

WORK FORWARD: PATHWAYS FOR GROWTH

Governor's Workforce
Strategic Plan

This plan showcases Connecticut's vision of an adaptable, innovative workforce ecosystem.

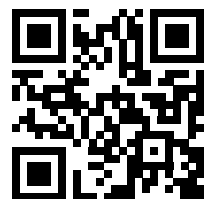
By building robust infrastructure and support structures today, we're advancing our state's future – creating pathways to growth for our economy, businesses, communities, and people.

A sustainable workforce system aligns around our greatest strength: the unique, capable workforce that moves Connecticut forward. With the right alignments and focus, this workforce can power shared success: connecting employers with the skilled talent they need, and building an economy where people from all backgrounds can live, work, and thrive in our state.

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on this report, scan here:



LETTER FROM THE GOVERNOR



Dear Fellow Connecticut Residents,

The pandemic upended nearly every aspect of daily life — from school and work to health and safety. In 2020, more than 100,000 jobs were lost. Today, the number of jobs is approaching pre-pandemic levels, and Connecticut’s economy is thriving — experiencing its fastest economic growth in 20 years.

The engine of a thriving Connecticut economy is a skilled workforce. That’s why workforce development is my top priority and why I launched the Governor’s Workforce Council in 2019. I am thankful to the Council members from industry, labor, education, government, and community organizations who ensure Connecticut continues to have the best workforce in the nation.

Workforce is also number one on the business agenda. Over 500 businesses have joined 14 Regional Sector Partnerships in healthcare, information technology, bioscience, manufacturing, and more. Working with education and nonprofit leaders, these employers develop talent pipelines by defining key skills and creating regional programs aligned with their talent needs.

As we continue to shape a demand-driven workforce system aligned with the evolving needs of employers, we remain deeply committed to expanding opportunity and access. In building a future-ready workforce, we are guided by a clear purpose: to help create a stronger and more prosperous future for everyone.

I am proud of the significant efforts underway to ensure CT’s talent is prepared for the future workforce. These include our flagship \$70M workforce initiative, Career ConneCT, which provides training and support services to unemployed and underemployed individuals. Our holistic work also includes meaningful investments in child care, preschool programs, dual and concurrent enrollment, housing, transportation, and more.

Fueled by our shared vision, our urgency to act, and our love of Connecticut, I have no doubt that we will realize a more robust, resilient, and fair economy that works for all our residents and serves as a model for the nation.

These are just some of the remarkable strides our state has made in strengthening our workforce and is a demonstration of what we can achieve when we all work together. No single entity can solve workforce challenges alone. By aligning resources, measuring outcomes, and scaling what works, we come closer to our ideal of enabling all residents of Connecticut to support themselves and their families, experience the dignity of work, and contribute to the civic and economic life of our great state.

I am immensely proud of what we have accomplished. But there’s a lot more to do, and this plan sets forth a set of ambitious workforce development objectives and a set of strategies to achieve them.

Together — government, industry, labor, education, and community organizations — must work collaboratively to achieve our goals. Fueled by our shared vision, our urgency to act, and our love of Connecticut, I have no doubt that we will realize a more robust, resilient, and fair economy that works for all our residents and serves as a model for the nation.

Thank you for all you do.

Sincerely,
Ned Lamont,
Governor

LETTER FROM THE GOVERNOR’S WORKFORCE COUNCIL

In the five years since we published our inaugural Strategic Plan, we have made great progress toward our agenda of ensuring that every Connecticut resident has expanded access to a rewarding career — and that every business has the skilled talent to innovate and thrive.

The pages ahead highlight our progress, objectives shaping our future work, and the strategies in action strengthening our workforce system.

One opportunity that we could not have anticipated when writing the original plan was the unprecedented investment of federal dollars from the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan Act. Through this funding, we launched Career ConneCT, which represents the largest state investment in workforce development, and exceeded the goal of training 6,000 individuals by the end of 2025. Connecticut also received \$23.9M from the Good Jobs Challenge—the nation’s largest grant—to invest in Regional Sector Partnerships and place 2,000 people in quality jobs.

Because of this work and so much more, industry engagement has not only soared, it has deepened. Through 14 Regional Sector Partnerships (and growing), more than 500 businesses are working with workforce boards, education institutions, training organizations, and community-based organizations, to enhance career pathways for youth and adults.

Many of our achievements have driven forward the 19 priorities articulated in the original plan.

Most notable is how we’ve scaled our most successful initiatives and practices to design a workforce development system for Connecticut’s future, aligned across three objectives:

- ▶ Drive Growth
- ▶ Build Skills
- ▶ Expand Access

The strategies under each of these objectives are informed by our three guiding values:

- ▶ Collaboration
- ▶ Opportunity
- ▶ Impact

Every one of our workforce development efforts is a purposeful collaboration among key stakeholders — including government, business, K-12 and higher education, labor, and community organizations — working together to shape policies and programs that meet employer needs and expand opportunities across all segments of our society. We remain deeply committed to removing barriers to workforce participation by providing critical support such as transportation, child care, housing, and more to those who need them most.

We’re proud of the work we’ve accomplished in collaboration with our key partners, but remain acutely aware of the significant work that remains ahead. We invite you to read about our objectives and strategies for a workforce system that works for all Connecticut residents.

Sincerely,



Ryan Drajewicz,
GWC Chair
Head of External Affairs
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Kelli-Marie Vallieres, PhD,
GWC Vice-Chair
Chief Workforce Officer,
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THE GOVERNOR'S WORKFORCE COUNCIL

Making Workforce Work for Everyone

WHO WE ARE

The Governor's Workforce Council (GWC) has been tasked with setting strategy and policy for the state's Pre-K through retirement workforce pipeline, and to serve as the primary coordinator for businesses, educators, trainers, state agencies, state workforce boards, community-based organizations, and others.

GWC was established as the state's Workforce Development Board in October 2019, under Executive Order No. 4, behind Governor Lamont's drive to build a more coordinated and effective approach to workforce development.

OUR MISSION

Ensure all individuals, regardless of background, have a seamless and supported pathway from education and training to a good job, and that every business has the talent they need to innovate and thrive.

HOW WE WORK

The primary goal of the Governor's Workforce Council is to ensure that Connecticut maintains a high-quality, accessible, broadly representative, and aligned workforce system – one that remains agile and responsive to the evolving needs of the 21st century economy.

GWC advances a system of governance, collaboration, and alignment among internal and external stakeholders. Through partnerships with public agencies, employers, K-12, postsecondary, and community-based organizations, the Council works to:

- Address workforce skill needs
- Remove barriers to workforce opportunity access
- Coordinate workforce policy and programs
- Measure outcomes
- Scale best practices
- Ensure the overall strategy is reflective of the needs of the different areas of the state

Governor's Workforce Council Committees

The members of the Governor's Workforce Council – leaders representing business, K-12, higher education, community, union and government leaders – are divided into six subcommittees:

- Systems Alignment
- Barriers to Employment
- Data and Accountability
- Industry Leadership
- Education and Career Pathways
- Sector Training

These subcommittees are tasked with moving the goals of the Strategic Plan forward, to highlight new opportunities for collaboration, and to further inform key stakeholders on new policies and promising practices in the field.

Office of Workforce Strategy

In 2020, Connecticut established the Office of Workforce Strategy as an executive branch agency to serve as the staff to the Governor's Workforce Council, and to provide strategic guidance to and support the implementation of workforce initiatives and investments across the state.

OUR VALUES

Our values guide every aspect of Connecticut's workforce development efforts. These principles drive our decisions, shape our initiatives, and ultimately determine our success in building a workforce system that truly works for all.



Collaboration

Building a strong workforce requires a true partnership between government, industry, K-12, higher education, adult education, and community-based organizations. By aligning our efforts, we can build a sustainable and effective workforce development system that prepares our state for the future. When we work together, we create a system that works for all.



Opportunity

Meaningful work brings growth and prosperity to individuals, employers, communities, and our economy. Our workforce is strongest when it includes a wide range of voices, experiences, and perspectives from people of all backgrounds, skill levels, and identities. That strength is multiplied when we actively learn from—and leverage—these differences. By embracing this variety of perspectives, we create not just a stronger workforce, but a more vibrant Connecticut—where we are individually and collectively afforded the opportunity to explore and expand on the full range of our human potential.



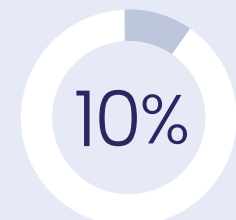
Impact

Workforce systems have the power to change lives. We are here to create measurable change for individuals, employers, communities, and our state's economy. We are committed to ensuring each initiative we support has the potential to make a meaningful difference. We do this through data-driven decision making and accountability. A data-driven approach allows us to continuously evaluate, adapt, and improve our strategies to maximize positive impact across Connecticut.

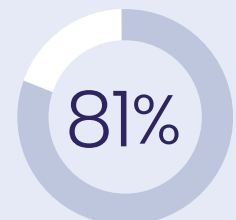
CONNECTICUT'S WORKFORCE PLAN

Studies show targeted workforce strategies can expand the pool of skilled, talented workers prepared for rewarding employment.

Skills-first hiring can increase talent pools by **17x** (LinkedIn, 2025)



Participants in summer programs for disadvantaged youth that bridge the gap from high school graduation to college are 10 percentage points more likely to earn a college degree (Bir, 2015).



