" as defined below; and**
  - b. A severe physical or mental impairment that seriously limits four or more functional capacity areas in terms of an employment outcome. Functional capacity areas are: mobility, work tolerance, communication, self-care, interpersonal skills, self-direction, or work skills.**
- 2. Priority Category 2: "Significant Disability" means an eligible individual who meets the following criteria:**
  - a. A severe physical or mental impairment that seriously limits one or more functional capacity areas in terms of an employment outcome. Functional capacity areas are: mobility, work tolerance, communication, self-care, interpersonal skills, self-direction, or work skills.**
  - b. Vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require multiple vocational rehabilitation services.**
  - c. Vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require services over an extended period of time.**
  - d. An individual who has one or more physical or mental disabilities determined on the basis of an assessment for determining eligibility, and vocational rehabilitation needs to cause substantial functional limitation.**
- 3. Priority Category 3: "individual with a disability" means an eligible individual.**

- (C) The VR agency’s goals for serving individuals in each priority category, including how the agency will assist eligible individuals assigned to closed priority categories with information and referral, the method in which the VR agency will manage waiting lists, and the projected timelines for opening priority categories. NOTE: Priority categories are considered open when all individuals in the priority category may be served.

**All priority categories are open. The bureau is not in an order of selection.**

(3) Has the VR agency elected to serve eligible individuals outside of the order of selection who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment?

Yes.  **is not in an order of selection.**

No

**(h) Waiver of Statewideness.** The State plan shall be in effect in all political subdivisions of the State, however, the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (Commissioner) may waive compliance with this requirement in accordance with section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act and the implementing regulations in 34 CFR 361.26. If the VR agency is requesting a waiver of statewideness or has a previously approved waiver of statewideness, describe the types of services and the local entities providing such services under the waiver of statewideness and how the agency has complied with the requirements in 34 CFR 361.26. If the VR agency is not requesting or does not have an approved waiver of statewideness, please indicate “not applicable.”

**The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services is not requesting a Waiver of Statewideness.**

**(i) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development.** In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act, the VR agency must develop and maintain annually a description (consistent with the purposes of the Rehabilitation Act) of the VR agency’s comprehensive system of personnel development, which shall include a description of the procedures and activities the VR agency will undertake to ensure it has an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals that provides the following:

(1) Analysis of current personnel and projected personnel needs including

- (A) The number and type of personnel that are employed by the VR agency in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services, including ratios of qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors to clients.
- (B) The number of personnel currently needed by the VR agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category.
- (C) Projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the VR agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors.

<b><u>Personnel Category</u></b>	<b><u>No. of Personnel</u></b>	<b><u>No. of Personnel</u></b>	<b><u>Projected No. of</u></b>
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	<u>Employed</u>	<u>Currently Needed</u>	<u>Personnel Needed in 5 Years</u>
<b>Support (Administrative Assistant, Clerical Unit, Supervisors, Fiscal Administrative Assistants, Secretaries &amp; ASL Interpreters)</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Central Office Consultants</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Regional Directors</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Project /Service Coordinators</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>VR State Director</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Manager</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>VR Supervisor</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>VR Counselors</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Assistant Counselors</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4</b>

(D) Ratio of qualified VR counselors to clients:

**BRS assisted 5,343 consumers in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2023. With 36-VR counselors, the ratio of VR counselors to all consumers is 1:148; the ratio of VR supervisors to consumers is 1:534. The ratio of all staff to consumers is 1:54. Of the 5,343 total annual consumers, 1,884 developed an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). Based on the same number of VR counselors, the ratio of staff to all consumers with an IPE is 1:52; VR supervisors to consumers with an IPE is 1:188; and all staff to consumers with an IPE is 1:19.**

(E) Projected number of individuals to be served in 5 years:

**13,612**

(2) Data and information on personnel preparation and development, recruitment and retention, and staff development, including the following:

(A) A list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program; the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.

<u>Institute of Higher Education</u>	<u>Type of Program</u>	<u>No. of Students Enrolled</u>	<u>No. of Prior Year Graduates</u>
<b>Central CT State University</b>	<b>Vocational Rehabilitation Program</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>16</b>

**BRS analyzes the graduate information from the regional Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) – accredited universities to find schools that offer required courses or graduate degrees in rehabilitation counseling. We also check with local CACREP schools for the availability of distance learning opportunities for the required CSPD courses. In the state of Connecticut, there is one CACREP–accredited institution of higher education that is preparing vocational rehabilitation professionals: Central Connecticut State University (CCSU). All rehabilitation counseling graduates from this college will be eligible to sit for the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) exam.**

- (B) The VR agency’s plan for recruitment, preparation and retention of qualified personnel, which addresses the current and projected needs for qualified personnel; and the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the VR agency and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.

**BRS sends announcements for Counselor positions to all regional CACREP –accredited institutions of higher education that train VR Counselors. We have initiated contacts with these universities so that we can continue to find well–qualified staff for the vacancies we anticipate in the future. In addition to the Connecticut–based CACREP institution listed above, we are in close contact with the regional institutions from which we have traditionally found Counselor applicants (Assumption and Springfield College in MA, University of Massachusetts, and Salve Regina in RI); we have staff that serve on advisory boards or teach at these institutions.**

**In addition to the above, for recruitment of Managerial or other higher-level administration or specialized positions the Bureau works with the Council of State Administrators in Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) to announce vacancies by dissemination of postings through this organization’s e-mail distribution list.**

**The Bureau has made efforts to recruit qualified staff representative of the population of Connecticut, experiencing a reasonable amount of success related to VR staff positions. This is indicated by 32% of the individuals being hired in FFY 2023 being from a minority background. The Bureau does experience persistent and ongoing challenges related to the hiring of Master’s level counselors who are proficient with Spanish or American Sign Language (ASL). We will continue and look to enhance the following strategies to ensure there is a sufficient pool of qualified counselors for future openings:**

**Increase both on–campus and online college recruitments.**

- **Strengthen partnerships with CT’s CACREP universities to ensure our counselors meet their CSPD requirements.**
- **Continue to offer practicum and internship experience for rehabilitation counseling students.**
- **Collaboration with marketing and outreach team to bring awareness to the public of the role of a VR Counselor through use of social media and videos, and provide opportunity for interested parties to receive notifications when a position of interest is posted online.**



**The Bureau acknowledges a continued insufficiency of diversity in leadership positions within the agency related to race and ethnicity, although we have experienced an improvement over 2019 at which time 11% of individuals in these positions were from minority backgrounds. Presently 28% of BRS leaders are from minority backgrounds.**

**Historically in Connecticut, there were several factors that ensured retention of staff. BRS attributed the reasons for retention success as follows:**

- BRS recruits staff committed to the importance of VR work**
- In-service training is available to staff at all levels**
- Staff may give input into decisions that affect the way they work**
- Staff can participate in ongoing committees related to: Community Rehabilitation Providers, Autism Spectrum, Counselor Performance Evaluation team, the BRS Annual Meeting, and other statewide work groups.**

**BRS continues to uphold these approaches as critical to staff retention, but as evidenced over recent years our approach must evolve relative to the times. During the years 2020-2023, the Bureau made targeted efforts to address issues that were leading to loss of staff and, in addition to the above, believe the following will lead to greater employee retention:**

- Ensure that staff have input into the work of the Bureau. The Bureau is encouraging staff at all levels to have representation on committees that offer opportunities for leadership experiences that will help them prepare for other positions in BRS.**
- Input to Counselor performance evaluation methodology. The Bureau understands the importance of a fair, valid and reliable approach to evaluating performance within a system now driven by compliance with the WIOA.**
- Implementation of improved post-inductive training with clear expectations communicated concerning developmental milestones for new Counselors to surpass over their first year.**
- Ensuring connectivity of administrative support staff to the goals, mission and priorities of the program through requiring their attendance at Regional and Statewide staff meetings.**
- We support several of our staff that have been trained in DEIA. We will continue to ensure we have staff trained in cultural competency.**
- BRS has partnered with George Washington University in development of Staff Recruitment and Retention plans and as a result developed and implemented an Employee Engagement Survey. Results of survey have identified key areas related to improvement and activities are planned to address specific areas of need. Identified areas include:**
  - Staff input on key decisions and hearing field-level staff input.**
  - Exploring and securing key tools and equipment needed to effectively complete the job of VR Counselor.**

**(C) Description of staff development policies, procedures, and activities that ensure all personnel employed by the VR agency receive appropriate and adequate training and continuing education for professionals and paraprofessionals:**

- i. Particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and
- ii. Procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to VR agency professionals and paraprofessionals and for providing training regarding the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act made by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

**The current requirements for CSPD are based on the national standards for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC). The National Standard is determined by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC). BRS hires counselors that meet CRCC criteria. Even though BRS bases its educational standards for VR Counselors on the national standards for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC), it does not require counselors to have CRC certification. However, applicants with a CACREP–accredited rehabilitation Master’s degree should be able to sit for the CRC exam.**

**BRS employees interested in CRC Certification are encouraged to contact the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification at the following website: <http://www.crccertification.com/> for more specific information on their credentials and experience. BRS does not guarantee that the above criteria will entitle a counselor to sit for the CRC exam. The Bureau provides training at no cost, and offers Continuing Education Units (CEU’s), which will count toward the ongoing training requirements by CRCC.**

- (3) Description of VR agency policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) to ensure that VR agency professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including
- (A) Standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and
  - (B) The establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, in accordance with section 101(a)(7)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.

**BRS requires that VR Counselors have a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a related field. Graduate coursework aligned with CRCC content requirements, must be completed to satisfy the requirements of the CRCC. The number of additional required courses will depend on the previous education and content areas of study. The Bureau’s definition of education, course curriculum, and experience is based on current standards for the national Certified Rehabilitation Counselor certification:**

- Individuals with a related Master’s degree, not in rehabilitation counseling – may require course content to align with CRCC. Defined content areas includes: Medical and Psychosocial Aspects of Disabilities; Assessment; Career Development Theories and Job**

**Development and Placement Techniques; Case Management and Community Partnerships; Theories and Techniques of Counseling; Research, Methodology, and Performance Management.**

**The Bureau recognizes that CRCC and CACREP accredited programs may develop programs and course content with some variation, and the Bureau seeks to explore alternative options to secure required content for our VR Staff and CSPD candidates in the future.**

**In addition to education requirements, BRS encourages staff to pursue certification in their field. The Bureau embraces the CSPD process to ensure a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities, continuous organizational development, and continuous improvement of the competencies of all staff. The Bureau participates and contributes to collaborative conferences and enables staff attendance that focus on the Connecticut labor and education initiatives under W.I.O.A. in order to maintain and increase VR Staff's understanding of current trends and emerging practices related to federal initiatives.**

**Each year, VR staff are required to participate in training in a variety of formats. As new procedures are developed, content specific training is delivered via staff meetings, in-person training and online virtual content. In recent years, content to all staff has been provided that address key themes including: data compliance, labor market, customized employment, supported employment, case management, career advancement, informed choice, rapid engagement, quarterly reporting, enrollment and measurable skill gains, amongst others. In addition, our online inventory with YesLMS of over 130 training modules enables the Bureau to customize training needs based on role and relevance. We have established training tracks based on these roles including VR Onboarding, Unit Supervisors/Administrative Assistants, and All Staff. In 2024, we are rolling our mandatory online trainings required during the calendar year. Attendance in all training is tracked. In addition, when VR Partners offer conferences, professional development opportunities, BRS reviews and approves individual staff to attend based on relevance to their role and operational needs.**

**BRS also seeks continuous improvements in service delivery, the continuation of a professional level VR staff that can consistently achieve quality employment outcomes as specified in the Rehabilitation Act and promised in the Americans with Disabilities Act. In addition, we continually seek ways to meet the needs of our consumers and deliver a complete array of services based on the goals of employment, community participation, and informed consumer choice. The Bureau has hired a qualified, diverse, flexible and progressive rehabilitation staff to serve our current and future consumers. BRS strives toward the continuous development of desired consumer outcomes: sustained jobs, jobs with future growth, and jobs with sufficient earnings.**

(4) Method(s) the VR agency uses to ensure that personnel are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

**BRS addresses individual communication needs of applicants for, and recipients of, vocational rehabilitation through the services of others able to communicate in alternate languages, appropriate modes, or in native languages. The Bureau employs staff who are fluent in Spanish, American Sign Language, and other languages. All of our public facing documents are trans-created in Spanish. Each region has one (1) or more Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCD) on staff to work with individuals who are Deaf, DeafBlind**

and fluent in ASL<sub>2</sub> and who have access to a videophone. Each region also has one (1) or more Bilingual Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors fluent in Spanish. BRS employs one (1) Central Office Latino Consultant. BRS is also in the process of hiring several clerk typist interpreters who are fluent in Spanish to assist the agency.

BRS has translated five (5) of fourteen (14) distance learning modules into Spanish and has translated the agency's four (4) Work Readiness Training Program Modules into Spanish.

BRS employs a State Coordinator for the Deaf who also serves as an Education Consultant and also has an Interpreter Coordinator. The Interpreter Coordinator coordinates all the agency's American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting services, acts as the agency's lead ASL interpreter, supervises two (2) full time agency staff interpreters, and contracts in person and remote ASL interpreter services, as necessary. The Interpreter Coordinator and staff interpreters all have video phone access and can interpret remotely through TEAMS, Zoom, or videophone.

When needed, BRS can hire a spoken language interpreter in almost any language and can access spoken language interpreter services over the phone for all languages. A program to provide virtual on demand translation services is being piloted in three BRS field offices in 2024.

The Bureau does not serve many consumers who use Braille since there is a public Vocational Rehabilitation program through the Connecticut Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) that serves most consumers who have visual disabilities. When needed, BRS can provide Braille materials for consumers or staff. The Bureau's goal is to provide any communication support necessary for staff or consumers with disabilities.

- (5) As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

BRS is a member of the CT Community of Practice Transition Core Team and collaborates with an Education Consultant at the Connecticut State Department of Education's Bureau of Special Education who has been active in the Department of Education's Comprehensive System of Personnel Development Council. The Bureau plans training with input from the Consultant. This Consultant provides annual training for all Bureau professional staff on transition and other provisions of the IDEA. This collaboration allows for coordination of the Bureau's human resource plan and personnel development under the IDEA. In addition, the SRC has an active SDE Education Consultant on their council.

