

# An Evaluation of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Services in New Jersey, Program Year 2020

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# Executive Summary

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The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey worked with the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development (NJDOL) to conduct a process study of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I services during Program Year (PY) 2020, defined as the period of July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021. This study encompasses all three WIOA Title I main populations – adult, dislocated worker, and youth services – and examines both career and training services. The goal of this study was to examine WIOA Title I service delivery in PY20. The context of PY20, however, cannot be understated. As the first full program year operating within the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, this study examines how NJDOL and local areas adapted services to virtual, remote, or hybrid formats to accommodate the influx of job seekers and the public health directives at that time, and how virtual and remote services affected overall WIOA Title I services in PY20. The study further examines how service modifications were perceived to have worked by local One-Stop Career Center staff. A third, and final, goal of the study was to provide information to NJDOL for use in future decisions around investments in WIOA Title I service delivery and when it considers continuous system improvements to provide customer-centered services to those in need of support.

The Heldrich Center used qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to assess information regarding WIOA Title I services as they were operated and delivered in PY20. To understand and provide a broad overview of WIOA Title I adaptations in PY20, researchers utilized the following multi-method approach to data collection:

- ▶ Conducted an analysis of the Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS) customer data from PY18, PY19, and PY20;

- ▶ Administered one bifurcated survey of local area One-Stop Career Center personnel to document and collect WIOA Title I service adaptations in PY20;
- ▶ Conducted structured interviews with state-level NJDOL workforce staff who are responsible for the implementation of WIOA Title I services;
- ▶ Conducted structured interviews with local area One-Stop Career Center staff at a variety of One-Stop locations in New Jersey; and
- ▶ Conducted focus groups with customers who received WIOA Title I services in PY20.

In developing the research instruments, Heldrich Center researchers used the following definitions for modes in which WIOA Title I services may have been delivered during PY20:

- ▶ **In person:** Service delivery that takes place in the One-Stop Career Center office location in a face-to-face setting;
- ▶ **Remote:** Service delivery that utilizes phone-based technology platforms and devices delivered synchronously;
- ▶ **Virtual:** Service delivery that utilizes computer-based technology platforms and devices delivered synchronously or asynchronously; and
- ▶ **Hybrid:** A mixture of service delivery modes.<sup>1</sup>

This report is organized by research question and associated finding(s) and recommendation(s). A summary is presented below.

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<sup>1</sup> Definitions from the survey given to One-Stop Career Center staff (see Appendix E). Please note that in the context of this study, hybrid was understood as any mixture of in-person, remote, and virtual services. This broad category captures much of PY20's service provision, as explained later in this report.

## Key Takeaways

### Findings

- ▶ Expansion of services: Local areas felt they could reach more people with the ability to offer services via a range of service delivery models: in-person, hybrid, virtual, and remote.
- ▶ Lesson learned on service delivery: Areas that are perceived to better/more impactful with in-person services are intake and orientation.

### Recommendations

- ▶ Investment in technological tool consistency across local areas should be the next frontier of investment for NJDOL.
- ▶ NJDOL could test and invest in modernization, technology tools, and ideas for innovation using small grants/pilots to continue to strengthen virtual service delivery infrastructure.
- ▶ NJDOL could invest in technology solutions to standardize the virtual “front door” for customers across all local areas, in collaboration with the New Jersey Office of Innovation.

## 1. Who accessed WIOA Title I (adult, dislocated worker, and youth) services (career and training) in PY20?

### Finding

The WIOA Title I population served in PY20 across all three WIOA Title I main populations – adult, dislocated worker, and youth – did not significantly differ from the population that received services in PY18 (a full non-pandemic year) and PY19 (a partial pandemic year).

### Recommendation

**Short Term:** NJDOL should collect service-level data and combine them with existing data to gain a better understanding of how service delivery affects participant outcomes.

**Long Term:** NJDOL should invest in a customer journey map to gain a deeper understanding of how customers find and engage with One-Stop Career Center services.

## 2. How did local area One-Stops in New Jersey adapt to providing WIOA Title I services to adult, dislocated worker, and youth customers during the July 2020 to June 2021 period when it was no longer possible to implement a fully in-person mode of service delivery?