81% of business leaders say that second chance hires (citizens returning from incarceration) perform the same or better than other employees (Melhorn, 2024).

The workforce ecosystem is Connecticut's greatest economic driver. But Connecticut employers face a paradox. Demographic changes are decreasing the size of the working population, while technological advances increase the need for workers with specialized skills. Indeed, 78% of Connecticut employers report difficulty finding and retaining talent (CBIA, 2024).

With a labor force participation rate of 65%, Connecticut outpaces the national average. Yet, the state still faces a shortfall of skilled workers to meet demand in key high-skill growth sectors. Differences in participation and wage outcomes across communities reflect persistent disparities — *and opportunities* to ensure broader access to quality employment. Expanding talent development and recruitment strategies to recognize a wider range of skills and experiences can help meet workforce needs across the state.

Our state has talented people with incredible potential. To unlock that potential, we must ensure that more residents can access education, training, and meaningful employment opportunities.

Connecticut's own experience with our flagship training program, Career ConneCT, shows that combining quality short-term training with thoughtful supports leads to impressive results.

69% of trainees found employment* in meaningful careers and the opportunity for economic prosperity.

*As of January 2025, 69% of Career ConneCT participants trainees who completed were employed, with more individuals in the pipeline, seeking employment.

This plan outlines the strategies Connecticut is implementing to leverage our most powerful asset: our people. Unlocking the potential of every person is key to maximizing workforce participation across all demographics. We do this by coming together - supporting workers as they build skills through education and training, and collaborating with employers to support training, job quality, and skills-first hiring. The result is a state where all community members have a purpose, a passion, and a pathway to contribute to a thriving community.

Unlocking the potential of every person is key to maximizing workforce participation across all demographics.

OBJECTIVES

Connecticut has identified three guiding objectives that create a comprehensive framework for building a workforce system that truly works for everyone in Connecticut.

Each of these objectives is supported by:

Key Strategies: How we achieve our objectives

Strategy in Action: Proven initiatives with potential to scale

Looking Forward: Ways for stakeholders to advance our workforce

Pathways to Success: Real stories, showing real impact

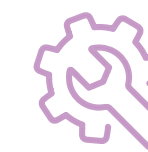


DRIVE GROWTH

Grow our workforce and economy with a collaborative, industry-driven workforce system that fills immediate and long-term workforce needs.

Key Strategies:

- Align workforce initiatives with industry needs
- Increase access to quality jobs
- Use data to drive impactful growth



BUILD SKILLS

Develop a workforce skills ecosystem where people thrive and businesses grow.

Key Strategies:

- Expand early career exposure and exploration opportunities
- Increase opportunities for high school students to gain early college and career experiences, skills, and college credit
- Increase opportunities for postsecondary learners to gain career-ready skills, experience, and credentials
- Increase opportunities for adult learners to gain in-demand workforce skills and credentials
- Partner with employers to upskill their current workforce



EXPAND ACCESS

Strengthen our workforce by removing barriers to education, employment, and opportunity.

Key Strategies:

- Remove barriers to education, training, and employment
- Strengthen ways for adult learners in need to gain basic skills
- Create accessible digital gateways to workforce opportunities



OBJECTIVE 1

OBJECTIVE 1:

DRIVE GROWTH

Grow our workforce and economy with a collaborative, industry-driven workforce system that fills immediate and long-term workforce needs.



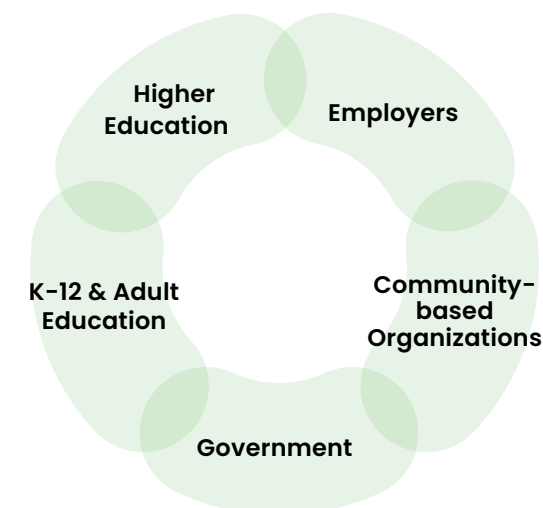
While Connecticut has excellent job growth and the lowest unemployment rate in decades, our success brings new challenges: the state currently has more job openings than unemployed people (CBIA, 2024). To sustain our momentum and prepare for the future, we must evolve our workforce system to meet both immediate demands and tomorrow's opportunities.

In an industry-driven workforce system, strategic workforce efforts directly fuel the growth of our economy, businesses, and communities. We help Connecticut residents prepare for meaningful and growing careers by aligning education, training, and supports with employer needs. This connection between skilled workers and job opportunities doesn't just fill today's openings; it creates lasting success and future pathways for everyone in our state.

KEY STRATEGIES:

- ▶ **Align workforce initiatives with industry needs**
- ▶ **Increase access to quality jobs**
- ▶ **Use data to drive impactful growth**

INDUSTRY-DRIVEN WORKFORCE SYSTEM



Employers: Articulate workforce and skill needs; provide work-based learning opportunities; implement skills-first hiring; and work to make every job a quality job.

Government: Sets direction; aligns stakeholders; defines and refines career pathways; collects, analyzes, and shares data; refines best practices; and fosters continuous improvement.

K-12 & Adult Education: Provides exposure and roadmaps to career pathways for all learners; builds academic, technical, and durable skills; offers dual & concurrent enrollment opportunities and work-based learning that may lead to industry-recognized credentials.

Higher Education: Provides career pathways leading to industry-informed, stackable certificates, credentials, and degrees; builds academic, technical, and durable skills; offers work-based learning opportunities.

Community-based Organizations: Provides community outreach, training, individual support, and wraparound services.

Strategy 1: Align workforce initiatives with industry needs

Ensuring Connecticut has a robust and skilled workforce to drive regional economic growth requires strategic collaboration, but coordinating these efforts can be challenging for employers.

Regional Sector Partnerships (RSPs) solve this problem by bringing employers from specific industries within a region together to collectively address workforce needs, and align education and training programs with real-world requirements.

Since 2021, Connecticut has built 14 Regional Sector Partnerships that have brought together 500+ employers, in healthcare, IT, bioscience, manufacturing, transportation distribution logistics, and architecture, construction, and engineering.

Together, these RSPs have collaborated with K-12 schools, higher education institutions, adult education programs, and training providers to define workforce skill needs and develop regional programming, industry-informed curricula, and work-based learning opportunities to meet those needs. Examples include career exploration programs, internships, pre-apprenticeships, registered apprenticeships, certificate programs, accelerated training programs, and future-ready degree programs.

Employers see impactful results from RSP participation:







High-quality, industry-aligned training programs

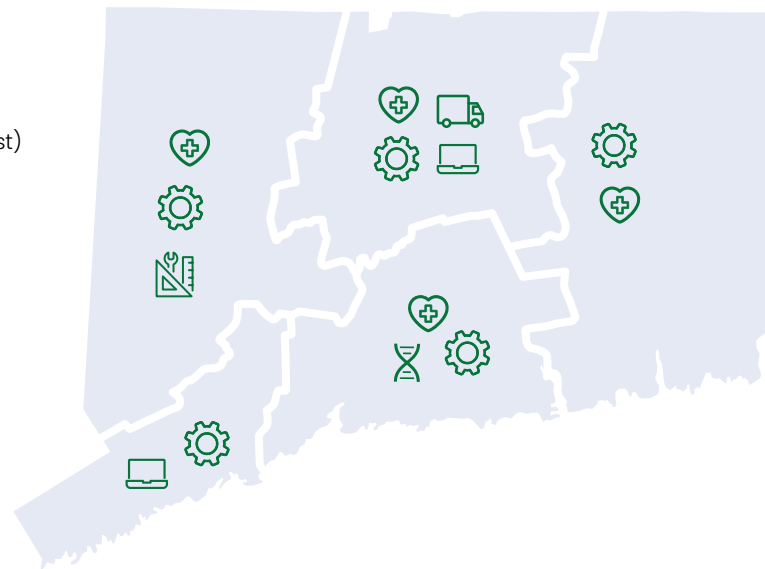
Improved employee retention and satisfaction

Accelerated industry growth through collaboration

Stronger, more representative pipeline of skilled workers (English, 2022)

CONNECTICUT'S REGIONAL SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

-  **1 Bioscience**
(New Haven)
-  **4 Healthcare**
(Northwest, Capital, New Haven, Northeast)
-  **2 Technology**
(Capital and Southwest)
-  **5 Manufacturing**
(All regions)
-  **1 Logistics and Transportation**
(Capital)
-  **1 Architecture, Construction, and Engineering** (Northwest)



STRATEGY IN ACTION

Northwest CT Manufacturing Regional Sector Partnership

“Metal Finishing” is one of Connecticut’s oldest manufacturing sectors. While a multi-billion-dollar industry, it is not a trade that is currently taught in the school system. Recognizing the need, the Northwest CT Manufacturing Regional Sector Partnership has worked to develop a new training curriculum called METAL (Master Electroplating Through Applied Learning) throughout 2024 and 2025. Once completed, the training program will be certified via the National Institute for Metal Working Skills (NIMS) and will offer certification as a “Plating Technician” to successful trainees. Via funding provided by the State to purchase necessary equipment, the Manufacturing Alliance Service Corps (MASC) will construct a state-of-the-art facility to implement and offer this “first of its kind” training, providing a major benefit to companies throughout the region and across Connecticut.