COOPERATION, COLLABORATION, AND COORDINATION (Section 101(a)(11) of the Rehabilitation Act)

**(i) Coordination with Education Officials.** In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(11)(D) of the Rehabilitation Act

- (1) Describe plans, policies, and procedures for coordination between the designated State agency and education officials responsible for the public education of students with disabilities, that are designed to facilitate the transition of the students with disabilities from the receipt of educational services in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services, including pre-employment transition services.

**BRS continues to collaborate with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and a number of entities to implement pre-employment transition services including the Connecticut Transition Community of Practice, the Northeast Transition Group, Transition Task Force, and CT- AHEAD/Higher Education Schools. Moreover, BRS has been awarded the Disability Innovation Fund Pathways to Partnership Grant which is a joint venture between BRS, CSDE, Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and the Centers for Independent Living to strengthen system capacity with BRS and our partners to develop seamless transition services that will focus on earlier identification and engagement of children (ages 10-13) and youth (ages 14-24) with disabilities and increase successful education and employment outcomes, with an emphasis on underserved populations. This work will center on developing statewide crosswalks and career pathways to competitive integrated employment through Postsecondary Education and vocational training programs; expanding independent living services in Level Up; and working with the CT Department of Education to create a more comprehensive Transition website. In all, this work should generate students who are better prepared to engage in Level Up, apply for and participate in VR services. It will also assist in ensuring that BRS meets its wide-ranging responsibilities identified in the recently passed CT Public Act 23-137.**

**CT Public Act 23-137 will enhance our partnerships with CSDE and LEAs. This new law has provided ADS/BRS with funding for 14 additional Vocational Rehabilitation FTE staff beginning in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of FFY24. These positions are expected to be fully funded in FFY25 and beyond. The intent of the appropriation of these additional resources is to increase the number of VR Staff available to provide transition services to students requiring special education who are potentially eligible to receive services through BRS. Additionally, BRS will need to appoint a liaison to work with the SDE Statewide Transition Services Coordinator to provide information and advice to the coordinator concerning the transition resources, transition services and public transition programs provided by BRS.**

**Consistent with the intent and the implementation of WIOA and the Public Act 23-137, BRS expanded to four Youth Services units. These units have been strategically distributed with defined catchment areas to ensure equal access to VR services across Local Education Authorities statewide. Each Youth Service Unit has 1 VR Supervisor, a 1:1 ratio of Level Up Counselors and Transition Counselors, and 1 assistant-level Counselor to promote seamless transition from Pre-ETS to Adult VR Services. Level Up Counselors are tasked to provide Pre-ETS (Level Up) exclusively with students with disabilities. In addition to these regionally based Youth Services Units, BRS employs two statewide positions to support their work: 1 Work-Based Learning Experience Coordinator and one Secretary 2. The aggregate field-level investment of state and federally funded staff dedicated to the student and transition-aged youth with disabilities by BRS is a total of 42 positions, which represents 41.6% of all direct client service personnel.**

**SDE and BRS have staff that serve on each other's advisory committees (Transition Task Force and Level Up Committee). Program staff attends common training regarding the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), secondary transition services and WIOA. SDE and BRS collaborated to develop a statewide CT Transition Community of Practice (COP) with a broad stakeholder base as a single portal for transition resource development, professional development, and interagency collaboration. SDE and BRS initiated statewide strategic planning with agencies, school districts, families and other stakeholders. SDE and BRS have led Person-Centered Planning integration (CT Statewide Life Course Planning (LCP)) Ambassador meetings and CT Life Course Education Ambassador meetings.**

**Information on the formal interagency agreement with the State Department of Education (CSDE) includes the following:**

**BRS has expanded focus to include both Level Up Committee and Transition Committee to focus on service delivery for students enrolled in high school and also collaborated with the State Department of Education (CSDE) and a number of entities to implement pre-employment transition services including the Connecticut Transition Community of Practice, Transition Task Force, and CT-AHEAD/Higher Education Schools.**

- (2) Describe the current status and scope of the formal interagency agreement between the VR agency and the State educational agency. Consistent with the requirements of the formal interagency agreement pursuant to 34 CFR 361.22(b), provide, at a minimum, the following information about the agreement:
  - (A) Consultation and technical assistance, which may be provided using alternative means for meeting participation (such as video conferences and conference calls), to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including pre-employment transition services and other vocational rehabilitation services.
  - (B) Transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency personnel for students with disabilities that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs (IEPs) under section 614(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
  - (C) The roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services and pre-employment transition services.
  - (D) Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services and pre-employment transition services. Outreach to these students should occur as early as possible during the transition planning process and must include, at a minimum, a description of the purpose of the vocational rehabilitation program, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and scope of services that may be provided to eligible individuals.
  - (E) Coordination necessary to satisfy documentation requirements set forth in 34 CFR part 397 regarding students and youth with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment.
  - (F) Assurance that, in accordance with 34 CFR 397.31, neither the SEA nor the local educational agency will enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity, as defined in 34 CFR 397.5(d), for the purpose of operating a program under which youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

**BRS entered into a MOU with SDE on 11/17/2017 and provides Pre-ETS (Level Up) to students starting at 16 years of age. This MOU will be reviewed and revised as necessary by April 2024 per the requirements of the Disability Innovation Fund Pathways to Partnership grant award.**

**Per the current MOU, the responsibilities of BRS under the formal interagency agreement are as follows:**

- 1. Collaborate with the CSDE in coordinating, providing, and documenting the provision of Pre-ETS (Level Up) to students with disabilities.**
- 2. Provide vocational rehabilitation services to students and youth who meet the eligibility criteria of BRS.**
- 3. Work with the Local Education Authorities (LEA) to make the best effort to develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) for each student eligible for adult VR services before the student leaves the school setting.**
- 4. Provide consultation and technical assistance to aid LEA in planning for the transition of eligible students.**
- 5. Coordinate with the SDE for training and technical assistance regarding transitioning youth with disabilities and interagency service linkages, including but not limited to, presenting at statewide events and supporting the statewide transition website of the Connecticut Transition Community of Practice (COP).**
- 6. Satisfy the documentation requirements of section 511 of WIOA and 34 C.F.R. 397 for students with disabilities who seek subminimum wage from employers who hold special wage certificates under the Fair Labor Standards Act, 29 U.S.C. 214 (c), including the provision of documentation of notice that Pre-ETS (Level Up) were available to that individual under 34 C.F.R. 361.48, documentation of an application for vocational rehabilitation services and the result thereof, and, if the individual was found eligible for vocational rehabilitation services, documentation that the individual had an IPE, was unable to achieve the employment outcome specified in the IPE, and had a closed case record meeting the requirements of 34 C.F.R. 361.47.**
- 7. Collaborate with the CSDE to provide trainings to schools about Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) careers and Customized Employment for youth with disabilities.**
- 8. Provide a VR staff member to participate on or support the SDE Transition Taskforce, the Connecticut Transition COP, and the BRS Level Up meetings.**
- 9. Satisfy the career counseling and information and referral requirements of WIOA, including its documentation requirements, for each youth with a disability who seeks, or obtains, subminimum wage employment.**

**The responsibilities of CSDE under the formal interagency agreement are as follows:**

- 1. Provide general supervision of the implementation of the IDEA's requirements for special education and related services to ensure a free appropriate public education for children and youth with disabilities.**
- 2. Collaborate with BRS to coordinate, provide, and document the provision of Pre-ETS (Level Up) to students with disabilities.**
- 3. Facilitate partnerships between BRS and LEA, including the identification of a contact person in each organization, as mutually identified by the parties, to facilitate communication.**
- 4. Collaborate with BRS and LEA to develop new Pre-ETS (Level Up) services.**
- 5. Assist BRS with training schools about STEM careers and customized employment for youth with disabilities.**
- 6. Assure that IEPs developed by LEA for youth with disabilities aged 16 or over include plans for the provision of educationally-related "transition services" as defined in 34 C.F.R. 361.22(b)(4) and 34 C.F.R. 300.43. Educationally-related transition services shall also include such activities identified by the LEA as are based on the child's needs, consider the child's preferences, and are designed to facilitate movement from school to post-secondary activities, including employment.**
- 7. For each student with a disability with an IEP or Section 504 Accommodation Plan that the LEA has reason to believe may pursue subminimum wage employment following their exit from the school system, SDE shall assure that LEA document the provision of transition services in accordance with the documentation requirements of 34 C.F.R. 397.30(b)(1), including, at a minimum, the child's name, a description of the service or activity completed, the dated signature of the responsible educational official documenting the completion of the required service or activity, and the dated signature of the responsible educational official who transmits the documentation of the provision of transition services to BRS upon the request of BRS;**
- 8. For each student with a disability that the LEA has reason to believe may pursue subminimum wage employment following their exit from the school system, SDE shall assure that LEA transmit documentation of the provision of educationally-related transition services to BRS by June 15 of the year in which the youth exits the school system. Such transmission of documentation to BRS shall include a cover sheet identifying the transmitted documentation that has been provided and shall be made in a manner that ensures confidentiality in accordance with the requirements of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.**
- 9. Collaborate with BRS to disseminate information about and train school personnel on how to coordinate services for students with disabilities as they transition to life after high school, including those students interested in supported, subminimum wage, or other employment in compliance with WIOA.**



- 10. Coordinate with BRS to distribute information for LEA to provide to students referred to BRS beginning at age 16.**
- 11. Provide information about BRS and related services on the SDE Secondary Transition and other relevant website pages**
- 12. Facilitate the provision of transition services through LEA, based on funding responsibilities identified in IDEA and WIOA.**
- 13. Provide an SDE staff member to actively participate on and support or co-chair the BRS Transition Committee, SDE Transition Taskforce and the Connecticut Transition COP.**
- 14. Assure that neither the SDE nor the LEA will enter into a contract with an entity for the purpose of operating a program under which a youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.**

(k) Coordination with Employers. In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(11)(E) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe how the VR agency will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of VR services; and transition services for youth and students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities.

**BRS employs a Workforce Outreach Team (WOT) made up of a Workforce Projects Coordinator and Workforce Counselors across the state. The Workforce Projects Coordinator and Workforce Counselors are responsible for employer outreach efforts across Connecticut. The Workforce Outreach Team builds relationships with employers to identify their workforce development needs. Through these mutually beneficial relationships, WOT offers business services such as disability awareness trainings, candidate pre-screening, competitive placement opportunities, on-the-job trainings and industry specific training and placement programs. In turn, the WOT Workforce Counselors obtain real-time labor market information that is shared with VR Counselors and participants of the vocational rehabilitation program as part of their career path exploration and decision-making process. This dual-customer approach allows BRS to prepare VR consumers for long-term, sustained employment in a constantly evolving labor market.**

**BRS has procured transition services for students with disabilities that include placement with employers to participate in work-based learning experiences and workplace readiness training, as defined in WIOA. The scope of services includes social skill development, independent living and instruction in self-advocacy, peer mentoring, and assistive technology. Upon graduation, youth will benefit from transition services to prepare for, seek and maintain employment and secure supports needed to be successful.**

**BRS has been awarded the Disability Innovation Fund Pathways to Partnership Grant, which is a five year (October 2023 – September 2028) joint venture between BRS, CSDE, Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and the Centers for Independent Living to strengthen system capacity with BRS and our partners to develop seamless transition services that will focus on earlier identification and engagement of children and youth with disabilities and increase successful education and employment outcomes, with an**

**emphasis on underserved populations. This work will center on developing statewide crosswalks and career pathways to competitive integrated employment through Postsecondary Education and vocational training programs; expanding independent living services in Level Up; and working with the CT Department of Education to create a more comprehensive Transition website. In all, this work should generate students who are better prepared to engage in Level Up and/or apply for VR services. It will also assist in ensuring that BRS meets its wide-ranging responsibilities identified in the recently passed Public Act 23-137.**

**(L) Interagency Cooperation with Other Agencies.** In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(11)(C) and (K), describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system to develop opportunities for community-based employment in integrated settings, to the greatest extent practicable for the following:

(1) State programs (designate lead agency.(ies) and implementing entity(ies) carried out under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998.

**The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services is the “lead agency” for the Connecticut Assistive Technology (AT) Act Program, therefore a MOA is not needed. The Program Director for the AT Act program serves in the role of AT Consultant to the VR program and a strong relationship exists. The AT Act program operates an AT device lending service specifically for VR consumers. The Program Director provides AT demonstrations when needed and assists VR consumers in participating in reuse activities. Additionally, VR consumers utilize the alternate financing program operated by the AT Act program to assist in paying for needed devices that the VR program may not be able to provide, such as vehicles, which can then be modified by the VR program.**

**The following are formal agreements that have been established to provide activities under Section 4 of the AT Act:**

**1.**

**a. The State Education Resource Center (SERC) MOU enables SERC to provide Assistive Technology device demonstrations and loans primarily to educators, other school personnel, family members and students.**

**b. The Southern Connecticut State University MOA enables laptops and iPads with specific software to be loaned to CT K-12 schools for up to four months to allow students to try devices before they are purchased.**

(2) Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture.

**None.**

(3) Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth.

**None.**

(4) State use contracting programs:

**The Office of the Attorney General MOA enables review and approval of all VR new and amended contracts, including those with Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), and legal representation at mediations and Administrative Hearings for consumers.**

**At the Department level, the agency participates with the Office of the State Comptroller for a Purchase Card program that permits expedited purchasing of goods and services needed by clients to participate in the rehabilitation process. The Department also has established a fee for service contract model with community rehabilitation providers across the state that enables VR to purchase services at consistent pricing levels, making budget forecasting a more consistent and reliable process. The agency also utilizes state use contracts made available through the Department of Administrative Services for services that have been competitively procured for statewide agency use. Examples include interpreting services, office supplies, cell phones, MiFi, computer hardware, IT consultants and clerical temps off DAS contracts as well.**

(5) State agency responsible for administering the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396 et seq.):

**The State Medicaid plan under Title XIX of the Social Security Act is a program operated by the Department of Social Services (DSS). For over 20 years until 2014, BRS functioned as a Designated State Unit with DSS serving as its Designated State Agency. As a result of this long-term relationship, BRS has a close working relationship with DSS programs such as TANF, the Medicaid Buy-In, and Money Follows the Person. We offer technical assistance through our Vocational Rehabilitation and Benefits Counseling programs. The Bureau is also in a cooperative agreement with the Department of Social Services (DSS) to ensure that recipients of Medicaid are aware of the services that are available through BRS VR, including the provision of information and referral services.**

(6) State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities:

**The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) MOU enables coordinated vocational employment services for people with intellectual disabilities to minimize overlap of resources.**

(7) State agency responsible for providing mental health services:

**The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) MOA enables BRS to partially fund a shared position to improve service delivery and collaboration for consumers of both programs.**

(8) Other Federal, State, and local agencies and programs outside the workforce development system:

**BRS has executed a 3-way MOU with the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Department of Labor (DOL) for the exchange of client records necessary for BRS to process cost reimbursement cases with the Social Security Administration (SSA). Under this agreement, BRS runs a batch file process with DSS. A resultant file is generated by DSS using DOL Unemployment Compensation data to assist BRS with identifying cases that qualify for cost reimbursement through The Social Security Administration (SSA).**

**BRS has a MOU with the University of Connecticut to house a Graduate intern in Central Office to help with the delivery of various VR projects and deliverables. An MOU with the Department of Developmental Services, the Connecticut State Department of Education to provide Customized Employment.**

**BRS and the Connecticut Department of Labor (DOL) are completing an MOU that will facilitate the electronic provision of data to assist in determining eligibility of businesses who have applied for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) Program and have hired individual consumers of BRS services. The federal WOTC Program, administered by DOL, is designed to encourage employers to hire individuals who have consistently had the most difficulty in securing employment by giving federal tax credits to employers. BRS will be entering into a contract with University of Maryland to develop the comprehensive statewide needs assessment in 2024.**

(9) Other private nonprofit organizations.