### Finding

Most WIOA Title I services for adult, dislocated worker, and youth populations were successfully transitioned to a virtual environment, with a vast majority of services reported as being delivered in a hybrid – or a mix of in-person, remote, and/or virtual – mode in PY20.

### Recommendation

**Short Term:** The New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission (SETC) should convene a subcommittee on innovative service delivery practices and to discuss service delivery modality preferences in depth.

**Long Term:** NJDOL should conduct additional research to identify specific service delivery modality preferences for common One-Stop Career Center services.

## 3. When reflecting on the adaptations in service delivery in PY20 for WIOA Title I services, what do local area One-Stop personnel believe were the most successful and least successful service transitions to a remote/virtual mode of delivery?

### Finding

In PY20, after an initial period of adapting to operating in a virtual environment, local One-Stop Career Center staff felt that they could fully serve customers in a remote and/or virtual setting. Local area staff were confident and felt successful in their ability to transition most, if not all, of their services to be delivered virtually in PY20.

### Recommendation

**Short Term:** A clearinghouse of best practice examples and guidance would be a valuable resource to local areas across New Jersey and the United States. State agencies, like NJDOL, would be ideal first stakeholders in curating the collection of local area ingenuity and entrepreneurship strategies that were employed to meet job seekers' virtual service needs. Similarly, the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) and/or key stakeholder agencies, like the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA), could also build on state

efforts to curate and disseminate a national repository of states' efforts and best practices in delivering virtual WIOA services.

**Long Term:** NJDOL should institutionalize best practices by offering reliable technical assistance to local Workforce Development Boards (WDB) and/or One-Stop Career Center directors interested in replicating innovative practices.

#### **4. If virtual and/or hybrid service delivery continues, what recommendations do local area One-Stop personnel have about what such a hybrid mode and mix of services should ideally look like? What investments could be made to support virtual and/or hybrid service delivery?**

##### **Finding**

One-Stop Career Center staff reported that the ideal service mix combines in-person and virtual services to maximize relationship building and ensure continued customer engagement. Investments in online learning tools, technology to allow for virtual handling of paperwork (such as DocuSign), and physical hardware (such as hotspot devices) were reported to be beneficial to a quick and continuing transition to hybrid and virtual service delivery.

##### **Recommendation**

**Short Term:** NJDOL's procurement process was cited by local area staff as a barrier to being able to adapt to a virtual environment and acquire the necessary tools and services for virtual service provision. While potentially a difficult undertaking, NJDOL should consider how to improve its procurement process to be able to quickly process requests and acquire new technologies.

**Long Term:** Investments in modernization, including procurement of technology and hotspot devices, software programs, reporting systems, etc., should be prioritized by NJDOL and local areas, to continue to update and strengthen the virtual service delivery infrastructure at the local level.

#### **5. What changes to processes and/or data systems, if any, should be made to ensure that service delivery is adequately documented in a hybrid or virtual mode of service delivery?**

##### **Finding**

America's One-Stop Operating System (AOSOS) has limitations as a reporting system. AOSOS needs to be updated to reflect the modality of service delivery to help local areas better capture their service delivery operations. AOSOS language and functionality could be clarified and improved to help local areas more seamlessly document the services they deliver to customers.

##### **Recommendation**

**Short Term:** Updates to AOSOS should be prioritized to begin to systematically capture modality of services to inform future investments in technology and/or physical spaces for local One-Stop Career Centers and NJDOL.

**Long Term:** While NJDOL is currently engaged in workforce modernization efforts to update and upgrade the case management system, specific consideration should be given to adding more robust real-time feedback mechanisms and other functionality to AOSOS in the short term so that local areas can derive more timely learnings from the data to make interim, as-needed changes to local area practices.

#### **6. What do local area One-Stop personnel need to be able to adapt more quickly to a public emergency in the future? How could the state support local area personnel during a future public emergency?**

##### **Finding**

Local One-Stop Career Center staff agreed that, with the support of their local and county partners, the autonomy and flexibility they had during PY20 to make service modifications and/or to implement new service strategies to meet the needs of their WIOA customers was beneficial and recommend it be continued to be able to adapt more quickly to a public emergency in the future. Additionally, staff noted that the technologies procured in PY20 should remain a regular component of service provision moving forward to better equip staff for future emergencies.