Great New Haven Bioscience Collaborative

Connecticut bioscience companies have come together to launch the SPRINT (Student Program to Ready Interns for Next-generation Talent) Internship program to advance sustainable bioscience workforce and career opportunities through active engagement with industry leaders and community partners. The goal for the 2025 Program is to provide over 200 paid job opportunities in the life-science industry for students attending Connecticut Colleges and Universities, as well as students with ties to Connecticut. Over the last three years, 450 students from 85 colleges and universities have come to New Haven for summer internships in the bioscience industry.



Strategy 2: Increase access to quality jobs

To advance our state, it's not enough to create jobs. We need to create quality jobs, with wages that support a family, good benefits, regular schedules, job security, opportunities for growth, and fair, safe working conditions. We also need to expand access to these jobs by embracing skills-first hiring practices prioritizing an individual's skills, not just their degrees. Doing so benefits employers, too – expanding talent pools, improving recruiting, and increasing worker productivity and retention.

CONNECTICUT'S QUALITY JOBS FRAMEWORK

Connecticut has built a Quality Jobs Framework based largely on the work of Jobs for the Future's (JFF). JFF's Quality Jobs Framework, which provides a detailed definition and structure for understanding the elements contributing to job quality, defines a quality job as one that includes—in addition to good pay and benefits—the flexibility, autonomy, stability, and advancement opportunities that are essential for people to thrive.

Skills-First Hiring and Advancement:

Creating opportunities through skills-first hiring practices, transparent career pathways, coaching and training, and prioritizing internal advancement

Compensation:

Ensuring workers receive competitive wages, comprehensive benefits, paid leave, and transparent pay practices

Agency & Culture:

Fostering belonging, providing transparent HR support, creating opportunities for input, and maintaining meaningful engagement

Structure:

Establishing safe workplaces, fair scheduling practices, and proper worker classification, licensure, and registered apprenticeship

Learn more about JFF's Quality Jobs Framework on their website, jff.org.

Jobs that include employee training and good working conditions have higher worker productivity and lower operational costs associated with turnover, boosting profitability, and economic growth (Center for American Progress, 2023).

Employers who use a skills-first hiring strategy say it has led to a wide range of positive outcomes.

- Employees being more interested in upskilling and education
- Higher incidence of transferable skills
- Broad talent base with participation of all communities
- More quality candidates
- Improved performance in roles
- Better retention of new hires
- Happier workforce
- More equitably distributed opportunities for job seekers
- Greater return on investment for hiring campaigns through reduced costs (Indeed, 2025)

Good Jobs Challenge

Opportunity@Work STARS Public Sector Hub

SKILLS-FIRST NATIONAL LEADER:

93% of Connecticut state job positions do not require a bachelor's degree.

STRATEGY IN ACTION

Through the Federal Economic Development Administration Good Jobs Challenge, Connecticut received a \$23.9 million grant – the largest award in the nation – to build collaborative skills training systems and programs. These initiatives focus on opening up workforce opportunities to all segments of our communities – with particular attention to individuals who may face challenges accessing education, training, and employment. By expanding participation and reducing obstacles, we ensure that more residents can pursue meaningful career pathways and contribute to Connecticut's economic growth. These efforts strengthen our workforce system while broadening the reach and impact of workforce development efforts.

The state is using these funds to support 10 Regional Sector Partnerships (RSPs), which are training and placing 2,000 people in quality, in-demand jobs in healthcare, manufacturing, and information technology.

2000+ residents are being trained and placed in quality jobs through the Good Jobs Challenge.

The State of Connecticut is a national leader in skills-first hiring, with 93% of state positions open to candidates without a bachelor's degree. This commitment to valuing skills over credentials has earned Connecticut a founding membership in Opportunity@Work's prestigious STARS Public Sector Hub.

As a hub member, Connecticut gains access to specialized resources, valuable connections, and proven strategies to enhance both workforce development and public sector employment opportunities. This innovative platform leverages the talents of workforce STARS (Skilled Through Alternative Routes) – recognizing that valuable expertise comes through many paths beyond traditional four-year degrees.

Through this partnership, Connecticut continues to strengthen its workforce by tapping into the full potential of all workers, regardless of educational background.



Strategy 3: Use data to drive impactful growth

Data drives growth by enabling us to make informed decisions and invest in workforce development initiatives that have a measurable impact. It provides the metrics to track our success and the insights to adapt our approach when necessary.

The ability to connect and integrate different data systems provides a comprehensive view of workforce development investments, maintains data security, and aligns with federal and state reporting requirements. This ensures that all investments are maximized and in support of the most effective workforce development solutions.



By integrating workforce data, we can:

Holistically analyze state and federal investments and their outcomes

Compare outcomes across programs, strategies, regions, and demographic groups

Ensure that efforts are effective in addressing employment goals

Identify successful approaches that should be scaled

This data-driven approach allows us to continuously evaluate, adapt, and improve our strategies to maximize positive impact across Connecticut.

State Workforce Data System Framework Development

STRATEGY IN ACTION

Through philanthropic funding from The Connecticut Project (TCP), the State worked with Jobs for the Future (JFF) to develop a framework for an integrated statewide workforce development system for data collection, reporting, and case management. The framework addresses three areas for action: Policy, which addresses enhanced governance, standards, and trusted access; Product, which includes an integrated data platform to access, analyze, and report data; and People, which includes staff capacity building.

Implementing such a system would allow the state to assess the real-world impact of its workforce development efforts, elevate programs that demonstrate strong results, foster collaboration through shared insights, and promote fairness and broad engagement across all initiatives.

14 State agencies, higher education institutions, & nonprofits are securely sharing workforce data through P20 WIN.

P20 WIN

P20 WIN is a unique state resource for addressing critical policy issues that require data from more than one agency. A research focus for P20 WIN is to develop standards for measuring the return on investment (ROI) for Connecticut's public workforce training programs.

Through the state's P20 WIN system, 14 state agencies, higher education institutions, and nonprofits are securely sharing data about their workforce development-related initiatives.

This shared data:

- Facilitates the development of sound policies and practices
- Ensures that individuals can navigate the state's network of supportive services and educational pathways
- Supports the return-on-investment analyses of our state's many workforce training programs

The Office of Workforce Strategy and CT Department of Labor, both members of P20 WIN, are engaged in a research project, funded by the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) grant through the US Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, to better understand the performance of the state's workforce system by examining:

- Wage and employment outcomes of participants in cataloged workforce training programs
- Transitions between workforce training programs and higher education, such as individuals who complete an adult education program, continue into a workforce program, then enroll in a two-year degree program
- Population trends to understand outcomes across different communities and regions of the state

Pathways to Possibility



REVA'S STORY

Student Program to Ready Interns for Next-Generation Talent (SPRINT)

Well on her way to earning a B.S.E. in biomedical engineering at the University of Connecticut, Reva knew she wanted to work in the biosciences. But, first she wanted to better understand the biotech company landscape and the different career paths available to her. SPRINT delivered, with an internship over two summers at Arvinas, a clinical-stage biotech company working to develop treatments for patients with limited options.

In her two summers as an intern on the automation team, Reva gained a range of industry experience, honed in on a specific area of focus, and began building her professional network—all of which she'll bring to bear as she pursues a master's degree at Columbia University.

The SPRINT Internship program was launched by the Greater New Haven Bioscience Collaborative, a Regional Sector Partnership, which is supported by the Good Jobs Challenge, to advance a sustainable bioscience workforce and career opportunities through active engagement with industry leaders and community partners. Over the last three years, 450 students from 85 colleges and universities have come to New Haven for summer internships in the bioscience industry.

"My internship has been pivotal in helping me discover my interests. I found that I enjoy working in the intersection of engineering and biology. Through networking, I've had the opportunity to explore career paths that were previously unknown to me, and see which ones fit my interests."

Reva, SPRINT Intern at Arvinas

LOOKING FORWARD

To build a workforce ecosystem that drives growth in Connecticut, our shared action plan includes these steps:

- Increase number of employers participating in RSPs and the number of RSPs statewide
- Increase number of industry-aligned partnerships among employers, K-12, adult education, higher education, and community-based organizations
- Encourage employers to evaluate practices against the CT Quality Jobs Framework and prioritize improvements aligned with business needs
- Encourage more employers to implement skills-first hiring and advancement practices to expand talent pipelines
- Develop a statewide workforce data system for real-time information sharing and effective decision making

Pathways to Possibility

ANTHONY'S STORY

Hartford HealthCare and ReadyCT

Hartford HealthCare (HHC) has committed to broadening and strengthening its workforce – and is engaging with high school classrooms to help achieve those goals.

With a focus on schools serving students from lower-income backgrounds and communities, HHC views the effort as a forward-looking investment with meaningful impact.

Consider Anthony, a Hartford Public High School graduate, newly employed as a sterile processing technician at the Bone & Joint Institute at Hartford Hospital. His journey from classroom to career exemplifies what's possible through intentional collaboration.

Anthony's opportunity emerged through a dynamic collaboration among his school, HHC, and ReadyCT – an organization that helps students discover career possibilities while preparing them for paid internships and long-term professional success.