**Cooperative agreements with CRP's, Workforce Development Boards (WBDs) and Independent Living Centers (ILCs) allow for employment supports through the Ticket to Work Partnership Plus program. BRS has with both CRP's and ILC's an MOU in place to determine and ensure distribution of ticket revenue.**

**Cooperative agreements are established by a negotiation process and are memorialized in Memorandums of Understanding (MOU). WBD's also have an MOU, with an accompanying infrastructure cost agreement in place that was done in collaboration with all of the WBD's and includes a component for those that are physically co-located with VR.**

**BRS uses a wide range of contractual agreements with accompanying fee schedules that have been established through a competitive bidding process by the Department of Aging and Disability Services, the designated state agency for the Blind and General VR programs. This provides a statewide comprehensive set of program options and services to choose from. Fourteen nonprofit community-based rehabilitation programs are available through these contractual agreements for clients to select from. The services that are offered through the community rehabilitation programs in the state include trial work experiences, work readiness training, community placement opportunities and job coaching, among other related services. BRS staff members conduct training seminars for staff of the community rehabilitation providers on cross disability subjects, work readiness training and other CRP service provision topics.**

## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CERTIFICATIONS AND ASSURANCES

### CERTIFICATIONS

<b><u>States must provide written and signed certifications that:</u></b>	
<b>1.</b>	<b>The (enter the name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate,) is authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by title IV of WIOA,<sup>1</sup> and its State Plan supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>In the event the designated State agency is not primarily concerned with</b>

<sup>1</sup> Public Law 113-128.

<b><u>States must provide written and signed certifications that:</u></b>	
	<b>vocational and other rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities, the designated State agency must include a designated State unit for the VR program (Section 101(a)(2)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act). As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of VR services, the (enter the name of designated State agency or the designated State unit when the designated State agency has a designated State unit)<sup>2</sup> agrees to operate and is responsible for the administration of the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan<sup>3</sup>, the Rehabilitation Act, 34 CFR 361.13(b) and (c), and all applicable regulations<sup>4</sup>, policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available to States under section 111(a) of the Rehabilitation Act are used solely for the provision of VR services and the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan.</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act for supported employment services, the designated State agency or the designated State unit when the designated State agency has a designated State unit, agrees to operate and is responsible for the administration of the State Supported Employment Services Program in accordance with the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan<sup>5</sup>, the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations<sup>6</sup>, policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under title VI are used solely for the provision of supported employment services and the administration of the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan.</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>The designated State unit, or if not applicable, the designated State agency has the authority under State law to perform the functions of the State regarding the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement and is responsible for the administration of the VR program in accordance with 34 CFR 361.13(b) and (c).</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>The State legally may carry out each provision of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement.</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>All provisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement are consistent with State law.</b>
<b>7.</b>	<b>The (enter title of State officer below) has the authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the VR services</b>

<sup>2</sup> All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

<sup>3</sup> No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

<sup>4</sup> Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations at 34 CFR part 361.

<sup>5</sup> No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

<sup>6</sup> Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 CFR part 363.

<b><u>States must provide written and signed certifications that:</u></b>	
	<b>portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement.</b>
	<b>Amy Porter</b>
<b>8.</b>	<b>The (enter title of State officer below) has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment services.</b>
	<b>Commissioner, Department of Aging and Disability Services</b>
<b>9.</b>	<b>The agency that submits the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan and its supplement.</b>

**ASSURANCES**

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate and identified in the State certifications included with this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, through signature of the authorized individual, assures the Commissioner, that it will comply with all of the requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, as set forth in sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act. The individual authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement makes the following assurances:

<b><u>The State Plan must provide assurances that:</u></b>	
<b>1.</b>	<b><u>Public Comment on Policies and Procedures:</u> The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b><u>Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement:</u> The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a Unified State plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 C.F.R. 76.140.</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b><u>Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan:</u> The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:</b> <b>(a) the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act.</b> <b>(b) either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act.</b> <b>(c) consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act.</b>

**The State Plan must provide assurances that:**

- (d) the financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3).
- (e) as applicable, the local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.
- (f) as applicable, the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act.
- (g) statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act.
- (h) the requirements for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.
- (i) all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act.
- (j) the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act.
- (k) the compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.
- (l) the reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities as set forth in section 101(a)(18)(A).
- (m) the submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act.

4. **Administration of the Provision of VR Services:** The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:
- (a) comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(E) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act.
  - (b) impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act.
  - (c) provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act, as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities

<b><u>The State Plan must provide assurances that:</u></b>	
	<p>in the State who apply for services or, if implementing an order of selection, in accordance with criteria established by the State for the order of selection as set out in section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(d) determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(e) comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(f) comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(g) provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(h) comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by sections 101(a)(14) and 511 of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(i) meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs.</p> <p>(j) with respect to students with disabilities, the State:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>(i) has developed and will implement,<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>(A) strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and</li><li>(B) strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and</li></ul></li><li>(ii) has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15), 101(a)(25), and 113).</li><li>(iii) shall reserve not less than 15 percent of the allocated funds for the provision of pre-employment transition services; such funds shall not be used to pay for the administrative costs of providing pre-employment transition services.</li></ul>
5.	<p><b><u>Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement to the State plan:</u></b></p> <p>(a) The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>



<b><u>The State Plan must provide assurances that:</u></b>	
	<p>(b) The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
6.	<p><b><u>Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program (Title VI):</u></b></p> <p>(a) The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(H) and (I) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(b) The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
7.	<p><b><u>Provision of Supported Employment Services:</u></b></p> <p>(a) The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(b) The designated State agency assures that</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">the comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act an individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act , which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(7)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>

Appendix 1: Performance Goals for the Core Programs

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years

covered by the plan. The state is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

Include the state's expected levels of performance relating to the performance accountability indicators based on primary indicators of performance described in section 116(b)(2)(A) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

	<b>Vocational Rehabilitation Program</b>			
	<b>Program Year: 2024</b>		<b>Program Year: 2025</b>	
	<b>Expected Level</b>	<b>Negotiated Level</b>	<b>Expected Level</b>	<b>Negotiated Level</b>
<b>Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)<sup>22</sup></b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>Baseline</b>
<b>Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)<sup>22</sup></b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>Baseline</b>
<b>Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)<sup>7</sup></b>	<b>\$7,000</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>\$7,200</b>	<b>Baseline</b>

<b>Credential Attainment Rate</b>	23.5%	<b>Baseline</b>	25%	<b>Baseline</b>
<b>Measurable Skill Gains</b>	52.5%	<b>37.0</b>	55%	<b>42.0</b>

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (BLIND)

A. INPUT OF STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

1. INPUT PROVIDED BY THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, INCLUDING INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN, RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL'S REPORT, THE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION, AND OTHER COUNCIL REPORTS THAT MAY HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED AS PART OF THE COUNCIL'S FUNCTIONS;

**The SRC for the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program at BESB continues to be a valuable and active contributing partner to the VR Program and BESB. Over the course of this plan, the SRC developed a workgroup responsible for working with BESB on the state plan through reviewing annual consumer satisfaction surveys and the Consumer Statewide Needs Assessment that was completed in 2023. SRC members continue to participate and work actively in partnership with BESB as well as continuing their existing responsibilities as identified in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).**

The following information summarizes the recommendations of the SRC through their continued collaboration and partnership with BESB.

**Recommendation 1: Resolve the RSA Corrective Action Plan for compliance in the Pre-Employment Transition Services Reserve.**

**Recommendation 2: Work on exploring ways to fully spend the awarded VR grant on services, technology, training, etc.**

**Recommendation 3: Focus on program outreach to underserved populations, small business employers, local governments, and such to increase awareness of services provided by the VR program.**

**Recommendation 4: Focus on marketing, revitalizing BESB VR's image, creating accessible VR marketing materials, social media posts, PSA's, and public education and awareness to increase the number of consumers referred to and served by the VR program.**

**Recommendation 5: Provide more training to VR staff on areas of identified needs and interests to better serve VR consumers and increase VR staff professional development.**

**Recommendation 6: Explore how adaptive technology can be more readily available for consumers across the whole state to have demonstrations and hands-on experiences with technology in order to make better informed choices prior to BESB providing technology and necessary training to consumers. For the modification period, the SRC offered the following recommendations:**

2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS; INCLUDING AN EXPLANATION FOR THE REJECTION OF ANY INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**BESB agreed with all of the SRC's workgroup recommendations and did not reject any of the recommendations.**

**(b) COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT (CSNA).** SECTION 101(A)(15), (17), AND (23) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT REQUIRE VR AGENCIES TO PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF:

(2) THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, INCLUDING:

(D) Individuals with the most significant disabilities and their need for Supported Employment;

**Utilizing the results and recommendations from the Comprehensive Needs Assessment, as well as the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, BESB, in collaboration with the SRC state plan workgroup, has identified areas that need further expansion and improvement to better serve clients.**

**From an analysis of the number of new applicants into the VR Program as well as the overall number of new referrals into the Bureau, a longitudinal decline has been noted. Since eye doctors represent the primary source of new referrals into the Bureau, the eye report form was updated and sent to all eye doctors in the state focusing on outreach in PY 2023. The eye doctor reporting form was updated to add clarity and definition for the reporting of functional vision impairments for circumstances where consistent results cannot be obtained during eye examinations to where a functional vision assessment would need to be conducted by designated Bureau staff to make a final eligibility determination. This form was posted on the agency website, which will include online submission capabilities in 2024, followed by a mailing of the new form to all eye doctors across the state, which also included the statutory reporting requirements.**

**Furthermore, each of the VR Counselors will incorporate focused program outreach to community-based organizations as well as underserved consumer populations into their work activities to make these organizations aware of the services that are available through BESB VR. Additionally, working in close collaboration with the regional workforce boards, the BESB VR Counselors will continue to participate in business services teams to learn about upcoming job opportunities. Outreach to community colleges to identify certificate program opportunities shall also remain a priority to assist clients with identifying and pursuing careers that are available through these types of initiatives.**

(E) Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;

**Individuals from underserved populations are tracked in VR to ensure that they are engaged in services and fully understand the scope of available services that can be provided. Before any individual from a traditionally underserved population is inactivated from BESB VR with an unsuccessful outcome, a supervisory review process is required. The VR Supervisor confirms that the individual was provided with information in his or**

her preferred language and accessible format. Additionally, the Supervisor reviews the case record of services to confirm documentation is present, substantiating that the individual was afforded the opportunity to make informed decisions regarding participation in VR services.

BESB VR employs a Counselor who is bicultural and is fluent in Spanish. BESB VR also employs four Counselors who are African American, two of the Counselors are covering a regional caseload and the other two cover a Transition caseload. These five staff are available to provide outreach to community-based organizations that can offer linkages to traditionally underserved communities.

Outreach to Hispanic organizations continues to be a goal of the program. A new Bilingual/Bicultural Counselor was hired recently who will be doing more outreach on a statewide basis with Hispanic organizations. Currently we have a Counselor who has a seat at the table of the Hispanic Council, which covers Fairfield County in CT.

As mentioned above, all of the VR Counselors have a program outreach goal incorporated into their work activities. The individualized relationships the Counselors have established thus far with the community-based organizations have strengthened the outreach activities in the local communities, but this was expanded to ensure a wider reach across the entire state. The decline in new referrals to BESB VR further suggests that more outreach activity is necessary to ensure that organizations and individuals are made aware of the services that BESB VR can offer.

- (F) Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the workforce development system; and

BESB VR has been actively involved in referring clients to other programs and services available through the statewide workforce development system. The level of commitment to facilitate client engagement in other components of the system is evident in the data that reflects 30 clients who have engaged in Adult Employment and Training Programs, 8 clients engaged in Adult Education Programs, 2 clients engaged in Dislocated Worker Programs, 1 client engaged in Job Corps, 66 clients enrolled in Wagner-Peyser and 2 engaged in Youth programs during Program Year 2022. BESB VR finds great value in these partnerships. Maximizing the resources and services available through other components of the statewide workforce development system has been a priority for BESB VR.

- (G) Youth with disabilities, including students with disabilities and their need for pre-employment transition services. Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under IDEA.