##### **Recommendation**

**Short Term:** NJDOL and/or SETC should encourage local WDBs and/or One-Stop directors to engage in asset mapping to identify additional supports, partners, and

community touch points to consider in the face of future recessions, public health emergencies, or other as-yet-unanticipated emergencies.

**Long Term:** NJDOL should identify a team (if not already in existence) to engage in a robust targeted and specific emergency planning effort.

### **7. What was the WIOA Title I customer experience like in PY20? How do customers who received WIOA Title I services feel about their experience interacting with the public workforce system?**

#### **Finding**

Customers experienced customized, high-touch services that addressed their needs. While some customers expressed desire for more in-person services (specifically around training), flexible services were valued and desired. Strong connections with career counselors were made; however, inability to access a specific counselor could lead to confusion and frustration as customers tried to navigate the broader system to receive assistance.

#### **Recommendation**

**Short Term:** Local One-Stop Career Centers need to consider how they can offer more touch points or clear and standardized avenues for communication to their customer population to ensure that every customer is supported throughout their experience engaging with the public workforce system.

**Long Term:** Operating within the constraints of existing funding allocations, NJDOL can contribute to a positive customer experience by facilitating the ability to quickly (and/or temporarily) increase staffing levels and by ensuring adequate staff training.

### **8. How can the state and local public workforce system be prepared for future disruptions and/or disaster recovery?**

#### **Finding**

The public workforce system can be prepared for future disruptions to services by continuing multi-modal service delivery by allowing greater flexibility and autonomy at the local level, and by continually working to dismantle silos across state agencies, units within agencies, between the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program and

other parts of workforce, and increase knowledge across WIOA titles and programs.

#### **Recommendation**

**Short Term:** NJDOL and/or local WDBs should foster innovation at the local WDB and One-Stop Career Center level by encouraging a spirit of innovating pilots and assessing and sharing their results.

**Long Term:** NJDOL should consider how to break program siloes and deepen the institutional knowledge of staff so that there is a greater shared understanding of how the entire public workforce system and its respective programs work together.

### **9. Where should future investments in WIOA Title I service delivery be made?**

#### **Finding**

Service delivery during PY20 alerted One-Stop Career Center staff to the specific needs of providing services in a hybrid or virtual format (technology and people-based needs). Targeted investments in technology and staff capacity will result in a more robust and versatile service delivery landscape, specifically one that can weather public emergencies better in the future. Additionally, lessons learned from other states (as profiled in the Heldrich Center's [Suddenly Virtual](#) and [Strategically Virtual](#) series and from peer-to-peer conversations) can and should be assessed for applicability within New Jersey.

#### **Recommendation**

**Short Term:** To invest in WIOA Title I service delivery technology, infrastructure, and service flows, NJDOL should consider partnering with SETC and/or the Garden State Employment and Training Association (GSETA) to provide local One-Stop Career Centers with desk aids, informational graphics, and other toolkits to support local service delivery. A statewide, multi-organizational partnership could help to ensure technological tool consistency at the local level of service provision.

**Long Term:** There is a need for greater investment in professional development for local One-Stop Career Center staff to further develop and enhance the hard and soft skills that are required to continue to move toward and fully adopt a hybridized relationship-building centric, high-touch service model.

## Introduction

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The Heldrich Center conducted a process study of New Jersey's services through WIOA during PY20, spanning July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021. This study was conducted to meet NJDOL's annual WIOA evaluation requirement. The purpose of this process study was to examine WIOA Title I services for the three main populations of adult, dislocated worker, and youth, covering both career and training services in PY20. It also looks at how WIOA Title I services in New Jersey adapted to and responded to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and how those adaptations were perceived to work by state and local staff. Finally, this study aims to identify what, if any, future investments should be considered to continue to deliver high-quality services in a multi-modal system that best meets the needs of New Jersey's job seekers.

The findings from this process evaluation provide an in-depth overview of WIOA Title I services and service delivery. Where possible, researchers identify

modifications made to service delivery that are perceived by local One-Stop Career Center staff to have worked most efficiently and are recommended to be extended into the future as part of WIOA Title I's efforts to continuously improve services for WIOA customers. Additionally, this study documents the experiences and perceptions of a select group of WIOA Title I customers served during PY20, which was captured through a series of focus groups and individual interviews. Researchers' analysis of WIPS data offered a descriptive analysis of who accessed services during PY20. The findings and recommendations from this study will not only help New Jersey provide better, more customer-centered services, but will also help to inform NJDOL and local workforce areas on future investments and guidance in a multi-modal public workforce development system that includes high-quality virtual and remote WIOA services.