"A healthcare workforce program that captures the attention of young people helps to train, develop, and prepare more people to work in the front lines of healthcare," said Jeff Flaks, president & CEO of Hartford HealthCare. "We want them, and we need them."

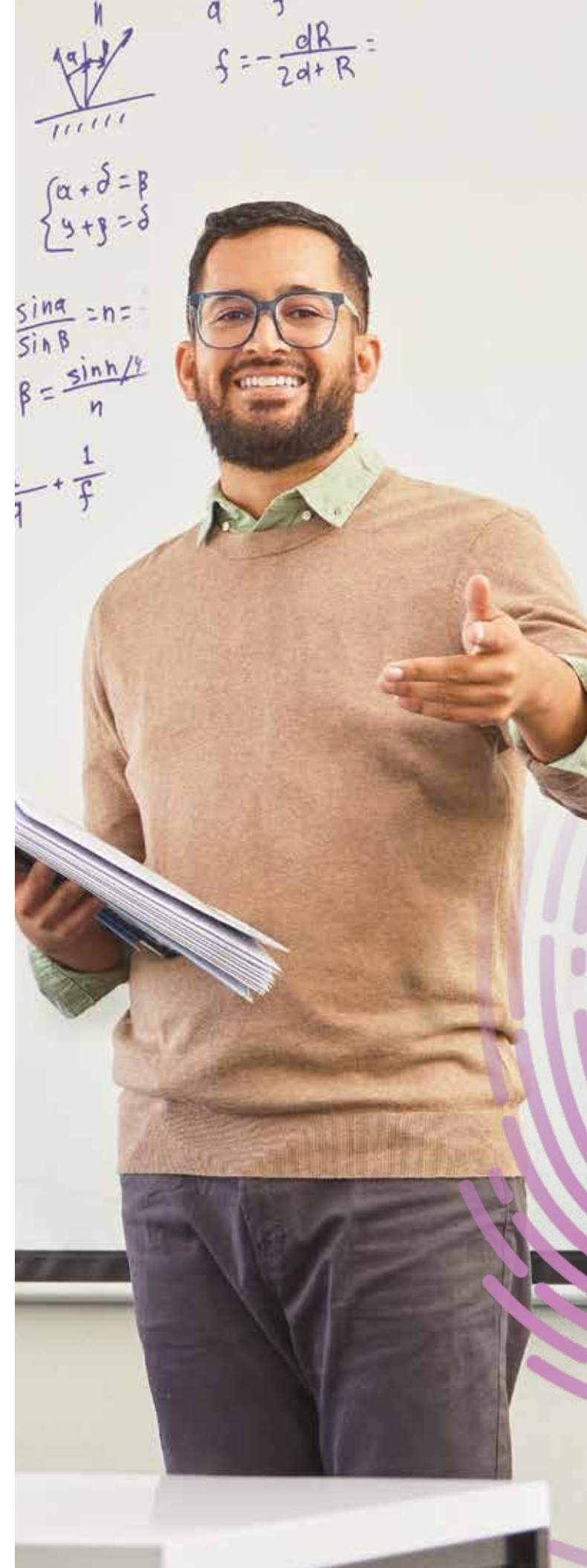
HHC has invested in career pathway programming in Hartford, East Hartford, New Britain, and Norwich. Each collaboration, in equal parts, includes:

School Contribution: Specialized classroom instruction in subjects aligned with healthcare careers, including anatomy and biology

ReadyCT Support: Industry guest speakers, immersive site visits, comprehensive career readiness training (time management, budgeting, communication skills), opportunities to earn industry-recognized credentials (first aid, CPR), and internship placement

Hartford HealthCare Investment: Expert guest lecturers, behind-the-scenes site visits, meaningful job shadows, paid internship opportunities, and defined career trajectories

For Anthony, this collaborative approach has unlocked a future of possibilities. His pathway now includes options to pursue state certification followed by an associate's degree in health science, all while advancing along HHC's career and salary ladder. Anthony is currently exploring degree programs to become a radiology technician.



OBJECTIVE 2

OBJECTIVE 2:

BUILD SKILLS

Develop a workforce skills ecosystem where people thrive and businesses grow.



Connecticut's workforce development approach recognizes that each individual has their own path to learning and career development. The ideal system is one that provides fair and accessible pathways from school to work. A job is not a destination; rather, learning and work are fluid, with all individuals able to engage in lifelong learning opportunities for long-term career growth.

IN-DEMAND SKILLS

To succeed in today's evolving job market, workers must develop a well-rounded set of in-demand skills that include technical skills, which equip individuals with job-specific expertise, and durable skills, which are evergreen skills required to be successful in the workplace.

Durable skills - sometimes called soft skills, 21st Century skills, or professional skills - include communication, critical thinking, and adaptability. They are critical to career success and bring a lifetime of value to workers and employers.

- **Leadership:** Directing efforts and delivering results
- **Character:** Personal and professional conduct
- **Collaboration:** Teamwork and connection
- **Communication:** Information exchange and management
- **Creativity:** New ideas and novel solutions
- **Critical Thinking:** Informed ideas and effective solutions
- **Metacognition:** Self-understanding and personal management
- **Mindfulness:** Interpersonal and self-awareness
- **Growth Mindset:** Improvement and aspiration
- **Fortitude:** Constitution and inspiration (America Succeeds, 2021)

7 out of 10 of the most requested skills in job postings are Durable Skills. (America Succeeds, 2021)

Connecticut's career pathways are designed to provide:

- In-demand skills
- Pathways for everyone
- Support along the way

PATHWAYS FOR EVERYONE

A comprehensive workforce development system meets people wherever they are on their journey. Everyone in Connecticut deserves to envision themselves in a future career and have a roadmap for getting there.

A career pathway looks different for each individual, combining education, training, supports, and advancement opportunities leading to a career with growth opportunities. One individual may go from K-12 to college to career. Another may journey from K-12 to career to training and then back to work. Still another may go from earning their GED to going to work, participating in training, earning a two-year degree, entering a career, and continuing to study while working. Regardless, these pathways are made as seamless as possible through collaborations between education institutions, training organizations, community-based organizations, employers, and government partners.

SUPPORT ALONG THE WAY

There are no right or wrong career paths - each individual has a unique journey that brings new skills, perspectives, and opportunities. Many people face obstacles along their path that are not of their own making; supports are needed to help these individuals overcome obstacles, get back on track, or maintain their progress.

Young people benefit from supports that help them stay engaged with school, and navigate the complex connections between school, work, and community. Adult workers often face different challenges, requiring wraparound supports that may include child care, transportation, and housing assistance to participate fully in education and employment opportunities.

By recognizing the varied needs of individuals, government, K-12, higher education, adult education, employers, and community-based organizations can collaborate effectively to create opportunities and reduce obstacles. When we provide the right supports at the right time, we enable more Connecticut residents to contribute their talents to our workforce.

Quality career pathways feature:

- Multiple entry points for all our communities
- Recognition of prior learning
- Transparent skill requirements
- Stackable credentials
- Integrated support services
- Data-driven continuous improvement

KEY STRATEGIES:

- ▶ Expand early career exposure and exploration opportunities
- ▶ Increase opportunities for high school students to gain early college and career experiences, skills, and college credit
- ▶ Increase opportunities for postsecondary learners to gain career-ready skills, experience, and credentials
- ▶ Increase opportunities for adult learners to gain in-demand workforce skills and credentials
- ▶ Partner with employers to upskill their current workforce



Pathways to Meaningful Employment

In a thriving workforce, successful careers take many paths.

Young learners excel when provided with career exposure and preparation, empowering them to make informed decisions about their future.

As learners grow, they need opportunities to attain career skills, credentials, and experiences that open doors to rewarding career pathways.