In addition to a Transition Coordinator, BESB VR has dedicated two VR Counselors to work exclusively with Pre-Employment Transition-Age students. There are currently 78 students who are potentially eligible or eligible for Pre-Employment Transition Services. The VR Counselors participate in Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings to address the full range of services that are available. Real work experiences are coordinated in both after-school and summer jobs. Career exploration and job shadowing opportunities are provided to many of these students as well. With the existence of a Children's Services Program at BESB, VR staff have a strong linkage for identifying referrals of new clients who are potentially eligible for Pre-Employment Transition Services. Education Consultants from the Children's Services Program and Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments from the school districts often coordinate with the VR Transition

**Coordinator to develop expanded core curriculum activities that feature mentoring, career exposure, and independent living skills training for clients served in that program as well as clients that are mutually served by both programs simultaneously.**

**The two Pre-Employment Transition Counselors participate in PPT meetings of students with disabilities and assist in the coordination of Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) for these students. The services that are detailed in the IEP of each student are factored into the development of each client's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), which must be developed within ninety (90) days of the determination of eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services, or by the time the client exits high school, whichever comes sooner. VR Counselor involvement can begin as early as age 14, with Pre-Employment Transition Services commencing at age 16 and ending at the end of the school year the student turns age 22. Referrals to BESB VR are most commonly initiated by the Education Consultants of BESB's Children's Services Program or by Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments that work directly for school districts.**

**Since BESB maintains a registry of all students who are legally blind or visually impaired within Connecticut, the process for identifying and referring clients from Children's Services to BESB VR is streamlined and efficient. The electronic case management system for BESB has a built-in tracking system for identifying clients by age range to further facilitate the referral of students who desire to participate in vocational rehabilitation services. The VR Counselors work with the students, educators, parents or guardians, and the Program's Transition Coordinator to identify careers of interest, develop career exploration opportunities, work and job shadowing experiences, mentoring activities, and leadership development programs.**

**In addition to serving on the Statewide Transition Taskforce, BESB VR's Transition Coordinator is also an active member of the Connecticut Transition Community of Practice. BESB VR continues to conduct career exposure programs for high school students who are visually impaired or legally blind. These programs include opportunities to interact with former recipients of vocational rehabilitation services who are successfully employed in a variety of careers.**

**BESB VR staff members continue to participate in and present information at in-service training programs organized by BESB for public school teachers and guidance counselors on issues affecting students who are blind or visually impaired. The Children's Services Program of BESB provides a comprehensive training series every year for school district staff to learn about low vision aids, adaptive technology, braille instruction, expanded core curriculum activities and resources that are available to facilitate the education and transition of students served by BESB.**

**BESB VR also participates in PPT meetings early in the transition process to identify the need for supported employment services, and to identify providers, both private and public, that may offer services while a student is preparing to transition from public or private education into employment.**

- (3) IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE.**

**Other than providing training to staff of community rehabilitation programs on blindness related technology and adaptations for accessing training and employment, no needs to establish, develop or improve upon these programs have been identified. BESB's VR Supervisor is an active participant on the statewide Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP) committee made up of the Department of Aging and Disability Services staff as well as**

staff from the CRPs. This committee meets regularly to improve collaboration and create efficient, effective processes.

The CRPs work through a collaborative contract with the General VR program within the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS). There is an online cross disabilities training provided to the CRPs, focusing on the specific services to be provided such as Trial Work Experiences, Job Coaching, and Work-Based Learning.

The CRPs have very little experience working with individuals who are blind. BESB VR Counselors and Rehabilitation Technologists provide training to staff of the CRPs on how to work effectively with individuals who are legally blind. The Technologists demonstrate the most common assistive technology devices available for individuals who are blind to use in a work environment. In addition, BESB staff provide information on incentives to hire an individual who is legally blind. This training occurs at least one time a year either in person or virtually.

**(c) GOALS, PRIORITIES, AND STRATEGIES.** SECTION 101(A)(15) AND (23) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT REQUIRE VR AGENCIES TO DESCRIBE THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES OF THE STATE IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS. THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES ARE BASED ON (1) THE MOST RECENT CSNA, INCLUDING ANY UPDATES; (2) THE STATE’S PERFORMANCE UNDER THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES OF SECTION 116 OF WIOA; AND (3) OTHER AVAILABLE INFORMATION ON THE OPERATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE VR PROGRAM, INCLUDING ANY REPORTS RECEIVED FROM THE SRC AND FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM MONITORING ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED UNDER SECTION 107 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT. VR AGENCIES MUST—

- (3) DESCRIBE HOW THE SRC AND THE VR AGENCY JOINTLY DEVELOPED AND AGREED TO THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES AND ANY REVISIONS; AND

**BESB and the SRC meet quarterly. They review all results from the consumer satisfaction survey as well as the consumer statewide needs assessment to identify strengths, weaknesses, and any gaps in service provision. The SRC developed a work group to work in partnership with BESB on the development of BESB’s goals and the state plan.**

- (4) IDENTIFY MEASURABLE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS AND THE BASIS FOR SELECTING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES (E.G., CSNA, PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES, SRC RECOMMENDATIONS, MONITORING, OTHER INFORMATION). AS REQUIRED IN SECTION 101(A)(15)(D), (18), AND (23), DESCRIBE UNDER EACH GOAL OR PRIORITY, THE STRATEGIES OR METHODS USED TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL OR PRIORITY, INCLUDING AS APPLICABLE, DESCRIPTION OF STRATEGIES OR METHODS THAT—

- (E) Support innovation and expansion activities;
- (F) Overcome barriers to accessing VR and supported employment services;
- (G) Improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, post secondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services); and
- (H) Improve the performance of the VR and Supported Employment programs in assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve quality employment outcomes.

[text box: List and number each goal/priority, noting the basis, and under each goal/priority, list and number the strategies to achieve the goal/priority]

**Goal 1 and Basis: Based on the Section 107 letter from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) in 2023, achieve compliance and resolve the corrective action plan to expend the Pre-**

**Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) 15% reserve.**

**Strategy and Method 1: Report quarterly to RSA in conjunction with BRS (the VR General Agency), beginning in January 2024, for one year on the progress of the processes and internal controls being used to monitor and expend the 15% reserve to be in compliance and resolve the RSA CAP.**

**Goal 2 and Basis: Based on the RSA 17 federal fiscal report, work toward expending the whole annual awarded VR grant for the VR program.**

**Strategy and Method 1: Explore and evaluate BESB VR policies and procedures, possibly through a contracted vendor, to assess the effectiveness and restrictiveness in order to determine if any changes/updates are needed to BESB VR policies and procedures.**

**Goal 3 and Basis: Based on the 2023 CSNA, conduct program outreach to underserved populations, employers, and organizations as well as other local agencies across the state on services provided by the VR program.**

**Strategy and Method : Each VR counselor and rehabilitation teacher will conduct a minimum of one in-person program outreach activity each month in each of the following: Employer, Community Organization or Group, and Underserved population and report their monthly participation to the VR supervisor.**

**Goal 4 and Basis: Based on the longitudinal decline in VR consumers being served and referred to the VR program, revitalize consumer engagement and increase referrals and consumers served by the VR program.**

**Strategy and Method 1: BESB will work to increase referrals through program outreach, updated materials, social media activities and posts, videos/PSAs and accessible program outreach materials to be utilized possibly through a contracted vendor.**

**Goal 5 and Basis: Based on the 2023 Consumer Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) and the 2023 Consumer Satisfaction Survey, provide more staff training to address areas where additional training is needed as well as the areas staff express an interest to further professional development.**

**Strategy and Method 1: Provide training on technology, complaint resolution/consumer rights and responsibilities, multiple disabilities, and other identified staff interests and needs in order to better serve VR consumers.**

**Goal 6 and Basis: Based on the CSNA and the 2023 Consumer Satisfaction Survey, explore how adaptive technology can be demonstrated and provided to consumers when necessary.**

**Strategy and Method 1: Complete the expansion of the VR Tech Lab in the BESB office located in the northern part of the state and explore how the same technology could be located in the southern part of the state to allow for a more timely demonstration and opportunity for consumers to get a hands-on experience with adaptive technology in order to help consumers make an informed choice prior to when BESB provides the necessary adaptive technology and training on the devices to consumers in addition to increasing access to technology through our existing partnership with the CT Tech Act.**

**(D) EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS: VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS.** FOR THE MOST RECENTLY COMPLETED PROGRAM YEAR, PROVIDE AN EVALUATION AND REPORT OF PROGRESS FOR THE GOALS OR PRIORITIES, INCLUDING PROGRESS ON THE STRATEGIES UNDER EACH GOAL OR PRIORITY, APPLICABLE TO THAT PROGRAM YEAR. SECTIONS 101(A)(15) AND 101(A)(23) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT REQUIRE VR AGENCIES TO DESCRIBE—

(4) PROGRESS IN ACHIEVING THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED FOR THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS;

**Goal A: Engage employers to increase career opportunities for eligible individuals of BESB VR.**



**Objective A1: BESB staff will reach out to employers and partner agencies to collaborate and educate them on BESB services.**

**Strategy: BESB VR Counselor Coordinator and VR Counselors will meet with and present to employers, partner agencies, and national organizations educating them on BESB services.**

**Progress: This goal has been achieved through presentations and participation in the following: Meriden Lions Club; AVANGRID- Presentation via TEAMS to corporate VP's from HR from around the country about Vocational Rehabilitation services; ADA Advisory Counsel for the City of Stamford, which was created to address accessibility issues/concerns within the city of Stamford; HACGS (The Hispanic Advisory Council of Greater Stamford); Elm City Chapter's Meeting on Business Networking; GNHRRT(Greater New Haven Re-Entry Roundtable) Committee; Rose City Business Networking meeting; Virtual presentation to over 100 participants in each session on BESB services through the Work for Council where the participants were employers, community rehabilitation providers, state agencies, and the American Job Centers throughout the State of Connecticut; Epilepsy Foundation; and News interview on NBC -CT on the services BESB provides.**

**Objective A2: Develop digital BESB marketing materials that can be distributed to employers and partner agencies.**

**Strategy: Create materials showing success stories and services that BESB offers.**

**Measure: Documentation of distribution to employers and partner agencies.**

**Progress: This has been partially achieved. The VR Supervisor, VR Counselor Coordinator and VR Counselor met with a marketing firm to develop new marketing materials and to update the website with a new logo, materials, and a new QR code. A contract was never approved with this marketing firm. This is a goal in the 2024-2027 state plan.**

**Objective A3: Train BESB VR clients how to use CT Hires, Career Index Plus, Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP), Indeed and other accessible job exploration platforms.**

**Strategy: Rehabilitation teachers and VR Counselors will teach no fewer than 10 job seeking clients per year how to navigate and utilize these platforms.**

**Measure: Documentation of a list of accessible and effective sites and utilization by each client.**

**Progress: This goal has been achieved. VR counselors report monthly to the VR supervisor on the clients that have been trained. The most common sites used were the O\*NET job exploration site and the Talent Acquisition Portal. Other sites used by consumers were Indeed and Linked In.**

**Objective A4: VR Counselors will engage clients on their caseloads to participate in job fairs, hiring events and training programs with partner agencies.**

**Strategy: VR Counselors will share this information with individuals on their caseloads and facilitate attendance at these events.**

**Measure: Documentation of no fewer than 5 clients per VR Counselor caseload per year attending one of these events and a survey of their experience.**

**Progress:** This goal has been achieved. This was also tracked in the monthly report that VR counselors submitted to the VR supervisor each month. All five AJCs throughout the state have put on at least one hiring event this year. The Northern and Southern part of the state put on a Resource Fair with employers and providers present for consumers. In addition, the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services put on a hiring event in September of 2023 where many consumers attended. Other events consumers participated in were college job fairs and resource events.

**Goal B: Provide coordinated services to students with disabilities to prepare for careers and post-secondary education after exit from high school.**

**Objective B1: BESB VR will continue to serve clients that are in the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) category.**

**Strategy:** Students will be assigned to a caseload to receive specific, qualifying Pre-ETS services with dedicated Pre-ETS funding.

**Measure:** Documentation of Pre-ETS services

**Progress:** This goal has been achieved. BESB has filled both vacant Pre-ETS VR Counselor positions. Currently, there are two dedicated Pre-ETS Counselors, splitting the state of CT by Southern and Northern halves. Each Pre-ETS VR Counselor has a caseload of approximately 60 consumers being served where IEP meetings are attended when the Pre-ETS VR Counselor is invited. The Pre-ETS program also has a Transition Coordinator who assists in coordinating Pre-ETS' programs and events for consumers throughout the year.

**Objective B2: BESB VR staff will coordinate enrollment and participation for their Pre-ETS eligible students in BESB run events as well as partnership with agencies that promote the development of self-determination, self-advocacy and financial literacy.**

**Strategy:** BESB VR staff working with Pre-ETS eligible students will develop opportunities and distribute information on existing programs. These opportunities will focus on pre-employment activities such as work based learning opportunities, internships, college preparatory programs, life skills programs, and related career development programs.

**Measure:** Documentation of participation in these events.

**Progress:** This goal has been achieved. Students participated in workplace experiences and workplace skills trainings throughout the year. Pre employment transition students participated in work-based learning activities through community rehabilitation providers at various sites in the summer. Through LEAP Vermont students participated in work-based learning opportunities through the program in the summer. Several students also participated in the preemployment transition programs through the Carroll Center for the Blind: Youth in Transition, Real World of Work, and Computing for College. The Youth Leadership Forum is a leadership program based on the UConn campus during the summer where students participated in a 5-day program whereby the students stay in dorms and learn leadership skills and independent living skills. In addition, there were two virtual programs through Sky's The Limit Communication on Financial Literacy and Self Advocacy, eight sessions- 2hours each where Pre-ETS students participated.

**Objective B3: BESB VR Staff will develop a mentor program for transition aged students**

**Strategy:** BESB transition aged students will be provided opportunities for group mentoring events, job shadowing and peer-to-peer support networking. Individuals will

be matched with a mentor that is blind or visually impaired who is employed within a wide range of careers.

**Measure:** A list of mentors available for a match with a transition aged student. Documentation of mentor matches and participation at events.

**Progress:** This goal has been achieved. The Pre-ETS Transition Coordinator has created a list of mentors who have been matched with mentees. Each mentor undergoes a background check and undergoes training on how to be a mentor. This list has been newly created and is continuously growing. In addition, the Pre-ETS Coordinator helped coordinate an overnight two-day in-person mentoring event through Sky's the Limit Communication. This first mentoring event had 12 participants who were mentors and mentees.

**Objective B4:** BESB VR and the SRC co-sponsor leadership development activities and camps for groups of Pre-ETS eligible clients.

**Strategy:** The SRC and BESB VR provide co-sponsorship funding for the leadership events such as the Youth Leadership Forum, and similar programs if available.

**Measure:** Documentation of the funds committed.

**Progress:** This goal has been achieved. BESB VR had one consumer who attended the Youth Leadership Forum this year and two consumers who attended last year, which BESB sponsored.