## Overarching Context

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Any analysis of programmatic service provision that occurred during PY20 must consider the massive upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The effects of the pandemic are still being felt over three years later as the nation continues to grapple with supply chain issues, massive loss of life, exacerbated and new health issues, changing workforce dynamics and labor market, and more. The situation in New Jersey is no different, and the implementation of WIOA programs and services was affected by the changes brought about by the pandemic.

Recent studies conducted by the Heldrich Center in the *Suddenly Virtual* and *Strategically Virtual* series acknowledge that many states, as well as local workforce areas, struggled with the sudden transition to operating in a virtual environment brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. In April 2020, the brief, *Suddenly Virtual: Delivering Workforce Services in the COVID-19 Environment* (Martin & Volpe, 2020a) collected feedback from 160 workforce staff, representing seven

states – Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Virginia – and documented the challenges and immediate changes implemented by multiple states' public workforce delivery systems as they adapted to working in virtual teams and providing virtual services. A follow-up brief, *Suddenly Virtual: Eight Weeks Later* (Martin & Volpe, 2020b), released in June 2020, further documented how the state and local workforce areas were then moving from crisis to a state of "new normals." The Heldrich Center research team then followed up on this research in October 2021 with *Suddenly Virtual: Voices from the Field, Workforce Responses to COVID-19* (Volpe & Barnett, 2021), which collected nearly 150 survey responses from workforce development professionals representing seven states – Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Washington – to ascertain the breadth and depth of the changes, challenges, and lessons learned for frontline service delivery workers as they continued to provide workforce



services to job seekers. Overall, these two publication series highlighted a heavily place-based system facing unprecedented challenges and local workforce professionals doing their best to navigate operations in new virtual environment. These two series will be referenced later in this report in greater detail to speak to the tools that were employed by New Jersey and other states during PY20 to transition to operating in a virtual environment.

Given the broader national landscape at the time, this study was designed with an understanding that NJDOL, and New Jersey’s 17 local workforce development areas, were forced to adapt their service delivery system amidst a broader national crisis in the public workforce development system in which all states were affected.

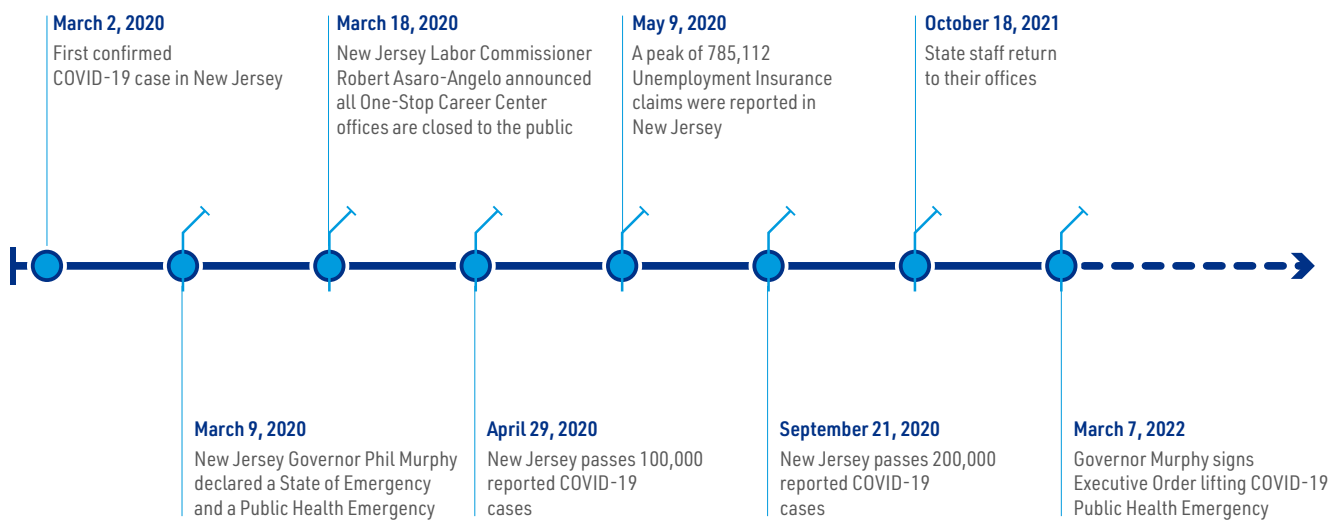
Additionally, the stress on the UI benefit system was immense, with massive numbers of people enrolling in UI as the pandemic closed workplaces and kept people at home (Mueller, 2021). While UI (delivered by state employees) and WIOA career and training services (delivered by county staff) are staffed separately, strain on the UI system had ripple effects throughout the public workforce system. *Suddenly Virtual* and *Strategically Virtual* documented the impact of long UI wait times and the resulting staff and customer frustration. Job seekers,