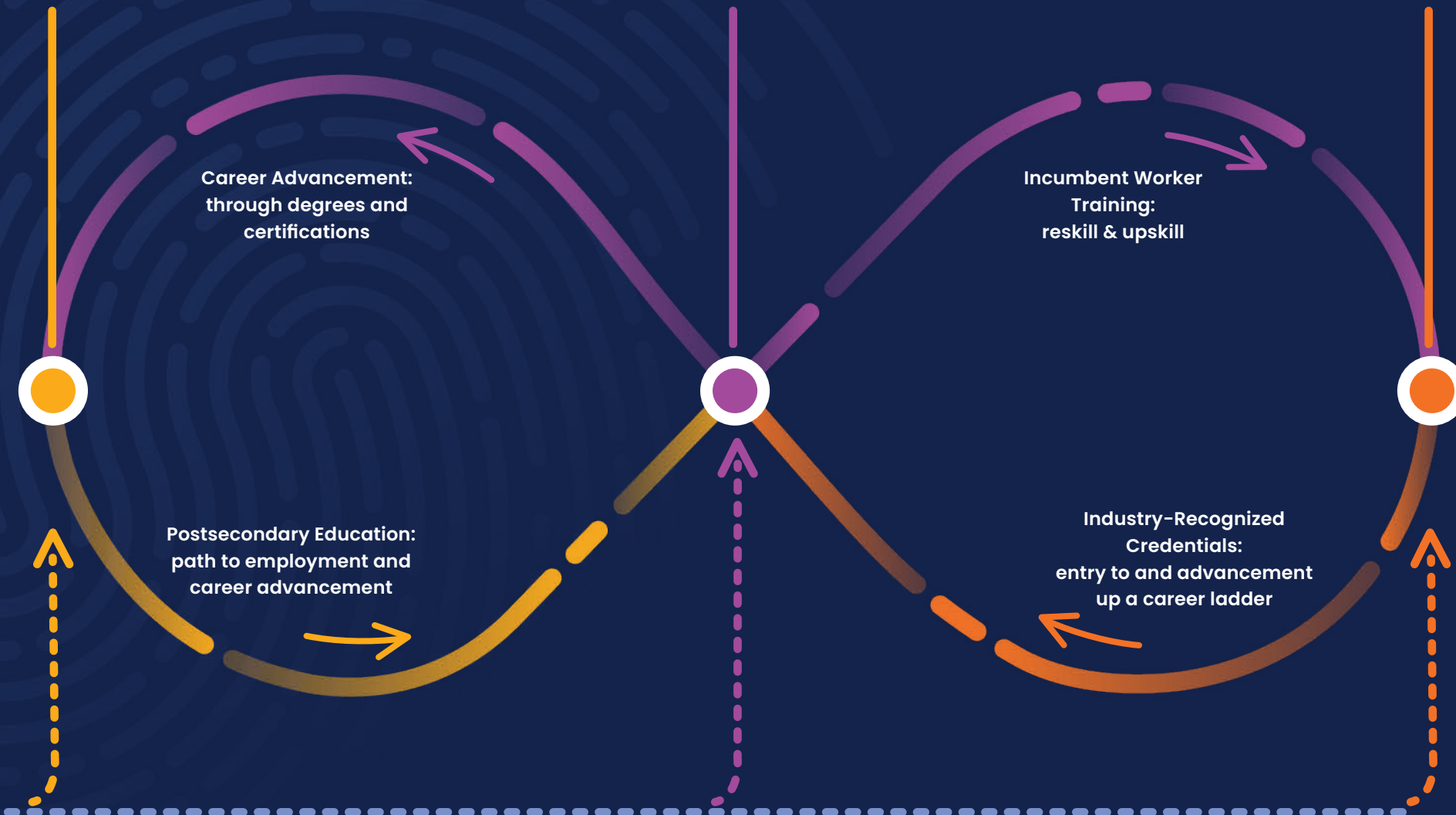
For many, the path to meaningful employment is not a straight line. Some individuals benefit from targeted supports that allow them to enter the workforce at any stage of their journey.

In today's rapidly changing workplace, lifelong learning opportunities enable workers to remain relevant, adaptable, and build economic prosperity.


POSTSECONDARY
EDUCATION


MEANINGFUL
EMPLOYMENT


SHORT-TERM
TRAINING




K-8
Exposure to a range of careers to build awareness and direction


HIGH SCHOOL
Early college and career experiences leading to employment, short-term training, and/or postsecondary education


POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION
Certificate, 2-year, 4-year, and postgraduate programs leading to meaningful employment


MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT
Career with a family-supporting income, growth potential, and opportunities for lifelong learning


SHORT-TERM TRAINING
Employer-informed training leading to industry-aligned credentials



Strategy 1: Expand early career exposure and exploration opportunities

To transform Connecticut's workforce, we must begin with our youngest students. Research shows that early career exposure significantly increases career awareness, educational motivation, and future employment outcomes—yet this exposure is not distributed equally across our state.

By fostering curiosity about a wide array of career paths, we help address the challenges that can limit opportunity. Research shows student perceptions about careers begin forming as early as age 10 and often remain unchanged by age 14 (Torii, 2018). Early exposure encourages students to explore new possibilities, broadening their understanding of what's achievable. When we build these connections early, we create pathways to opportunity that benefit students, employers, and the future of Connecticut's economy.

Employers are catalysts for change.

Employers can drive transformative change in Connecticut's talent pipeline by actively engaging with schools to create high-quality education and career preparation opportunities:

- Participating in career talks and exploration events
- Hosting workplace visits and excursions
- Providing hands-on learning experiences
- Mentoring and advising students
- Advising on curriculum to reflect real-world industry needs

Because parental values and expectations significantly influence students' career choices, these programs must also engage families in the career exploration journey.

Student perceptions about careers begin forming as early as age 10.



STRATEGY IN ACTION

Avelo Aviation Career Exploration

The Avelo Aviation Career Exploration (ACE) Program is a partnership between Avelo Airlines, East Haven Public Schools, and Scouting America designed to inspire a new generation of aerospace professionals. Now in its third year, the four-month program introduces 50 middle school students and their parents to a broad range of aerospace career opportunities. The ACE curriculum encompasses a number of dynamic opportunities, including after-school classroom instruction; guest speakers, such as pilots, astronauts, flight attendants, maintenance technicians, and airport managers; and local and out-of-state field trips, where students have the chance to fly multi-million-dollar, state-of-the-art flight simulators and tour the Sikorsky aerospace manufacturing facility.

Strategy 2: Increase opportunities for high school students to gain early college and career experiences, skills, and college credit

Every Connecticut student deserves to understand and have access to the full range of opportunities available for their future. By integrating early college and career experiences into high school education, we prepare students for success regardless of their post-graduation plans. Programs that provide career exposure, work-based learning opportunities, industry-recognized credentials, and the opportunity to earn college credit help high school students gain experience and skills to navigate their next steps confidently.

Connecticut is committed to creating opportunities for every student to envision their future careers, have a roadmap for getting there, be informed through classroom and real-world experiences, and believe in their ability to fulfill their ambitions.

A PATH FOR EVERY STUDENT

All students gain valuable exposure to different career fields, workplace environments, and college, helping them make more informed decisions about their future.

Students not planning for college are set up for success when they earn industry-recognized skills and credentials, and make connections that open doors to early careers that do not require a four-year degree. At the same time, students will earn college credits that may be applied to a degree later in their careers.

College-bound students benefit from exposure to careers they may choose to pursue a degree in, and opportunities to earn college credit while in high school.

EARLY COLLEGE PROGRAMS

Dual and Concurrent Enrollment programs allow high school students to earn college credit before graduation, providing them with a head start on their higher education journey.

Concurrent enrollment courses are college-level courses offered at a student's high school.

Dual enrollment enables high school students to take college courses, either online or on a college campus. Both types of courses allow the student to earn credit that counts towards high school and potentially college graduation requirements.

These early college programs consistently demonstrate a strong return on investment and positive long-term outcomes. Research shows these programs are especially effective in broadening participation in higher education, with data showing they:

- Increase participation by students at risk of disconnecting from school
- Improve high school graduation rates
- Encourage college enrollment and retention
- Reduce the overall cost of college
- Enhance the likelihood that students will earn a degree or credential (American Institutes for Research, 2020)

In the 2023–24 school year, students across Connecticut completed 36,000 dual credit courses (EdSight, 2024).

Research confirms the powerful impact of early career exposure:

Schools integrating career-focused programming into academic learning show improved high school graduation rates and higher postsecondary participation (Ross, et. al., 2020)

Graduates of schools with robust career exposure programs are shown to earn higher wages and work more hours after completing high school (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021)

Work-based learning experiences in high school that incorporate positive relationships with adults help young people of color and those from low-income backgrounds gain higher-quality jobs by age 30 (Baum & Ruhm, 2014)

YOUTH PIPELINE INITIATIVES

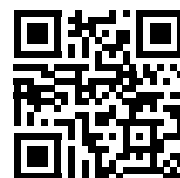
Youth pipeline initiatives provide career-focused exploration, skills training, work-based learning, and career development opportunities to high school students interested in career paths that may not require a four-year college degree. These programs are developed through partnerships among high schools, higher education, employers, and/or community-based partners. Students who enroll in these programs participate in hands-on training, gain durable skills, and make connections with potential employers. Participants may receive certificates of completion for career pathways, industry-recognized credentials, college credits, pre-apprenticeship hours, and job search assistance.

Connecticut’s commitment to expanding these opportunities isn’t just about preparing students for jobs—it’s about empowering them with the information, experiences, and skills to make choices that align with their goals and potential.

Investments in Dual and Concurrent Enrollment Opportunities

STRATEGY IN ACTION

In partnership with school districts across the state, Connecticut-based colleges and universities have implemented a wide range of dual and concurrent enrollment programs. In 2023, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) issued \$3.8 million in grant funds to 89 districts to assist schools in expanding dual enrollment opportunities for students. CSDE also granted over \$4 million to 14 Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs). These grants help IHEs strengthen their dual enrollment programs; implement best practices; increase partnerships with high schools; attain National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) accreditation; and provide no-cost dual enrollment courses for high school students from low-income families. In 2024, CSDE also launched a new dashboard on dual enrollment courses completed by Connecticut high school students at IHEs. The dashboard allows for the data to be viewed by college/university, subject, district, school, and course title.



Scan to visit the CSDE Dashboard

Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (YMPI)

To meet growing manufacturing industry demand—especially as many workers approach retirement—the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board (EWIB) created the Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (YMPI). Based on the nationally recognized Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI) curriculum, this collaborative program between EWIB, the Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance Regional Sector Partnership, CT State Community College, ReadyCT, and 12 participating high schools delivers foundational manufacturing skills to high school students interested in industry careers.

The YMPI provides students with:

- Accelerated pathways to manufacturing careers
- Industry-recognized credentials, including OSHA 10 certification
- College credits and pre-apprenticeship hours
- Durable skills development through ReadyCT curriculum
- Work-based learning opportunities
- Direct connections to employment services

Since 2018, 100+ students participating in the Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative were immediately placed in manufacturing jobs after completing the program (EWIB).