(5) PERFORMANCE ON THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA FOR THE MOST RECENTLY COMPLETED PROGRAM YEAR, REFLECTING ACTUAL AND NEGOTIATED LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE. EXPLAIN ANY DISCREPANCIES IN THE ACTUAL AND NEGOTIATED LEVELS; AND

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level
Performance Indicators		
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	52.2	52.5
<u>Actual Level</u>		59.5% (Met)
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	47.2	49.7
<u>Actual Level</u>		42.2% (Unmet) <b>BESB VR sought VR technical assistance through VR TAC QM. VR TAC QM provided training for BESB and BRS VR staff to better understand the reporting requirements for the six common performance</b>

**measures. This technical assistance focused on quality employment outcomes and helping consumers with disability obtain careers and what that may entail rather than just finding entry level jobs.**

Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)  
**Actual Level**

5153.0

6200.0

\$6,858 (Met)

Credential Attainment Rate  
**Actual Level**

11.8

20.0

23.3% (Met)

Measurable Skill Gains  
**Actual Level**

52.2

52.5

**44.6% (Unmet)**

**BESB VR was underreporting this measure. BESB VR and BRS sought VR technical assistance through VR TAC QM and provided training to VR staff on the six Common Performance Measures in order for VR staff to have a better understanding of the reporting requirements. BESB VR is also working with Libera on developing a Dashboard for the System 7 case management system to allow VR staff to better track measurable skill gain opportunities for consumers. .**

Effectiveness in Serving Employers

Not Applicable

Not Applicable

(6) THE USE OF FUNDS RESERVED FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES (SECTIONS 101(A)(18) AND 101(A)(23) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT) (E.G., SRC, SILC).

**Offering a robust approach to career information and job openings is a key component of the Innovation and Expansion activities that have been established by BESB VR. BESB VR provides access to the National Federation of the Blind’s (NFB) Newsline service to provide a lower-tech option through touch tone telephones for clients who may not have internet access or current skills in the use of computers. NFB Newsline also offers a web-based option for clients who have access to the internet.**

**Programs serving youth, including youth from underserved populations have also been identified for growth opportunities. VR staff assists in the development of independent living, leadership and career exposure programs and initiatives. The SRC and BESB VR offer co-sponsorship to the Youth Leadership Forum, a proven model for developing leadership skills and community involvement for youth with disabilities.**

**Expansion of the availability of adaptive technology in training programs in core services is another category where there is considerable activity. BESB VR staff brings their knowledge of blindness related technology accommodations into discussions with the partners so that solutions can be identified and implemented in the planning stages of new initiatives, ensuring equal access to services. BESB VR also provides support for the adaptive technology laboratory located at the Southeastern Connecticut Community Center of the Blind, making it possible for clients of BESB located in that region to receive local training in the use of adaptive technology.**

**Another identified need is a new approach to program outreach through the development of an updated BESB VR logo to better align with the new Connecticut state branding. BESB will work to increase referrals through program outreach, through updated materials, social media activities and post, videos/PSAs and accessible program outreach materials to be utilized possibly through a contracted vendor.**

**(E) SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS, AND ARRANGEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES.**

- (5) Acceptance of title VI funds:
- (A)  VR agency requests to receive title VI funds.
  - (B)  VR agency does NOT elect to receive title VI funds and understands that supported employment services must still be provided under title I.
- (6) If the VR agency has elected to receive title VI funds, Section 606(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act requires VR agencies to include specific goals and priorities with respect to the distribution of title VI funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services. Describe the use of title VI funds and how they will be used in meeting the goals and priorities of the Supported Employment program.

**The Vocational Rehabilitation Program has found it challenging to utilize the Title VI funding under the allowable uses that were placed upon these funds in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. In addition, the State of Connecticut increased the secondary graduation age to 22 through the end of that full school year, which shortens the length of time for youth with disabilities to find work prior to reaching age 25. Under prior regulations, these funds could be utilized to explore vocational opportunities through work assessments, rehabilitation technology assessments, and a host of other support services that were incorporated into each client's IPE. Under current rules, these funds can only be utilized for support after a job hire, primarily in the form of job coaching and extended services. It is a primary goal of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to identify strategies that will result in a job hire so that greater utilization of these funds can be achieved. This strategy will not necessarily rely upon Title I funds to provide for the work assessments, short-term internships with supports, and for the provision of adaptive technology so the individuals can have the opportunity to demonstrate to potential employers their capabilities.**

**BESB utilizes contractual agreements and fee schedules established by the Designated State Agency, the Department of Aging and Disability Services, to work with community providers to purchase supported employment services prior to the transition to the provider of extended services.**

**BESB has an active agreement with the State Department of Developmental Services (DDS). This cooperative agreement assists in the coordination and identification of training providers that have specific expertise when a client with a developmental disability and legal blindness could benefit from supported employment services. This working relationship also involves the utilization of DDS as a long-term third-party provider of funding. Efforts at coordinating customized employment services are also underway, with joint development of vendor qualifications for the delivery of the components of customized employment being finalized and readied for full implementation.**

**BESB has also developed a working relationship with the State Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). Through this arrangement, individuals who have a mental health diagnosis, acquired brain injury, or an addiction diagnosis along with legal blindness can access services to assist them in achieving a competitive, integrated employment outcome, including supported employment opportunities, with DMHAS providing the third-party funding.**

**Beyond the collaborative arrangements for third party funding with other state agencies, BESB VR continues to work with the community rehabilitation providers throughout the state that are contracted by the designated state agency for the provision of these services.**

(7) Supported employment services may be provided with title 1 or title VI funds following placement of individuals with the most significant disabilities in employment. In accordance with section 101(a)(22) and section 606(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe the quality, scope, and extent of supported employment services to be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities; and the timing of transition to extended services.

**Supported employment services refer to competitive integrated employment, including customized employment in an integrated work setting in which an individual with a most significant disability that includes visual impairment or legal blindness, including a youth with a most significant disability, is working on a short-term basis toward competitive integrated employment that is individualized and customized. These services are provided in a manner that is consistent with the unique strengths, abilities, interests, and informed choice of the individual. Supported employment services are available for individuals for whom competitive integrated employment has not historically occurred, or for whom competitive integrated employment has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of a significant disability, and who, because of the nature and severity of their disabilities, need intensive supported employment services and extended services after the transition from support provided by the Bureau, in order to perform this work.**

**An individual with a most significant disability, whose supported employment in an integrated setting does not satisfy the criteria of competitive integrated employment, is considered to be working on a short-term basis toward competitive integrated employment so long as the individual can reasonably anticipate achieving competitive integrated employment within six months of achieving a supported employment outcome. In limited circumstances, a period not to exceed 12**

months from the achievement of the supported employment outcome is permissible if a longer period is necessary based on the needs of the individual and the individual has demonstrated progress toward competitive earnings based on information contained in the service record. The six-month short-term basis period, and the additional six months that may be available in limited circumstances, begins after an individual has completed up to 24 months of supported employment services (unless a longer period of time is necessary based upon the individual's needs) and the individual has achieved a supported employment outcome. The job placement of the individual must be stable for a minimum period of 90 days following the transition to extended services. At this point, the individual has achieved a supported employment outcome.

Ongoing support services, including customized employment, and other appropriate services needed to support and maintain the client in supported employment are organized and made available, singly or in combination, in such a way as to assist the client to achieve competitive integrated employment, and these services:

- (A) Are based on a determination of the needs of an eligible individual, as specified in an Individualized Plan for Employment;**
- (B) Are provided by the Bureau for a period of time not to exceed 24 months, unless under special circumstances the eligible individual and the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor jointly agree to extend the time to achieve the employment outcome identified in the Individualized Plan for Employment; and**
- (C) Following transition, as post-Employment services that are unavailable from an extended services provider and that are necessary to maintain or regain the job placement or advance in employment.**

Supported employment services are initiated once the individual is hired and has started to work at the actual job site for the employer. Title 6B Supported Employment funds can only be utilized for this specific service or for extended services for youth with disabilities placed into supported employment. All other services as planned for and detailed in the IPE, including job placement services, can only be paid for using basic Vocational Rehabilitation Title I funds, state matching funds, or program income funds. The most frequent type of supported employment service is job coaching, although on-site evaluators and similar services that provide direct support to the individual at the job site may also be considered for funding through the Title 6B funds.

An Individualized Plan for Employment for an individual with a most significant disability, for whom an employment outcome in a supported employment setting has been determined to be appropriate, must—

- 1. Specify the supported employment services to be provided by the Bureau;**
- 2. Specify the expected extended services needed by the eligible individual, which may include natural supports;**
- 3. Identify the source of extended services, or to the extent that the source of the extended services cannot be identified at the time of the development of the IPE, include a description of the basis for concluding that there is a reasonable expectation that such a source will become available;**
- 4. Provide for periodic monitoring to ensure that the individual is making satisfactory progress toward meeting the weekly work requirement established in the Individualized Plan for Employment by the time of transition to extended services;**
- 5. Provide for the coordination of services provided under an Individualized Plan for Employment with services provided under other individualized plans established under other Federal or State programs;**

- 6. To the extent that job skills training is provided, identify that the training will be provided on site; and**
- 7. Include placement in an integrated setting for the maximum number of hours possible based on the unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice of individuals with the most significant disabilities.**

**Extended services refer to ongoing support services and other appropriate services that are needed to support and maintain an individual with a most significant disability that includes visual impairment or legal blindness, including a youth with a most significant disability, in supported employment. Extended services can be made available singly, or in combination, in such a way as to assist an eligible individual in maintaining supported employment. The services are customized and based on the needs of the eligible individual, as specified in their Individualized Plan for Employment. Extended services may be provided by a state agency, a private nonprofit organization, employer, or any other appropriate resource, after an individual has made the transition from supported employment provided by the Bureau. Transition to extended services occurs once the individual has received up to 24 months of supported employment services or the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and the individual have determined that an extension of time to provide supported employment services beyond 24 months is necessary to support and maintain the individual in supported employment before the individual transitions to extended services.**

**For a youth with a most significant disability that includes visual impairment or legal blindness, the Bureau may directly provide, or fund extended services for a period not to exceed four years or at such time that a youth reaches age 25, whichever occurs first. The Bureau cannot provide extended services to an individual with a most significant disability who is not a youth with a most significant disability.**

**It is the primary goal and priority of BESB VR to consider supported employment as an option in all circumstances where the provision of these services will increase the likelihood of job placement success for people with significant, multiple barriers to employment.**

**BESB has been actively involved in cooperative working relationships with other public and private agencies for many years with regard to supported employment and extended services. The BESB VR Counselors identify individuals who have a significant disability along with legal blindness who can potentially benefit from long-term supports through supported employment. This process begins as early as middle school and high school for transition-age youth through the Counselor's involvement in the PPT meetings and discussions, but it can also often occur during the adult years of clients in situations where supported employment services may be appropriate and beneficial.**

**In order to facilitate the identification of supported employment options for transitioning high school students, the two VR Counselors assigned to work with this specific client population participate in PPTs and work in cooperation with the Children's Services Program at BESB. The teams are informed about the scope of vocational rehabilitation services, including the option for providing up to 4 years of extended services for eligible individuals who meet the requirements. Education Consultants from the Bureau's Children's Services Program are also made aware of this provision to assist in facilitating discussions with team members and parents or guardians of these individuals. The Bureau has available funding to support youth with disabilities in extended services and looks forward to entering into such arrangements with school districts, state agencies, private**



community providers, or directly with employers who can offer natural supports after the period of extended services funding.

While CRPs will continue to be utilized as the providers of extended services when available, greater emphasis on natural supports through the employer will be encouraged as a goal in the future. Where available and feasible, natural supports through a client's family to expand options for the provision of support services will also be encouraged. With the opportunity to offer extended services funding to youth with disabilities to provide for longer-term supports on the job, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program shall also work closely with the Planning and Placement Teams in the school districts to make them aware of these funding options to support clients placed into supported employment.

The Title VI funds were used for individuals who are eligible for long-term supported employment. Job coaching was provided for on-the-job support services for both youth and adults of the VR program. The job coaching support was long term for up to 24 months for these individuals allowing more support before the third party began as follow along services.

- (8) Sections 101(a)(22) and 606(b)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act require the VR agency to describe efforts to identify and arrange, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services. The description must include extended services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including the provision of extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities in accordance with 34 CFR 363.4(a) and 34 CFR 361.5(c)(19)(v).

BESB continues to have an active working arrangement with the State of Connecticut, Department of Developmental Services (DDS). This cooperative agreement assists in the coordination and identification of training providers that have specific expertise when a client with a developmental disability and legal blindness could benefit from supported employment services. This working relationship also involves the utilization of DDS as a long-term third-party provider of funding.

In addition to the collaborative relationship with DDS, BESB has developed a working relationship with the State of Connecticut, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). Through this arrangement, individuals who have a mental health diagnosis, acquired brain injury, or an addiction diagnosis along with legal blindness can access supported employment opportunities, with DMHAS providing the third-party funding.

The VR Staff are members of the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) and the VR Supervisor is on the Board representing BESB. Staff participate in regular trainings and seminars offered through APSE. This organization links community providers, employers, state agency representatives, and other resources together to exchange information on job placement strategies, funding sources, and employer job leads. Annually, staff participate in the National Conference and in the Regional Conference.

(F) ANNUAL ESTIMATES. SECTIONS 101(A)(15) AND 101(A)(23) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT REQUIRE ALL VR AGENCIES TO ANNUALLY CONDUCT A FULL ASSESSMENT OF THEIR RESOURCES AND ABILITY TO SERVE ALL ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS BEFORE THE START OF THE FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR. IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 CFR § 361.29(B),

ANNUAL ESTIMATES MUST INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING PROJECTIONS:

(2) Estimates for next Federal fiscal year—

(C) VR Program; and

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under VR Program	Costs of Services using Title I Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
<b>NA</b>	<b>749</b>	<b>749</b>	<b>\$1,177,888.46</b>	<b>NA</b>

(D) Supported Employment Program.

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under Supported Employment Program	Costs of Services using Title I and Title VI Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
<b>NA</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>\$164,623.35</b>	<b>NA</b>

**(G) ORDER OF SELECTION.**

**[X] The VR agency is not implementing an order of selection and all eligible individuals will be served.**

[check box] The VR agency is implementing an order of selection with one or more categories closed.

\* VR agencies may maintain an order of selection policy and priority of eligible individuals without implementing or continuing to implement an order of selection.

Pursuant to section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act, this description must be amended when the VR agency determines, based on the annual estimates described in description (f), that VR services cannot be provided to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for and are determined eligible for services.

(2) For VR agencies that have defined priority categories describe—

(D) The justification for the order;

**Not Applicable**

(E) The order (priority categories) to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services ensuring that individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities; and

**Not Applicable**

(F) The VR agency’s goals for serving individuals in each priority category, including how the agency will assist eligible individuals assigned to closed priority categories with information and referral, the method in which the VR agency will manage waiting lists, and the projected

timelines for opening priority categories. NOTE: Priority categories are considered open when all individuals in the priority category may be served.