often frustrated with the inability to connect with UI staff, attempted to access UI information and services directly through their local One-Stop Career Center, with varying degrees of success. This put additional stress on WIOA staff, who often could not directly speak to UI issues.

WIOA services have traditionally been hands-on, in-person focused services. From intake to classroom-based training, the public workforce system operates in a direct, relational way with customers. As Figure 1 illustrates, for the period of March to May 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had direct and substantial effects on the ability of the public workforce system to implement WIOA. Offices closed, frontline staff transitioned to providing services from their homes, and stay-at-home orders were in place. This timeline is critical as it illustrates the sheer upheaval experienced by the public workforce system, in addition to the lasting disruptions and impacts on the provision of services to customers for an extended period of time.

The need to pivot from in-person services to virtual, remote, and hybrid services informed the research design of this study, is the backdrop to all the analyses, and must be considered in light of the findings and recommendations.

**Figure 1: Timeline of the COVID-19 Pandemic Onset and Impact for NJDOL**





# Methodology

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The Heldrich Center used a variety of quantitative and qualitative research methods to collect data and assess program information regarding WIOA Title I services as they were operated and delivered in PY20. The research team developed a set of data collection instruments to capture state-level workforce staff perspectives, local area One-Stop Career Center staff perspectives, and WIOA PY20 customer feedback on their experiences of interacting with WIOA Title I services in various capacities during PY20. The instruments included research protocols for conducting interviews and focus groups and for administering a web-based survey (see Appendices B-1 through B-5 for research protocols). With the assistance of the NJDOL Office of Research and Information (ORI), WIOA Title I program data were also obtained and analyzed by the Heldrich Center research team. A set of nine research questions guided all research activities throughout the study.

## Research Questions

1. Who accessed WIOA Title I (adult, dislocated worker, and youth) services (career and training) in PY20?
2. How did local area One-Stops in New Jersey adapt to providing WIOA Title I services to adult, dislocated worker, and youth customers during the July 2020 to June 2021 period when it was no longer possible to implement a fully in-person mode of service delivery?
3. When reflecting on the adaptations in service delivery in PY20 for WIOA Title I services, what do local area One-Stop personnel believe were the most successful and least successful service transitions to a remote/virtual mode of delivery?
4. If virtual and/or hybrid service delivery continues, what recommendations do local area One-Stop personnel have about what such a hybrid mode and mix of services should ideally look like? What investments could be made to support virtual and/or hybrid service delivery?
5. What changes to processes and/or to data systems, if any, should be made to ensure that service delivery is adequately documented in a hybrid or virtual mode of service delivery?
6. What do local area One-Stop personnel need to be able to adapt more quickly to a public emergency in the future? How could the state support local area personnel during a future public emergency?
7. What was the WIOA Title I customer experience like in PY20? How do customers that received WIOA Title I services feel about their experience interacting with the public workforce system?
8. How can the state and local public workforce system be prepared for future disruptions and/or disaster recovery?
9. Where should future investments in WIOA Title I service delivery be made?

These research questions were designed to be addressed via multiple data collection methods and with input from multiple stakeholder groups. Researchers designed the process evaluation to capture a holistic perspective on what occurred during PY20 to inform improved implementation of WIOA services overall, particularly in situations where virtual modes of delivery may be appropriate. See Appendix C for the WIOA PY20 process study plan. The multiple methods of data collection are outlined below.