Youth Healthcare Pipeline Initiative (YHPI)

Healthcare is consistently the most in-demand industry in every region of the state.

Building off the success of YMPI, EWIB has established its Youth Healthcare Pipeline Initiative (YHPI) and has partnered with regional high schools to offer healthcare training to students, allowing them to earn recognized credentials required for entry-level healthcare careers, such as CNA and EMT.

YHPI training, which is currently operational in nine Eastern Connecticut comprehensive high schools:

- Prepares students for credentialing exams
- Provides the opportunity for durable skills development and work-based learning opportunities through a structured ReadyCT curriculum
- Provides high school graduates immediate employment in an in-demand healthcare career

Strategy 3:

Increase opportunities for postsecondary learners to gain career-ready skills, experience, and credentials

By 2031, 72% of jobs will require postsecondary certification or training. But significant gaps exist between education and workplace needs (Georgetown, 2024). For example, on a national basis, only 41% of bachelor's degree students gain internship experience during their studies (Marken, 2023). In Connecticut, these gaps have real consequences – for example, 80% of manufacturing employers reported difficulty filling positions in 2024 (CBIA, 2024).

Career-focused degrees, certificates, and hands-on experience make a critical difference in employment outcomes. Real-world learning bridges the gap between classroom theory and workplace application, building both technical and durable skills, and the professional confidence needed for career success.

Connecticut has developed strategic programs to help more students attain industry-recognized certifications, complete college degrees, and gain career-ready skills throughout their postsecondary journey—strengthening the vital connections between education and employment.

Students who understand the real-world relevance of their schoolwork are more engaged, motivated, and academically successful (Johansen, 2023).

72% of jobs will require postsecondary certification or training

Only 41% of bachelor's degree students gain internship experience during their studies



Tech Talent Accelerator

Through two rounds of funding, this \$2 million initiative aligns higher education with technology industry needs in high-demand fields including cybersecurity, virtual modeling, software development, and digital analytics. Co-managed by the Business Higher Education Forum and the New England Board of Higher Education, the program:

- Develops short-term (6-12 week) credential programs for entry-level technology positions
- Embeds sought-after skills and credentials from global technology leaders into degree programs
- Creates pathways from education to employment in Connecticut's growing tech sector

A third round – Tech Talent Accelerator 3.0 – will launch in 2025 and invest \$2.7 million into Artificial Intelligence pathways.

AS OF THE END OF 2024:

12 Higher Education Partnerships

701 Enrolled

26 Industry Partnerships

117 Industry Credentials Earned

15 Pathways and Credentials in Development

109 Internships Facilitated

STRATEGY IN ACTION

CT Health Horizons

Launched in September 2023 to strengthen Connecticut's healthcare and social work talent pipelines, this \$35 million initiative focuses on nursing and social work careers while encouraging broad participation across communities. The program provides tuition support for students from lower-income backgrounds, expands the number of faculty, and promotes innovative initiatives. Through partnerships with Connecticut State Colleges & Universities, UConn, and The Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges, the program has already:

- Awarded 1,662 scholarships issued over the first two years – exceeding the goal of 1,200 by 38%
- Hired 73 new faculty, expanding both nursing and social work programs statewide
- Funded 10 nursing and 6 social work programs that include partnerships with businesses and hospitals

Strategy 4: Increase opportunities for adult learners to gain in-demand workforce skills and credentials

Building career skills is a continuous process that unfolds over a lifetime. Most of us wish to advance along a rewarding and challenging career path, but many face significant barriers, including limited growth opportunities, underemployment, or unemployment.

- Some individuals face barriers to participation in training that include lack of transportation, child care, housing, and more
- Others are unable to find programs that are available at a time and place that works for their busy schedules, which could include holding a job that pays the bills
- Many low-income residents who would like to participate in high-quality training programs can't afford to do so

7,300 workers in Connecticut are Registered Apprentices working for about 1,800 companies (CT DOL, 2025)

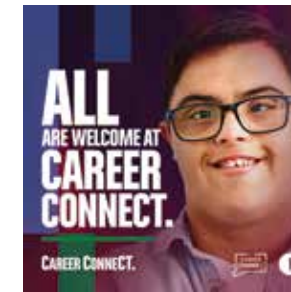


What unites these experiences is the need for pathways to family-supporting incomes and economic opportunity. Short-term job training with comprehensive supports offer individuals, regardless of their starting points, the chance to transform their circumstances.

To support these goals, adult learners need accessible information about career opportunities and skill requirements, and access to high-quality, short-term training programs across a range of sectors that provide:

- Clear career progression with stackable credentials that provide immediate value with the opportunity to build toward associate's or bachelor's degrees that may be necessary for career advancement
- Flexible learning options accommodating work and family responsibilities
- Support services addressing practical barriers like child care, transportation, and housing security
- Durable skills development building communication, teamwork, adaptability, and professionalism for lasting career success
- Hands-on work experiences through internships and pre-apprenticeships to develop job-specific technical skills

Supported training programs help expand economic mobility by serving a wide range of individuals – including young adults, career changers, and others seeking quality jobs with family-sustaining wages.



Career ConneCT

STRATEGY IN ACTION

Career ConneCT empowers unemployed and underemployed Connecticut residents to transform their futures. This \$70 million American Rescue Plan Act-funded initiative has provided 19 strategic grants to Workforce Development Boards and community organizations statewide, providing not just free training but also case management and essential supports (including transportation, housing, and child care) that remove barriers to participation in training.

The program is seeing unparalleled results. As of January 2025, the program has enrolled 6,674 individuals in training for quality jobs in healthcare, IT, construction, advanced manufacturing, and more since its 2022 launch. Of those enrolled in training, 67% have completed. Of those who have completed training, 69% are employed, with the remaining receiving employment support to attain jobs.

The Career ConneCT portal serves as a single entry point for broad recruitment, data collection, and reporting. The portal includes a “skills inventory” (assessment), connection to a career coach, training opportunities, and jobs.

To ensure Career ConneCT reaches individuals with the greatest need, the initiative features a culturally responsive media campaign focused on communities with limited access to workforce resources and support services.

Career Accelerator

Connecticut is designing an innovative “Pay-it-Forward” Career Accelerator program that bridges a critical gap in workforce development funding. Developed in partnership with national nonprofit, Social Finance, this initiative will provide crucial financial assistance to job seekers who don't qualify for free training through traditional funding channels, such as Workforce Pell grants, federal funding through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), or CT State Community College PACT program, but lack the financial resources to invest in their skills.

Focusing on high-demand fields including commercial driver's licensing, advanced manufacturing, and healthcare, the program will offer interest-free loans for training, plus free supports for essentials like child care and transportation. The repayment structure is thoughtfully designed to begin only when participants secure employment, with terms based on salary—ensuring accessibility and fairness.

93% of workers who complete registered apprenticeships **gain long-term employment.**
(ApprenticeshipUSA, 2022)

Registered Apprenticeship Training Program

Registered apprentices earn while they learn: they master a trade through a combination of on-the-job training and classroom instruction. These programs increase workforce recruitment and proficiency, help employers transfer occupational skills to a new generation of workers, and ensure succession planning.

Connecticut has benefited from a customized Registered Apprenticeship training program across many occupations, including skilled trades, manufacturing technicians, certified nurses and nurse assistants, and teachers and child care providers. As of February 2025, 7,300 workers are Registered Apprentices working for about 1,800 companies (CT DOL).

When participants complete their program, the Connecticut Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship Training provides an industry-recognized, portable credential that certifies completion of the program; distinguishes the apprentice as a master of their craft; and makes the apprentice eligible to take any occupational licensing exams.

*"Absent an employer, there is no apprenticeship. Employers look at everything as a cost, but I see apprenticeship as an investment in employees. Some employers ask me, 'What if they leave?' I ask them, 'What if they stay?' My people value the fact that I've invested in them. If you provide career opportunities and growth, employees stay and become better. The ROI has been substantiated — **a \$1.47 in return for every \$1 invested.**"*

Melissa Sheffy,
President at Network Interiors, Inc., NDC Commercial
Construction and Network Framing Solutions, LLC



Strategy 5: Partner with employers to upskill their current workforce

For employers, especially the thousands of small and mid-sized businesses that form Connecticut's economic backbone, continual innovation requires a skilled workforce. Incumbent worker training enables companies to upskill their employees and promote from within. Without proper support, this process can be costly and complex.

Manufacturing Innovation Fund

STRATEGY IN ACTION

Since 2015, Connecticut's Manufacturing Innovation Fund (MIF) has strengthened the state's industrial competitiveness through targeted investments in equipment and workforce development. By the end of fiscal year 2024, the MIF had committed over \$17.7 million to help ~600 manufacturers defray the costs of upskilling over 29K employees in advanced technologies and lean manufacturing processes.

This strategic program helps Connecticut manufacturers respond to rapidly changing market demands, enabling them to upskill their existing workforce as needs evolve and promote from within—creating advancement opportunities for workers while ensuring businesses remain competitive in the global marketplace.