**Not Applicable**

(2) Has the VR agency elected to serve eligible individuals outside of the order of selection who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment?

**[X] Yes. BESB VR is not in an order of selection.**

[check box] No

**(h) WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS.** THE STATE PLAN SHALL BE IN EFFECT IN ALL POLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS OF THE STATE, HOWEVER, THE COMMISSIONER OF THE REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION (COMMISSIONER) MAY WAIVE COMPLIANCE WITH THIS REQUIREMENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(4) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT AND THE IMPLEMENTING REGULATIONS IN 34 CFR 361.26. IF THE VR AGENCY IS REQUESTING A WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS OR HAS A PREVIOUSLY APPROVED WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS, DESCRIBE THE TYPES OF SERVICES AND THE LOCAL ENTITIES PROVIDING SUCH SERVICES UNDER THE WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS AND HOW THE AGENCY HAS COMPLIED WITH THE REQUIREMENTS IN 34 CFR 361.26. IF THE VR AGENCY IS NOT REQUESTING OR DOES NOT HAVE AN APPROVED WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS, PLEASE INDICATE “NOT APPLICABLE.”

**Not Applicable**

**(i) COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT.** IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 101(A)(7) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, THE VR AGENCY MUST DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN ANNUALLY A DESCRIPTION (CONSISTENT WITH THE PURPOSES OF THE REHABILITATION ACT) OF THE VR AGENCY’S COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT, WHICH SHALL INCLUDE A DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCEDURES AND ACTIVITIES THE VR AGENCY WILL UNDERTAKE TO ENSURE IT HAS AN ADEQUATE SUPPLY OF QUALIFIED STATE REHABILITATION PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS THAT PROVIDES THE FOLLOWING:

(6) Analysis of current personnel and projected personnel needs including—

- (F) The number and type of personnel that are employed by the VR agency in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services, including ratios of qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors to clients;
- (G) The number of personnel currently needed by the VR agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and
- (H) Projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the VR agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors.

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
<b>Secretary</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Quality Control Reviewer</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Rehabilitation Teacher</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>VR Assistant Counselor</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

<b>VR Counselors</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>VR and Transition Coordinators</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>VR Supervisor</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>VR Director</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

(I) Ratio of qualified VR counselors to clients:

**Based on the PY 2024 projections the ratio of qualified VR counselors to consumers is 1 to 83.**

(J) Projected number of individuals to be served in 5 years:

**Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, BESB was very hesitant to close any eligible consumers' cases wanting to ensure consumers obtained and maintained employment and necessary services through the end of the pandemic. BESB is now working to close out cases of eligible consumers as appropriate. This will decrease the overall annual total of eligible consumers served. BESB projects serving 575 eligible consumers in five years.**

(7) Data and information on personnel preparation and development, recruitment and retention, and staff development, including the following:

(D) A list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program; the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.

Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
<b>Central Connecticut State University (CCSU)</b>	<b>Counseling and Counselor Education with an option of specialty in Clinical Counseling</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>17</b>

**BESB analyzes the graduate information from the regional Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) – accredited universities to find schools that offer required courses or graduate degrees in rehabilitation counseling. BESB also checks with local CACREP schools for the availability of distance learning opportunities for the required CSPD courses. In the state of Connecticut, there is one CACREP–accredited institution of higher education that is preparing vocational rehabilitation professionals: Central Connecticut State University (CCSU).**

(E) The VR agency’s plan for recruitment, preparation and retention of qualified personnel, which addresses the current and projected needs for qualified personnel; and the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the VR agency and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.

**BESB VR remains in contact with CCSU, the institution of higher education in this state that offers a master’s degree program in Counseling and Counselor Education with a Specialization in Clinical Rehabilitation to ensure that an adequate flow of graduates is anticipated for projected vacancies. When positions are available, recruitment efforts are conducted through job announcements that are placed on the state’s online job portal through the CT Department of Administrative Services web site. BESB VR also distributes the job vacancy announcements to organizations of and for individuals who are blind within the state, as well as advertising nationally through Rehab Net, which is a list-serve that connects all of the state public VR agencies across the country and the island territories. The list-serve for the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) is also utilized to distribute job announcements to ensure the widest possible distribution. Given the relatively competitive starting salaries for VR Counselors in comparison to the private sector for similar positions, the BESB VR Program is not experiencing a retention issue beyond what is expected through retirements and career advancement decisions. When job openings do occur, the applicant pool is significant and allows for a wide range of potential candidates to be interviewed.**

- (F) Description of staff development policies, procedures, and activities that ensure all personnel employed by the VR agency receive appropriate and adequate training and continuing education for professionals and paraprofessionals:
  - iii. Particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and
  - iv. Procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to VR agency professionals and paraprofessionals and for providing training regarding the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act made by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

**Working with the Department of Labor, the One-Stop Centers, and their regional partners, BESB VR staff participate in training seminars on the needs of employers within the state. BESB VR staff work closely with the American Job Center partners, participating in regional team meetings with the business consultants from the partner agencies to identify employment opportunities for clients and to be kept current on emerging sector-based training opportunities within their regions of the state.**

**BESB VR makes available a full range of training programs offered through public and private entities such as the Technical Assistance Centers, Rehabilitation Services Administration, the Council for State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB). Program staff members are encouraged to identify training areas of particular interest for their individualized professional development in addition to BESB VR identifying programmatic training categories for staff to participate in to remain current in the field of rehabilitation.**

**VR Counselors work directly with their supervisor to identify areas for professional growth and development each year. Each employee of BESB VR receives at least one written evaluation per year, which is consistent with collective bargaining agreements. The Supervisor of BESB VR meets with staff members regularly to assist with any areas of their job performance that could benefit from further development and to provide feedback on best practices that have proven to be effective in-service delivery. Technical**

**assistance on policies and procedures is also provided during individualized meetings and during staff meetings. If an employee is found to need additional assistance and training in order to meet the job requirements, then a plan for improvement is developed. This may include the use of weekly reviews, additional written performance evaluations, and increasing the opportunity for the employee to participate in formalized training programs to increase skills and competencies.**

**Assistive Technology continues to be among the highest training priorities for staff in BESB VR, particularly since adaptive equipment is so often a component of success on the job for clients served by BESB VR. Examples of training opportunities that staff have participated in are IOS Accessibility for Users who are Visually Impaired and Topaz OCR among others. Other training opportunities staff have participated in include: Program Evaluation and Quality Assurance, Jobs Accommodation Network, Self-Employment: Who, What, Where, and How to Close, Windmills Disability Awareness Training, ADA Mini- con on ADA basics, WIOA Performance Accountability Training ( VR TAC QM), Bridging the Gap: Encouraging Equity in Registered Apprenticeships for Neurodiverse Youth and Adults, Working with Transition-Aged Youth with Disabilities and Ethical Considerations When Working With Hispanic Immigrants, and Celebrating Accomplishments and Building an Inclusive Tomorrow: Increasing Access & Equity for Individuals who are blind and DeafBlind**

**The annual conferences of Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation, National Council of State Agencies for the Blind held in the Spring and Fall, and the National Employment Team (NET) were held in person allowing staff to attend each conference. In addition, employment staff attended the two-day National Employment Team Summit.**

**Cultural Diversity and sensitivity continue to be high priority topics for VR staff. A comprehensive four-day training was made available to staff, the VR Supervisor participated in the Knowledge Building Session on Cultural Diversity for members of one of the state's workforce boards, and members of the VR staff participated in a Community of Practice.**

**Information from the RSA supported technical assistance centers is made available to staff and has been utilized to assist with interpreting regulation requirements. VR staff participated in a two-day training on WIOA performance accountability. VR leadership staff participated in a two-day Fiscal Training and have utilized the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition.**

**The VR Supervisor participated in a quarterly Veteran's Professional Network COP comprised of VR professionals throughout the Country. The VR Supervisor, Transition Coordinator and VR Counselor Coordinator participate in the Pre-ETS Blindness COP that meets quarterly and discusses programs offered to Pre-ETS individuals and best practices throughout the country.**

(8) Description of VR agency policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) to ensure that VR agency professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including—

- (C) Standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and

- (D) The establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, in accordance with section 101(a)(7)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.

**All staff members working as VR Counselors, the VR Supervisor and the BESB VR Director meet the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development requirements. These staff members meet these requirements by having a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a closely related field, as specified by the criteria for certification as a rehabilitation counselor by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC).**

**There is one VR Assistant Counselor that does not meet the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development requirements of a master's degree in Rehabilitation or a closely related field. As specified in BESB VR policy, the VR Supervisor, who meets this standard, approves all eligibility decisions, Individualized Plans for Employment, and case closures for this staff member.**

**There is no requirement in the job specification of the VR Assistant Counselor series to advance into the Counselor level. Staff hired into the job title of VR Assistant Counselor may seek continuing education to meet the qualifications of the VR Counselor level, within available funding.**

- (9) Method(s) the VR agency uses to ensure that personnel are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

**There is one VR Counselor who is bicultural, who is fluent in Spanish, and who serves Spanish-speaking clients throughout the State. BESB VR also provides information to clients in large-print, Braille, electronic, and audio formats to ensure that materials are accessible. BESB VR staff can also utilize contracted translation services to communicate with clients in other languages. Interpreter services for individuals who are deaf are available on a fee-for-service basis, including tactile interpreters for clients who are deaf and blind and whose preferred mode of communication is through sign language.**

- (10) As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

**Collaboration through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) occurs on a continual basis through joint training programs and initiatives. Staff members from BESB VR participate in transition work groups including the Transition Task Force that is facilitated by staff from the State Department of Education. There is also a Community of Practice group that focuses on best practices and emerging trends in transition services to youth with disabilities. This multi-agency initiative includes representatives from BESB VR as well as the State Department of Education, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Department of Developmental Services, and the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), Connecticut's General VR Program. In addition, the Pre-Employment Transition Services Staff participated in a two-day Capacity Building Conference on Transition with transition partners throughout the country**

**COOPERATION, COLLABORATION, AND COORDINATION (Section 101(a)(11) of the Rehabilitation Act)**

**(i) COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE**

REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 101(A)(11)(D) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT—

- (3) Describe plans, policies, and procedures for coordination between the designated State agency and education officials responsible for the public education of students with disabilities, that are designed to facilitate the transition of the students with disabilities from the receipt of educational services in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services, including pre-employment transition services.

**BESB VR is actively involved in a variety of transition school-to-work initiatives, with extensive collaboration and coordination at the administrative and service delivery levels of the organization. The Department of Aging and Disability Services, in the role of designated state agency, has a formal interagency agreement with the State Department of Education (SDE) that details the roles and responsibilities of Connecticut’s VR programs and SDE in the transition process. This formal interagency agreement was enacted on November 17, 2017.**

**At the direct service level, BESB VR Counselors participate in Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings of clients who are in middle school or high school and assist in the coordination of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students. The services that are detailed in the IEP of each student are factored into the development of each client’s Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) which must be developed within ninety (90) days of the determination of eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services, or by the time the client exits high school, whichever comes sooner. BESB VR Counselor involvement may begin as early as age 14, with referrals to the VR Program to initiate the application for VR services. These referrals are most frequently initiated by Teachers for Students with Visual Impairments, some of whom work for the Bureau and some of whom work directly for school districts. Pre-Employment transition services may be initiated at the age of 16. Pre-Employment transition services clients are assigned to one of the two BESB VR Counselors that are exclusively dedicated to serving this population of eligible or potentially eligible students. Assignments are based on geographic location of the client. The BESB VR Counselors provide and coordinate the full range of pre-employment transition services to enable the students on their caseloads to gain exposure to careers through real work experiences, discussions with mentors who are blind, job shadowing, informational interviews and internships. Exploration of post-secondary programs that can lead to credentialing in careers of interest is also coordinated by the Counselors.**

**Within higher education, the Department has successfully negotiated with the State University System to establish a cooperative agreement that addresses the services available in the university setting for students with disabilities. This cooperative agreement includes the responsibilities of both of the Department’s Vocational Rehabilitation programs and the responsibilities of the universities to ensure that students with disabilities achieve equal access to classroom instruction, internships, and school-sponsored activities.**

- (4) Describe the current status and scope of the formal interagency agreement between the VR agency and the State educational agency. Consistent with the requirements of the formal interagency agreement pursuant to 34 CFR 361.22(b), provide, at a minimum, the following information about the agreement:

- (G) Consultation and technical assistance, which may be provided using alternative means for meeting participation (such as video conferences and conference calls), to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including pre-employment transition services and other vocational rehabilitation services;



- (H) Transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency personnel for students with disabilities that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs (IEPs) under section 614(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;
- (I) The roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services and pre-employment transition services;
- (J) Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services and pre-employment transition services. Outreach to these students should occur as early as possible during the transition planning process and must include, at a minimum, a description of the purpose of the vocational rehabilitation program, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and scope of services that may be provided to eligible individuals;
- (K) Coordination necessary to satisfy documentation requirements set forth in 34 CFR part 397 regarding students and youth with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment; and
- (L) Assurance that, in accordance with 34 CFR 397.31, neither the SEA nor the local educational agency will enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity, as defined in 34 CFR 397.5(d), for the purpose of operating a program under which youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

**As identified in the formal interagency agreement, BESB VR program staff continue to participate and present information at in-service training programs organized by the Bureau for public school teachers and guidance counselors on issues affecting students who are blind or visually impaired. BESB VR staff makes information available on transition initiatives, such as mentoring opportunities, independent living training programs, and work experiences that may be of interest to students who are blind or visually impaired. The Children's Services Program of the Bureau provides a comprehensive training series every year for school district staff to learn about low vision aids and adaptive technology, braille instruction, expanded core curriculum activities, and resources that are available to facilitate the education and transition of students served by BESB.**

**The BESB VR Educational Projects Coordinator serves on the Statewide Transition Task Force and participates on the Steering Committee for this group. The Statewide Transition Task Force supports the Connecticut State Department of Education in its efforts to inform and guide students with disabilities, families, school districts, and community organizations to facilitate the progression from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, independent living, and community participation. The Steering Committee maintains the Mission Statement & Guiding Principles of the task force, develops committee activities and projects, creates and facilitates workgroups, and recommends outside experts to assist with the designated activities and projects.**

**The Education Projects Coordinator also participates in the Connecticut Secondary Transition Symposium which brings students and their families together with educators and other professionals to improve secondary transition programming and services for students with disabilities. The annual symposium builds the capacity of educators and other professionals, in partnership with middle and high school students with disabilities and their families, to help ensure successful post-school outcomes. Participants learn about a variety of programs and resources to support students who are transitioning to adult life. The symposium includes sessions specifically for students making college and career choices. The two Pre-ETS Counselors presented at this year's symposium to a group of parents about BESB VR services, the VR eligibility process and the five required Pre-ETS transition services.**

**The BESB VR Education Projects Coordinator also participates in the Connecticut Transition Community of Practice. This group brings multiple stakeholders together to collaborate and share ongoing secondary transition information, resources, activities and events in a centralized location that is accessible to all students, families, and statewide transition teams. The resources assist students, families and others in making informed decisions to achieve personal success including education, meaningful employment, self-sufficiency, and community access and involvement.**

**The agreement with the State Department of Education (SDE) allows staff from SDE to assist staff from BESB VR to connect with the individual Local Education Agencies (LEAs). The intent is to assure that Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) developed by LEAs for youth with disabilities aged 16 or over include plans for the provision of educationally related transition services as defined in 34 C.F.R. 361.22(b)(4) and 34 C.F.R. 300.43. The educationally related transition services include activities identified by the LEAs that are based on the student's needs, consideration of the student's preferences, and are designed to facilitate movement from school to post-secondary activities, including employment. Counselors from BESB VR are participants in the PPT meetings to assist with the formulation of transition goals and activities. To the maximum extent possible, the BESB VR Counselors also incorporate these transition goals into the IPE of the client to align these transition activities between the LEA and BESB VR.**

**Through the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with SDE, the roles and responsibilities of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program and the public educational system are clearly defined. This includes financial responsibilities as well as coordination of services and staff training. To facilitate this coordination, the Education Projects Coordinator from BESB serves on an interagency Transition Task Force and there is an appointed representative from SDE serving on the State Rehabilitation Council to BESB.**

**As detailed in the MOU, at no cost to BESB VR, SDE provides general supervision of the IDEA's requirements for special education and related services to ensure a free appropriate public education for children and youth with disabilities. SDE coordinates with BESB VR in disseminating information to LEAs regarding effective, results-based practices for preparing students with disabilities for post-secondary education, vocational training, competitive employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. SDE further collaborates with BESB to disseminate information about and train school personnel on how to coordinate services for students with disabilities as they transition to life after high school, including those students interested in supported employment. For each student with a disability with an IEP or Section 504 Plan that the LEAs have reason to believe may pursue subminimum wage employment following their exit from the school system, SDE assures that the LEAs document the provision of transition services in accordance with the documentation requirements of 34 C.F.R. 397.30(b)(1), including, at a minimum, the child's name, a description of the service or activity completed, the dated signature of the responsible educational official documenting the completion of the required service or activity, and the dated signature of the responsible educational official who transmits the documentation of the provision of transition service. SDE further ensures that none of the LEAs enter into contracts with an entity for the purpose of operating a program under which a youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.**

**The MOU further addresses collaboration between BESB VR and SDE in coordinating, providing, and documenting the provision of pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities. BESB VR provides vocational rehabilitation services to students and youth who meet the eligibility criteria. BESB VR staff assist the LEAs in providing**

**transition planning for students with disabilities that facilitates the development and implementation of their IEPs and also work with the LEAS to develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) for each student eligible for BESB VR services before the student exits high school. BESB staff also provides consultation and technical assistance to assist the LEAs in planning for the transition of eligible students. For students with disabilities who seek subminimum wage from employers who hold special wage certificates under the Fair Labor Standards Act, 29 U.S.C. 214 (c), BESB VR offers pre-employment transition services, and an offer to apply for vocational rehabilitation services. If a student is found eligible for vocational rehabilitation services and has an IPE but is unable to achieve the employment outcome specified in the IPE, BESB VR can provide documentation of this outcome after obtaining a signed release of information.**

**Since BESB maintains a registry of all students who are legally blind or visually impaired within Connecticut, the process for identifying and referring students from the BESB Children’s Services Program to the BESB VR Program is streamlined and efficient. The electronic case management system for BESB has a built-in tracking system for identifying clients by age range to further facilitate the referral of students who desire to participate in vocational rehabilitation services. This system is unique in that it allows for BESB VR to be aware of and track every child in Connecticut who is legally blind or visually impaired and who is participating in public education.**

**The BESB VR Counselors work with the students, educators, parents or guardians and the Program’s Education Projects Coordinator to identify careers of interest, develop career exploration opportunities, work and job shadowing experiences, mentoring activities, and leadership development programs.**

**Through the MOU with SDE, staff from that agency assist BESB with the distribution of information for LEAs to provide to students who may benefit from BESB VR services. SDE staff also provides information about the availability of BESB VR services to the LEAs to share with school personnel. SDE further assists the LEAs in providing outreach and identification of students with disabilities who are in need of transition services and pre-employment transition services that can be offered by BESB VR.**

**(k) COORDINATION WITH EMPLOYERS. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 101(A)(11)(E) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, DESCRIBE HOW THE VR AGENCY WILL WORK WITH EMPLOYERS TO IDENTIFY COMPETITIVE INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER EXPLORATION OPPORTUNITIES IN ORDER TO FACILITATE THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES; AND TRANSITION SERVICES FOR YOUTH AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.**

**The primary goal of coordinated activities with employers is to bring about long-term partnerships that foster a mutually beneficial relationship for both the employer and the clients served by BESB VR, while at the same time avoiding a duplication of efforts. BESB VR is very aware of and sensitive to the time constraints of employers and seeks to work in collaboration with other partners in the Workforce Development System that also perform employer outreach to reduce the potential for overlap in job development efforts.**

**The Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Coordinator serves as the BESB VR team lead for outreach to employers and the gathering of job lead information. This includes establishing relationships with employers, with BESB VR receiving and disseminating job announcements. The BESB VR Counseling Coordinator also serves as the point of contact with the National**

**Employment Team (NET), administered through the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). The NET utilizes a business approach to facilitate outreach to larger employers that have a presence across multiple states. The NET is a valuable resource to develop relationships with these national companies. The NET coordinator puts the local human resources representative from a large employer in contact with the Vocational Rehabilitation agency's point of contact. The local staff meet to discuss specific services or recruitment needs at the local level. The needed services can vary from providing job candidates for local job openings or providing in-service training to front line supervisors on disability topics, to offering job retention assistance for workers with disabilities who have requested work site accommodations.**

**Within the NET, there is an employer database, referred to as the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP), where only job seekers who are receiving services from a public Vocational Rehabilitation agency can access the portal. Employers can search for qualified candidates through this portal as well. This helps the employer recruit pre-screened qualified candidates who have a disability.**

**BESB VR Counselors are members of the Business Service Teams within each of the five workforce regions, sharing job leads and learning of the employer outreach efforts of other members of these regional teams. Furthermore, members from The Governor's Workforce Council Diversity Equity Inclusion & Accessibility Committee for Persons with Disabilities formed a committee that the VR Supervisor is a member of and part of the planning committee. This committee developed the Integrated Resource Team (IRT) model. The IRT consists of partners of the American Job Centers (AJCs): Department of Aging and Disability Services both Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and BESB, Department of Developmental Services, and Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. The AJC's will be providing a series of trainings in collaboration with all partners on the Integrated Resource Team (IRT) model. The IRT training equips workforce development professionals with the knowledge and tools to create wrap-around services for jobseekers, with multiple barriers to employment by leveraging resources, with more than one agency, to reach a positive outcome for all. Building knowledge of the Integrated Resource Team (IRT) Model is to learn how to enhance cross-agency collaboration and communication to better leverage available resources to support jobseekers, and meet cross-system/program common measures/performance outcomes.**

**In addition two virtual presentations were conducted by all partners to an audience of 100 or more in attendance for each presentation to discuss core services from each agency. More outreach events will be taking place to educate on the IRT model once fully implemented.**

**(I) INTERAGENCY COOPERATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 101(A)(11)(C) AND (K), DESCRIBE INTERAGENCY COOPERATION WITH AND UTILIZATION OF THE SERVICES AND FACILITIES OF AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS THAT ARE NOT CARRYING OUT ACTIVITIES THROUGH THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM TO DEVELOP OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY-BASED EMPLOYMENT IN INTEGRATED SETTINGS, TO THE GREATEST EXTENT PRACTICABLE FOR THE FOLLOWING:**

- (9) STATE PROGRAMS (DESIGNATE LEAD AGENCY(IES) AND IMPLEMENTING ENTITY(IES)) CARRIED OUT UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998;**

**BESB's Vocational Rehabilitation program is the designated state unit for individuals who are blind within the Department of Aging and Disability Services, which is the designated state agency.**

**BESB works closely with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, the lead agency for the Connecticut Assistive Technology Act program, to provide outreach and referrals of clients who are deaf and blind so that clients who meet the eligibility requirements of the Deafblind Technology Grant can apply for and receive specialized adaptive equipment to increase their access to communication. In addition, a low-interest loan program is available to assist clients who desire to acquire adaptive equipment that is not vocationally related, or who may need a short-term loan to cover the cost of repairs to personally owned devices.**

(10) PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT BY THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE;

**Being a part of the Statewide Workforce Development System, the BESB VR has access to the full range of programs carried out through the Department of Agriculture.**

(11) NON-EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES SERVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH;

**The Bureau continues to work with the LEAP Program in Vermont for the provision of transition programs for in-school and out-of-school youth. Programs include mentoring, leadership development, independent living skills trainings, and work experiences as camp counselors. This year the Bureau entered into an agreement working with Sky's the Limit Communication to provide ACE Academy training opportunities both virtually and in person for transition age youth. There were two virtual opportunities offered for advocacy and financial literacy, as well as, an in-person mentoring two-day event for mentors and mentees.**

(12) STATE USE CONTRACTING PROGRAMS;

**At the Department level, the agency participates with the Office of the State Comptroller for a Purchase Card program that permits expedited purchasing of goods and services needed by clients to participate in the rehabilitation process. The Department has also established a fee for service contract model with community rehabilitation providers across the state that enables BESB VR to purchase services at consistent pricing levels, making budget forecasting a more consistent and reliable process. The agency also utilizes state use contracts made available through the Department of Administrative Services for services that have been competitively procured for statewide agency use. An example includes interpreting services for individuals who are deaf and deafblind.**

**Cooperative agreements are established by a negotiation process and are memorialized in Memorandums of Understanding (MOU's). The Bureau has in place and will continue to maintain MOU's with each of Connecticut's Workforce Development Boards (WDB), with an accompanying Infrastructure Cost Agreement in place. Each MOU outlines the consumer service responsibilities of both the WDB and BESB to ensure VR consumers have access to the full range of services available within each WDB's region. These MOU's and the accompanying Infrastructure Cost Agreement facilitate the opportunity for physical co-location of BESB and WDB direct service staff. These co-locations have proven greatly beneficial to individuals with disabilities in terms of case coordination, service provision and access.**

(13) STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR ADMINISTERING THE STATE MEDICAID PLAN UNDER TITLE XIX OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT (42 U.S.C. 1396 ET SEQ.);

**Through a cooperative agreement with the Department of Social Services (DSS), recipients of Medicaid who have disabilities are made aware of the BESB VR program and BESB VR Counselors provide information and referral assistance for clients who express an interest in seeking services from DSS such as Medicaid benefits, and the Home and Community Based Services waivers.**

**Benefits Counselors from the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services are also available to assist clients of BESB VR with understanding how employment earnings and public assistance benefits interact so that clients can make informed decisions regarding employment. The Benefits Counselors also explore with clients the many options that are available within the state and federal government programs including how to apply for Medicaid and Medicare, as well as health insurance under the Affordable Care Act.**

**(14) STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES;**

**This Bureau has an active agreement with the State Department of Developmental Services (DDS). This cooperative agreement assists in the coordination and identification of training providers that have specific expertise when a client with a developmental disability and legal blindness could benefit from supported employment services. This working relationship also involves the utilization of DDS as a long-term third-party provider of funding. A coordinated system of customized employment services has been implemented, with joint development of vendor qualifications for the delivery of the components of customized employment.**

**(15) STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES;**

**BESB has developed a working relationship with the State Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). Through this arrangement, individuals who have a mental health diagnosis, acquired brain injury, or an addiction diagnosis along with legal blindness can access services to assist them in achieving a competitive, integrated employment outcome, including supported employment opportunities, with DMHAS providing the third-party funding.**

**(16) OTHER FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS OUTSIDE THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND**

**BESB uses a wide range of contractual agreements with accompanying fee schedules that have been established through a competitive bidding process by the Department of Aging and Disability Services, the designated state agency for the Blind and General VR programs. This provides a statewide comprehensive set of program options and services to choose from.**

**Social Security Administration: The Bureau has an active cooperative agreement with the Social Security Administration (SSA) that makes it possible to seek and receive reimbursement for certain costs associated with clients of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program that have achieved earnings at or above substantial gainful levels and have therefore transitioned off of Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). The process to seek reimbursement requires a combination of cooperative agreements at the state level. Client benefit status verification is obtained through an agreement with the Department of Social Services (DSS). A cooperative**

**agreement with the Connecticut Department of Labor (DOL) makes it possible to review wage records of individuals who are participating in BESB's Vocational Rehabilitation Program to determine if their earnings are above substantial gainful activity (SGA) levels and would therefore qualify the Bureau to request cost reimbursement from SSA. Cost reimbursement would be for the cost of BESB purchased services as well as fees for administrative and tracking costs associated with a client's case.**

**Native American Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program: The Bureau also has an active cooperative agreement with the Native American VR Program in Connecticut. This agreement has been developed to help both programs coordinate and provide services to individuals who are mutually served by the programs or who could benefit from these services if they were to apply and meet eligibility criteria. To maximize collaboration, a representative of the Native American VR Program has served as an appointed member of the BESB State Rehabilitation Council.**

**Connecticut VR-General Program: For individuals who are deaf and blind, BESB works closely with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), Connecticut's VR-General Program, for the coordination of services. Individuals who are deaf and blind can receive coordinated services from both public vocational rehabilitation programs. Through case conferencing, a determination is made as to which program will assume lead case management responsibilities, with the other program providing support services as needed. For clients who are receiving case management services through BRS, BESB offers vocational consultations, orientation and mobility services, and rehabilitation teaching assistance.**