Incumbent Worker Training - Administered by CCAT

MIF Funding | FY24: \$705,639 | Funding Committed: \$17,755,045

Companies Assisted	Individuals Trained
FY24: 66	FY24: 1,908
Total: 654	Total: 30,678

LOOKING FORWARD

To support the development of a skilled and robust workforce, our shared action plan includes these steps:

- Establish more robust industry and K-12 partnerships that provide early career exposure, work-based learning experiences, and opportunities to earn industry-recognized credentials
- Continue to increase dual and concurrent enrollment courses that lead to a college credential, whether a certificate, associate's, or bachelor's degree
- Expand higher education and industry partnerships that embed industry skill needs into curricula and provide work-based learning opportunities
- Scale best practice sector-based training models
- Encourage employer investment in upskilling and reskilling workers to meet changing business needs

Pathways to Possibility

JORDAN AND JUSTIN'S STORY

Career ConneCT

Twin brothers Jordan and Justin had early experience with the trades, helping their grandfather who owned a construction business build porches and sheds.

When they heard that the Connecticut State Building Trades Training Institute (CSBTTI) was hosting a career fair at their local library featuring unionized registered apprenticeship training programs, they both decided to attend, and signed up for CSBTTI's apprenticeship readiness training program, supported through Career ConneCT grant funds.

The apprenticeship readiness program built upon what Jordan and Justin had learned from their grandfather. It provided OSHA, CPR, first aid, and a math refresher course, as well as durable skills like time management and teamwork. CSBTTI supported the twins by providing them with stipends while they attended training.

When they completed training, the brothers, with guidance from CSBTTI case management staff, applied and were accepted to the Electricians Local 35 Registered Apprenticeship training program. Using grant funding, CSBTTI provided them with the work tools they needed as apprentices. Today, they are in the second year of their five-year program and on their way to earning their electrician license.

"Training helps prepare you for what it's actually like in the trades and what it could be like out in the field. I also believe it gives an extra boost for your interview and resume because they can see that you are committed to becoming a good tradesman. I love what I'm doing and look forward to a future as a licensed electrician."

Jordan, Career ConneCT

The CT State Building Trades Training Institute (CSBTTI), a Career ConneCT grantee, prepares interested Connecticut residents with the skills and credentials needed to succeed in the construction industry. Engagement and recruitment efforts focus on reaching young adults (ages 18–24), returning citizens, veterans, and other residents seeking support to enter or re-enter the workforce.

Pathways to Possibility

MIN'S STORY

Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative

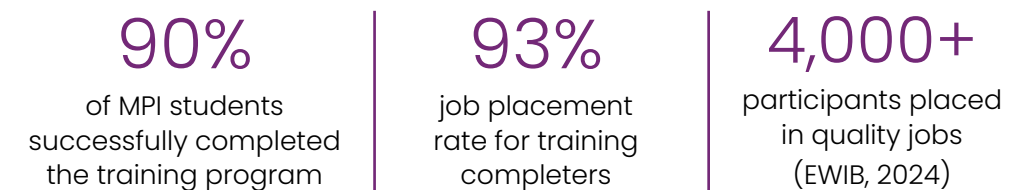
At 24, Min found himself underemployed with just eleven hours of weekly work at a low-wage job while living with his parents. Seeking a rewarding career path, he discovered the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board's Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI).

The MPI program addresses a critical workforce need by providing no-cost training tailored to the specific hiring requirements of Electric Boat, members of the Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance Regional Sector Partnership (EAMA RSP), and other manufacturers.

During the intensive five-week program, Min mastered manufacturing terminology, developed hands-on tool skills, and prepared for workplace expectations. The program's comprehensive support system—including attendance-based stipends, mileage reimbursement, and work boots and apparel—allowed him to focus entirely on his training.

After earning both his MPI certificate and State pre-apprenticeship certification, Min successfully launched his manufacturing career as a shipfitter at Electric Boat in January 2024.

550 employers have hired MPI participants:



Through this targeted, supportive, industry-driven approach to workforce development, Connecticut is connecting motivated individuals with transformative training and supports to meet industry needs.



OBJECTIVE 3

OBJECTIVE 3:

EXPAND ACCESS

Strengthen our workforce by removing barriers to education, employment, and opportunity.



Connecticut's greatest asset lies in the unique, capable people who drive our state forward. To ensure long-term growth and prosperity, we must take a strategic, inclusive approach to workforce development, focusing on expanding opportunities and eliminating barriers to education and employment.

Connecticut's workforce includes individuals from many walks of life – from veterans transitioning to civilian employment, to individuals re-entering the workforce after incarceration, to young people exploring nontraditional career paths. It also includes those pursuing roles in new industries,

as well as individuals with access needs. Each person brings valuable experiences and perspectives that shape their career journeys. Many navigate overlapping challenges that call for flexible, responsive workforce strategies to broaden access to education, training, and sustainable employment opportunities.

While our initiatives focus on addressing obstacles to employment identified for specific communities, they are based on best practices that benefit everyone in Connecticut's workforce.



KEY STRATEGIES:

- ▶ Remove barriers to education, training, and employment
- ▶ Strengthen ways for adult learners in need to gain basic skills
- ▶ Create accessible digital gateways to workforce opportunities



A thriving workforce requires a multifaceted approach; building awareness, agency, access, and skill-building. Our approach focuses on:

- Ensuring all residents understand career opportunities available, helping them find meaningful work that suits their skills and abilities
- Identifying and addressing obstacles that prevent individuals from accessing education, training, and employment
- Providing pathways for all residents to develop the technical and durable skills that increase their employability in an evolving job market
- Centralizing access to information about career pathways, training, and job opportunities to enable individuals to make informed decisions about their professional futures
- Supporting adult learners in building the basic skills necessary to pursue their chosen training and career paths

By doing these things, we expand our pool of workers, bring new perspectives and innovation to the workplace, and grow our state’s middle class. The result is a workforce system that works for all: connecting employers with the skilled talent they need; and building an economy where people from all backgrounds can live, work, and thrive.

Strategy 1: Remove barriers to education, training, and employment

While Connecticut’s overall labor force participation rate is a strong 65%—outpacing the national average of 62.6%—the state still faces a mismatch between open positions and the number of skilled workers available to fill them. Despite high participation in the workforce across many communities, wage disparities persist, particularly in roles that require specialized skills or offer limited advancement opportunities (CT DOL, 2025).

To provide employers with the talent they need to compete, we must expand the labor pool by providing education and training alongside targeted supports to individuals facing barriers to training, education, and meaningful work. All residents deserve opportunities to create better futures for themselves and their families, enrich their communities, and contribute to the economic and social vitality of the state.

Several key obstacles prevent many of Connecticut’s resilient residents from accessing education, training, and high-quality employment opportunities:

- Lack of access to high-quality, affordable child care prevents many from working — particularly impacting lower-wage earners and primary caregivers
- Transportation challenges impact both rural and urban communities
- Housing instability undermines educational and employment success
- Benefits cliffs make it difficult for low-income families to advance in their careers, disproportionately affecting families with children
- Gaps in internet access, device availability, and technology skills limit access to education and employment opportunities, especially in rural and urban areas

Women account for just 29% of the manufacturing workforce (NAM, 2023).

The reentry population has a 27% unemployment rate – six times higher than the state average (Couloute, 2018).

By 2032, adults aged 65 and older are expected to comprise 8.6% of the labor force, up from 6.6% in 2022. This increase indicates a growing number of older individuals either remaining in or returning to work (BLS, 2024).

Fewer than 25% of people with disabilities are currently employed (BLS, 2024).

19% of Connecticut’s 14-26 year-olds were either at-risk or disconnected in 2021-2022 (BCG, 2023).

Every dollar invested in free, full-time preschool care generates \$6 in economic benefits, primarily through increased parental earnings (OEC Blue Ribbon Panel, 2024).

By actively removing these challenges, Connecticut is strengthening its workforce and building a state where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care

STRATEGY IN ACTION

Access to high-quality child care is fundamental to workforce participation and career advancement. When parents have reliable child care, they can fully engage in their careers with confidence. A recent study confirms the economic impact: every dollar invested in free, full-time preschool care generates \$6 in economic benefits, primarily through increased parental earnings (Tobin Center, 2024).

In 2023, Governor Ned Lamont established the Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care through Executive Order, tasking it with developing a 5-year strategic plan for a child care system that serves families, providers, and Connecticut's economy effectively.

After more than a year of work and extensive community input, the Panel's report outlines four goals for Connecticut's early childhood education (ECE) infrastructure to improve workforce and quality, increase access to care that meets a wide range of family needs, develop agile and responsive systems, and build a well-funded sustainable funding structure positioned to leverage future investments.



Family Child Care Apprenticeship

A severe shortage of child care workers in Connecticut has left 40,000 legally authorized slots unfilled, leaving families across the state without care, according to a report by DataHaven and United Way of Connecticut (211 Child Care, 2024). To help address this critical gap, the Connecticut Department of Labor, Office of Early Childhood, and CSEA SEIU Local 2001 launched the Family Child Care Registered Apprenticeship Program.

The program was created with the goals of partnering with families and communities to create culturally and linguistically appropriate care for their children; improving the quality of early care and education by offering coursework in child development; and valuing the important work that child care providers perform within their communities.

This federally backed workforce training program requires a minimum of 2,000 hours working on the job and 144 hours of classroom learning. Upon completion of the program, family child care providers will have the Child Development Associate and National Association for Family Child Care credentials. These credentials raise the wages for providers, improve future earning power, and lift the quality of the home-based early childhood education programs.

Following the success of the Family Child Care Registered Apprenticeship, child care center employers and partners developed an entry-level registered apprenticeship to build the workforce and provide high-quality early learning experiences for CT's youngest children, allowing more parents to enter or remain in the workforce as their families grow. The Office of Early Childhood is supporting 12 programs across the state to implement this first-ever registered apprenticeship for early care and education centers.

Transportation Research Initiative

Access to reliable, affordable transportation is essential for individuals to successfully participate in education, training programs, and employment. Yet for many people — particularly those in communities with limited infrastructure or services — transportation remains a significant obstacle.

This issue is acute in more rural areas of the state where public transportation is limited. However, even in regions with public transportation, work schedules and destinations prohibit the use of these options. Cars are not an easy alternative, given the cost of obtaining a reliable vehicle, insurance, a driver's license, and operating expenses.

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
- Stakeholder interviews, including with potential beneficiaries, of transportation solutions
- Design of 2-3 transportation solutions

Benefits Cliff Tool

Consider this scenario: A single parent with two children receives a modest \$0.10 hourly wage increase—approximately \$200 annually. This seemingly positive step forward triggers an unexpected financial crisis as her income now exceeds the threshold for child care subsidies, resulting in a devastating \$9,000 loss in essential support.

Not only do these “benefits cliffs” cause direct financial harm to families, but the complexity of state and federal public assistance eligibility creates uncertainty as to when these cliffs may happen. These factors combined create a significant disincentive for individuals to embark on career paths that lead to long-term increases in income and economic security.

In addition to impacting household economic stability and individual career growth, they also contribute to the workforce shortage as fewer workers are adequately trained for middle-skill jobs. This creates an untapped workforce of individuals who are not able to complete workforce training or gain the on-the-job experience needed to move up the career ladder.

With this challenge in mind, Connecticut's Two Generational Initiative (2Gen) partnered with the Atlanta Federal Reserve to build the Career Ladder Identifier and Financial Forecaster (CLIFF), a dashboard that calculates when benefits cliffs will occur for families based on their household composition and income. Using CLIFF, career counselors are working with families to help them understand the impact that a career change may have on their eligibility for public assistance — reducing the uncertainty of a career change.



Scan to view the Career Ladder Identifier and Financial Forecaster (CLIFF)

State Digital Equity Plan

Today's worker is expected to be able to access and navigate the internet, yet the digital divide prevents many Connecticut residents from developing these essential capabilities. Lack of internet access or skills creates barriers to training opportunities and job applications. Digital literacy has become fundamental for virtually all employment, yet only 64% of Connecticut residents can complete basic computer tasks without assistance. This gap disproportionately affects communities of color, people with disabilities, and low-income households, with some groups showing proficiency rates below 50% (CT DAS, 2024).

With support from the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) Commission for Educational Technology is leading a multi-year effort to design and implement a statewide Digital Equity Plan. In March 2024, the Commission published “Connecticut: Everyone Connected,” which addresses multiple challenges including internet access, affordability, availability of devices, and digital skill development. The plan focuses on reaching communities that may face greater barriers to connectivity, including older adults, individuals who are incarcerated, those living near or below the poverty line, individuals with access needs, residents with language or digital skill gaps, rural communities, and veterans.



Strategy 2: Strengthen ways for adult learners in need to gain basic skills

Today's jobs require core capabilities that many Connecticut residents have not yet had the opportunity to fully access or develop.

Among Connecticut adults:

176,000+

lack a high school credential

210,000+

have limited English proficiency

63,000+

face both challenges simultaneously (Opportunity at Work, 2024)

For these individuals, securing family-supporting employment is extremely difficult without additional support.

Adult education programs, serving primarily those between 25 and 44 years of age, create vital pathways to employment through tailored approaches. These programs address a wide range of learning needs and life circumstances:

- Some adult learners need basic education skills training that leads to career pathways. The success they experience often inspires them to complete their secondary education and transition to postsecondary options, motivated to demonstrate the importance of education to their children.
- Other adult learners are new arrivals to the U.S. with documented status, experience, and degrees, but lack the certifications or licenses needed for employment in their former fields. For these individuals, English language instruction enables them to navigate the process of acquiring needed credentials.

Basic Skills Remediation Pilots

STRATEGY IN ACTION

In 2024, Capital Workforce Partners and Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board launched innovative Basic Skills Remediation Pilot Programs. These initiatives serve adults 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 in manufacturing, green jobs, IT, and commercial driving.

Beyond their immediate impact, these pilots aim to identify replicable best practices that can benefit adults statewide, including:

- Integration of academic skills with occupational training
- Flexible scheduling and delivery methods to accommodate working adults
- Comprehensive support services that address barriers to participation

Strategy 3: Create accessible digital gateways to workforce opportunities

Navigating the complex landscape of education, training, and employment can be overwhelming, especially for those disconnected from the labor force or facing multiple barriers. Connecticut is transforming this experience by creating centralized, accessible, virtual entry points to opportunity.

Currently, Connecticut residents can access services through American Job Centers (AJCs), with six full-service and 14 affiliate locations statewide. These centers provide critical in-person workforce assistance for job seekers and employers through a partnership of state, regional, and local organizations.

To further help reduce barriers to economic opportunity, the State is bolstering the AJCs with one-stop, virtual resources that include comprehensive and easy-to-navigate education, training, case management, and job tools.



STRATEGY IN ACTION

Jobs.CT.Gov

To provide job seekers with easy access to data and resources, the State launched a new portal to assist Connecticut residents—and those seeking to become Connecticut residents—in their job search.

Through Jobs.CT.gov, job seekers can access comprehensive employment resources, free and low-cost training opportunities, and personalized career development tools. Employers benefit from resources to help hire, train, and retain talent.

“The new jobs portal is the next step in our administration’s effort to make information more accessible and available for Connecticut residents and businesses.”

Ned Lamont, Governor

Pathways to Possibility

Career ConneCT Portal

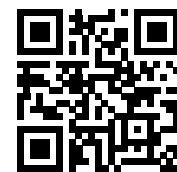
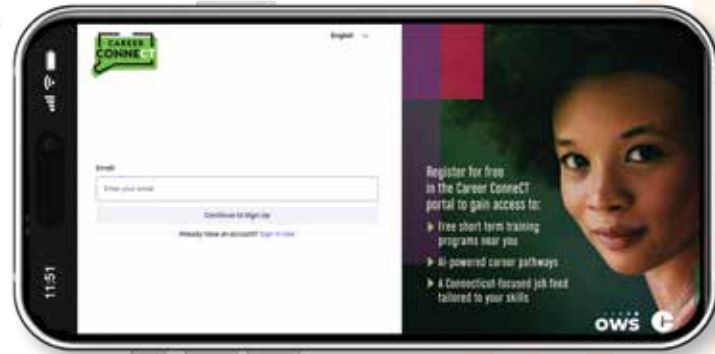
The Career ConneCT portal significantly expands access to workforce opportunities across Connecticut. As the unified online gateway to the state's \$70 million workforce initiative, it connects residents who face barriers to employment with life-changing education and career resources.

To reach individuals who could most benefit from the program, the portal features a comprehensive, demographically targeted marketing campaign in English and Spanish. Outreach efforts of Workforce Development Boards and nonprofit partners also help to reach populations who would most benefit from free training and supportive services.

What makes Career ConneCT effective is its comprehensive approach. After completing a skills assessment, users connect with Career Coaches who provide guidance and help navigate essential support services, including child care, transportation, and housing assistance. By addressing practical barriers alongside career development, the portal ensures more residents can access opportunities.

In partnership with CTHires, the workforce development system managed by the CT DOL to report to the USDOL, the portal tracks outcomes including job placement and wage increases, enabling continuous improvement of services that benefit both job seekers and employers throughout Connecticut.

Read more about the Career ConneCT program under Objective 2: Build Skills, Strategy 4: Increase opportunities for adults to gain in-demand workforce skills and credentials.



Scan for Career ConneCT portal

LOOKING FORWARD

To strengthen our workforce by removing barriers, our shared action plan includes these steps:

- Recognize and address the complex and intersectional needs of learners
- Strengthen training and education programs by integrating comprehensive supports for learners
- Provide easy access to information for job seekers in multiple formats

MOISE'S STORY

Student 5.0

Growing up, Moise didn't see much of a future for himself. But Student 5.0, a career launch program for high school seniors and recent graduates, gave him a whole new perspective.

Through Student 5.0, students are matched to a career launch coordinator (CLC) who spends time learning each participant's interests and skills. Working together, they create a career launch plan, and the CLC provides ongoing coaching support and guidance to better ensure that the plan is successfully executed.

For Moise, like many others, transportation is a barrier to training and employment. Career ConneCT supported Moise in getting his driver's license. "For me to have a car in my family to get us from Point A to Point B is a blessing," Moise shared.

Since completing the program, Moise was connected to the CT State Building Trades Training Institute, another Career ConneCT grantee, which helped Moise become part of the Carpenters Union in their Registered Apprenticeship Training Program, where he is earning wages and benefits while learning from the most experienced professionals in the field.

"Student 5.0 changed my life. Now I want to help other kids get into this program, change their life, and be where I am. I finally know what I want to do in life. And without Student 5.0 pushing me, I don't think I would have made it this far."

Moise, Career ConneCT

Student 5.0 is an initiative of ReadyCT, a Career ConneCT grantee and nonprofit committed to academic excellence and career-connected learning for all public school students in Connecticut through collaboration with business, civic, and education leaders. Seniors attending public high school in Greater Hartford/East Hartford and New Britain/Bristol, Middletown, and Manchester can enroll in Student 5.0.

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