**State Medicaid Agency: The Bureau has a cooperative agreement with the Department of Social Services (DSS) to ensure that recipients of Medicaid are aware of the services that are available through BESB VR, including the provision of information and referral services.**

**Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV): The Bureau has a cooperative agreement with the state DMV that implements a state law requiring the department to report on a quarterly basis to DMV the names of individuals aged 16 and older who have been declared legally blind in each preceding fiscal quarter. The DMV uses this information to notify such individuals that their driver's license is no longer valid.**

**(10) OTHER PRIVATE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS.**

**BESB uses a wide range of contractual agreements with accompanying fee schedules that have been established through a competitive bidding process by the Department of Aging and Disability Services, the designated state agency for the Blind and General VR programs. Several nonprofit community-based rehabilitation providers are available through these contractual agreements for clients to select from. The services that are offered through the community rehabilitation providers (CRPs) in the state include trial work experiences, work readiness training, community placement opportunities and job coaching, among other related services.**

**The agreement with the CRPs allows a more individualized approach to job exploration and development. The CRPs have established sites for individuals to participate in a trial work experience and work readiness training that will ultimately lead to employment. The CRPs provide on-site evaluators as well as job coaches that give one on one assistance on the job to improve performance. BESB's VR Rehabilitation Technologists and VR Counselors provide training to the CRPs on common assistive technology devices as well as working with individuals who are blind.**

**BESB staff members conduct training seminars for CRP staff on blindness related topics such as orientation and mobility and the use of adaptive technology to ensure that programs and services are safe and accessible. Additional fee agreements have been established with private non-profit service providers in other states where it is identified that these programs offer specific vocational and independent living services for persons who are blind. These agreements include non-profit rehabilitation providers in Louisiana, Colorado, Maine, Arkansas, Maryland, Minnesota, and Massachusetts.**

**BESB has contracts with out of state training programs that offer adjustment to blindness training for individuals who are newly blind or have lost more vision. These programs assist individuals through residential and virtual programs in how to live independently with blindness skills that assist with skills such as orientation and mobility and technology. This ultimately will assist an individual to be independent so that they may get a competitive job in the community using their newly acquired skills. These programs also offer on-the-job training opportunities such as internships and paid employment.**

**Through a fee agreement with the National Federation of the Blind, the NFB Newsline is available for clients to access news, career information, and current events. This collaboration includes the National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut, which provides funding to cover a portion of the overall cost. The contract with Newsline assists individuals with access to print materials in an accessible way so that they are able to access jobs and information in the community.**

**VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CERTIFICATIONS AND ASSURANCES**

**CERTIFICATIONS**

<b>States must provide written and signed certifications that:</b>	
1.	The (enter the name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate,) is authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by title IV of WIOA, <sup>8</sup> and its State Plan supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act;
	<b>Department of Aging and Disability Services, Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind, Vocational Rehabilitation Program</b>
2.	In the event the designated State agency is not primarily concerned with vocational and other rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities, the designated State agency must include a designated State unit for the VR program (Section 101(a)(2)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act). As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of VR services, the (enter the name of designated State agency or the designated State unit when the designated State agency has a designated State unit) <sup>9</sup> agrees to operate and is responsible for the administration of the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan <sup>10</sup> , the Rehabilitation Act, 34 CFR 361.13(b) and (c), and all applicable regulations <sup>11</sup> , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available to States under section 111(a) of the Rehabilitation Act are used solely for the provision of VR services and the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;
	<b>Department of Aging and Disability Services , Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind</b>

<sup>8</sup> Public Law 113-128.

<sup>9</sup> All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

<sup>10</sup> No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

<sup>11</sup> Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations at 34 CFR part 361.



<b>States must provide written and signed certifications that:</b>	
3.	As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act for supported employment services, the designated State agency or the designated State unit when the designated State agency has a designated State unit, agrees to operate and is responsible for the administration of the State Supported Employment Services Program in accordance with the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan <sup>12</sup> , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations <sup>13</sup> , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under title VI are used solely for the provision of supported employment services and the administration of the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;
4.	The designated State unit, or if not applicable, the designated State agency has the authority under State law to perform the functions of the State regarding the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, and is responsible for the administration of the VR program in accordance with 34 CFR 361.13(b) and (c);
5.	The State legally may carry out each provision of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement.
6.	All provisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement are consistent with State law.
7.	The (enter title of State officer below) has the authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement; <b>Amy Porter</b>
8.	The (enter title of State officer below) has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment services; <b>Commissioner, Department of Aging and Disability Services</b>
9.	The agency that submits the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan and its supplement.

**ASSURANCES**

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate and identified in the State certifications included with this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, through signature of the authorized individual, assures the Commissioner, that it will comply with all of the requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, as set forth in sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act. The individual authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement makes the following assurances:

<b>The State Plan must provide assurances that:</b>	
1.	<b>Public Comment on Policies and Procedures:</b> The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.
2.	<b>Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its</b>

<sup>12</sup> No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

<sup>13</sup> Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 CFR part 363.

<b>The State Plan must provide assurances that:</b>	
	<p><b>Supplement:</b> The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a Unified State plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 C.F.R. 76.140.</p>
3.	<p><b>Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan:</b> The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(n) the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(o) either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(p) consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(q) the financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3).</li> <li>(r) as applicable, the local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(s) as applicable, the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(t) statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(u) the requirements for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(v) all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(w) the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(x) the compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(y) the reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities as set forth in section 101(a)(18)(A).</li> <li>(z) the submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> </ul>
4.	<p><b>Administration of the Provision of VR Services:</b> The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:</p>

<b>The State Plan must provide assurances that:</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(E) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(j) impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(k) provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act, as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services or, if implementing an order of selection, in accordance with criteria established by the State for the order of selection as set out in section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(l) determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(m) comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(n) comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(o) provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(p) comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by sections 101(a)(14) and 511 of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(i) meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs.</li> <li>(j) with respect to students with disabilities, the State:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) has developed and will implement,                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(A) strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and</li> <li>(B) strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and</li> </ul> </li> <li>(ii) has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15), 101(a)(25), and 113).</li> <li>(iii) shall reserve not less than 15 percent of the allocated funds for the provision of pre-employment transition services; such funds shall not be used to pay for the administrative costs of providing pre-employment transition services.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>5.</b>	<p><b>Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement to the State plan:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(c) The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(d) The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for</li> </ul>

<b>The State Plan must provide assurances that:</b>	
	individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.
6.	<p><b>Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program (Title VI):</b></p> <p>(c) The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(H) and (I) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(d) The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
7.	<p><b>Provision of Supported Employment Services:</b></p> <p>(c) The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(d) The designated State agency assures that</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">the comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act an individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act , which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(7)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>

**VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

	Vocational Rehabilitation Program			
	Program Year: 2024		Program Year: 2025	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
	Employment (Second Quarter after Exit) <sup>22</sup>	<b>60.0%</b>		<b>62.0%</b>
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit) <sup>22</sup>	<b>50.0%</b>		<b>52.0%</b>	

Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit <sup>14</sup> )	<b>\$7,000</b>		<b>\$7,200</b>	
Credential Attainment Rate	<b>23.5%</b>		<b>25.0%</b>	
Measurable Skill Gains	<b>52.5%</b>		<b>55.0%</b>	

*“Effectiveness in Serving Employers” is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2024 State Plan*

**Additional Questions**

**VR Program:**

**Describe how your entity’s existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.**

*Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.*

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

**State applicants must respond to four questions.**

**The first of four questions is:**

- 1. Describe how your entity’s existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.*

**The Connecticut Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind, within the Department of Aging and Disability Services, is an affirmative action employer and strongly supports all state, federal and Constitutional mandates and complies with all policies established by the Department of Aging and Disability Services pursuant to state mandates, laws, and regulations.**

**The mission of BESB is to be responsible for initiating, coordinating, and implementing the education and training of Connecticut's children who are blind or visually impaired in order to maintain their academic, physical, emotional, and social progress at age-level, grade level or diagnosed ability level. BESB serves Connecticut's adults who are legally blind through ongoing educational, vocational, and living skills programs in order to empower them to achieve employment success in their chosen profession and to enhance their self- sufficiency**

**The BESB VR Program is responsible for administering the vocational rehabilitation program for individuals in the State of Connecticut who are legally blind. All services will be provided in accordance with the appropriate federal and state statutes for Vocational Rehabilitation for individuals who are legally blind as described.**

**The second of four questions is:**

2. *Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?*

BESB VR staff work diligently to educate employers and the public regarding the capabilities of visually impaired and blind consumers. However, public transportation and the access to public transportation presents a barrier to employment and services for the blind and visually impaired; especially in the rural areas of Connecticut. In addition, the inaccessibility to websites, educational platforms, software programs, databases, and etc. also present barriers for consumers who are blind or visually impaired to be able to fully participate in educational settings, employment, and community inclusion activities.

**The third of four questions is:**

3. *Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?*

The Department of Aging and Disability services is committed to accessibility for all consumers. BESB VR is also working to make all forms accessible and electronic through the use of Jot Forms software. Access to public transportation will continue to be a barrier, but BESB VR is working creatively to provide consumers transportation services through their individualized plans for employment to reduce the barrier of access to public transportation in order to optimize the success of VR consumers in educational, employment, and community inclusion settings.

**The final of four questions is:**

4. *What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?*

BESB VR has already begun the creation and implementation of accessible electronic forms in VR through Jot Forms. The staff bandwidth for the creation of these accessible Jot Forms is limited, which will mean this project will take a couple of years to fully complete. BESB VR is also continuously working on transportation services and options for blind and visually impaired consumers. Through program outreach, BESB VR staff remain committed to educating the public on the abilities of blind and visually impaired consumers, which includes education to the public on accessibility and accessibility options for consumers. In addition, BESB VR staff have monthly program outreach requirements, which will continuously work toward these barriers.

**Supported Employment Program:**

Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

**Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a)** *applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.*

[GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package](#)

**State applicants must respond to four questions.**

**The first of four questions is:**

1. *Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.*

**The Connecticut Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind, within the Department of Aging and Disability Services, is an affirmative action employer and strongly supports all state, federal and Constitutional mandates and complies with all policies established by the Department of Aging and Disability Services pursuant to state mandates, laws and regulations.**

**The mission of BESB is to be responsible for initiating, coordinating, and implementing the education and training of Connecticut's children who are blind or visually impaired in order to maintain their academic, physical, emotional, and social progress at age-level, grade level or diagnosed ability level. BESB serves Connecticut's adults who are legally blind through ongoing educational, vocational, and living skills programs in order to empower them to achieve employment success in their chosen profession and to enhance their self- sufficiency**

**The BESB VR Program is responsible for administering the vocational rehabilitation program, which includes supported employment services, for individuals in the State of Connecticut who are legally blind. All services will be provided in accordance with the appropriate federal and state statutes for Vocational Rehabilitation for individuals who are legally blind as described.**

**The second of four questions is:**

- 2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?*

**BESB VR staff work diligently to educate employers and the public regarding the capabilities of visually impaired and blind consumers. However, public transportation and the access to public transportation presents a barrier to employment and services for the blind and visually impaired; especially in the rural areas of Connecticut. In addition, the inaccessibility to websites, educational platforms, software programs, databases, and etc. also present barriers for consumers who are blind or visually impaired to be able to fully participate in educational settings, employment, and community inclusion activities.**

**The third of four questions is:**

- 3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?*

**The Department of Aging and Disability services is committed to accessibility for all consumers. BESB VR is also working to make all forms accessible and electronic through the use of Jot Forms software. Access to public transportation will continue to be a barrier, but BESB VR is working creatively to provide consumers transportation services through their individualized plans for employment to reduce the barrier of access to public transportation in order to optimize the success of VR consumers in educational, employment, and community inclusion settings.**

**The final of four questions is:**

- 4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?*

**BESB VR has already begun the creation and implementation of accessible electronic forms in VR through Jot Forms. The staff bandwidth for the creation of these accessible Jot Forms is limited, which will mean this project will take a couple of years to fully complete. BESB VR is also continuously working on transportation services and options for blind and visually impaired consumers. Through program outreach, BESB VR staff remain committed to educating the public on the abilities of blind and visually impaired consumers, which includes education to the public on accessibility and accessibility options for consumers. In addition, BESB VR staff have monthly program outreach requirements, which will continuously work toward these barriers.**

**APPENDIX 1: PERFORMANCE GOALS FOR THE CORE PROGRAMS**

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years covered by the plan. The state is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

Include the state's expected levels of performance relating to the performance accountability indicators based on primary indicators of performance described in section 116(b)(2)(A) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

**ADULT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	70.0		70.0	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	67.0		67.0	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$5,900		\$6,000	
Credential Attainment Rate	60.0		60.5	
Measurable Skill Gains	65.0		66.0	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

*"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2024 State Plan.*

**DISLOCATED PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	75.0		75.5	



Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	71.5		71.5	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$9,100		\$9,200	
Credential Attainment Rate	66.5		67.0	
Measurable Skill Gains	65.0		66.0	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>  
*"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2024 State Plan.*

**YOUTH PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	75.0		75.5	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	73.5		74.0	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$3,600		\$3,700	
Credential Attainment Rate	73.5		74.0	
Measurable Skill Gains	65.5		66.0	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>  
*"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2024 State Plan.*

**ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Performance Indicators	PY 2024 Expected Level	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Expected Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	28.0%		28.0%	

Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	29.0%		29.0%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	4,700		4,700	
Credential Attainment Rate	30.0%		301.0%	
Measurable Skill Gains	30.0%		30.0%	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>	Not Applicable <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

*"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2024 State Plan.*

**VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

	<b>Vocational Rehabilitation Program</b>			
	<b>Program Year: 2024</b>		<b>Program Year: 2025</b>	
	<b>Expected Level</b>	<b>Negotiated Level</b>	<b>Expected Level</b>	<b>Negotiated Level</b>
<b>Employment (Second Quarter after Exit) <sup>22</sup></b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>Baseline</b>
<b>Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit) <sup>22</sup></b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>Baseline</b>
<b>Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit) <sup>7</sup></b>	<b>\$7,000</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>\$7,200</b>	<b>Baseline</b>
<b>Credential Attainment Rate</b>	<b>23.5%</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>Baseline</b>
<b>Measurable Skill Gains</b>	<b>52.5%</b>	<b>37.0</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>42.0</b>

**ADDITIONAL INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE**

There are no additional indicators of performance.

**OTHER APPENDICES**

There are no additional appendices.