## Customer Demographic Analysis

Using WIPS data,<sup>2</sup> researchers explored the demographic characteristics of the PY20 population and their identified barriers to employment. For general comparison, researchers examined how this population was similar to and/or varied demographically from the customer population that accessed WIOA Title I services in PY18, spanning July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019, and PY19, spanning July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020. PY18 provides comparison to a full pre-COVID-19 pandemic year. PY19

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<sup>2</sup> In regard to the WIPS data, it is important to note that those reported as outcomes in PY20 were potentially served in PY19. Similarly, those that were served in PY20 would possibly be captured and reported in PY21 outcomes. Researchers acknowledge that this is the context of the data that were used in this study.

provides comparison to a partial COVID-19 pandemic year. This fundamental analysis helped researchers establish a clear understanding of who was served in PY20 under WIOA Title I services and gave context to subsequent data collection efforts during the course of the process study (see Appendix D for interim deliverable #1). In addition to the deliverable, the Heldrich Center research team also used Tableau software to create a WIPS customer demographic analysis data story for internal use by ORI to conduct a customer group comparison analysis.

### **Statewide WIOA Title I Services Survey**

To understand the full scope of how local One-Stop Career Centers adapted service provision in PY20, the Heldrich Center research team administered one bifurcated statewide survey to local workforce area staff in New Jersey (see Appendix E for the survey instrument). This survey encompassed all three WIOA Title I main populations' (adult, dislocated worker, and youth) service provision. The survey was conducted via Qualtrics online software. One section of the survey was geared toward documentation of WIOA Title I adult and dislocated worker services and service adaptations. The second section of the survey was geared toward documentation of WIOA Title I youth services and service adaptations. The survey was addressed to the local workforce area staff most knowledgeable about WIOA Title I service provision in PY20. There was no limit on the number of staff that could respond on behalf of the same One-Stop Career Center in New Jersey. Researchers' goal was to garner as much One-Stop Career Center representation as possible with the survey. The survey was fielded from June 15 to July 28, 2022 and garnered 34 total responses split between adult and dislocated worker service provision and youth service provision (see Appendices F-1 and F-2 for the survey topline and Appendix G for interim deliverable #2 with more information).

### **NJDOL Workforce Staff Interviews**

Heldrich Center researchers interviewed four state-level staff, including three at NJDOL and one at SETC, deemed most knowledgeable about and responsible for the administration of WIOA Title I. The purpose was

to gain an understanding of program administration and adaptations at the state level in PY20. Researchers performed initial outreach to interviewees in mid-June 2022. Interviews were conducted in late June and July 2022 (see Appendix B-1 for the interview protocol).

### **Local One-Stop Career Center Staff In-depth Interviews**

Researchers identified a cross section of local area One-Stop Career Centers in New Jersey to conduct more in-depth interviews with WIOA Title I administrators. Researchers selected six One-Stop Career Center locations in New Jersey for in-depth interviews. The site selection criteria were based on several key factors (see Appendices G-1 and G-2 for more detail on the site selection and examination process). First, researchers balanced the selection of One-Stop Career Centers geographically based on WBD region of the state by selecting two from each region: north, central, and south. Next, WDBs were selected by the total number of Title I adult, dislocated worker, and youth customers served during PY20, as identified by the WIPS PY20 data provided by ORI. From each region, the WDB with the highest number of total WIOA Title I customers and the site with the lowest number of WIOA Title I customers were selected. For WDBs with only one One-Stop Career Center, that site was selected. For WDBs with more than one One-Stop Career Center, a random number generator was used to randomly select a One-Stop Career Center as a site for interview data collection. Structured interviews were conducted with both adult and dislocated worker staff and youth staff at each selected site (see Appendices B-2 and B-3 for the interview protocols). Interviews were conducted via Zoom during September and October 2022 (see Appendices I-1 through I-3 for the interview recruitment and consent forms).

### **WIOA Title I Service Customer Focus Groups**

In coordination with assistance from ORI, the Heldrich Center research team was provided a list of individuals who received WIOA Title I services in PY20 and had not yet exited the system (as of October 2022). This list contained 268 names with associated contact information. Researchers began outreach in October

2022 via email and followed up with a series of phone calls. To maximize outreach to as many focus group customers as possible, the Heldrich Center research team conducted two focus groups geared toward adult and dislocated worker customers and two additional focus groups geared toward youth customers.<sup>3</sup> These focus groups were offered during the daytime and early evening to ensure that each population had multiple opportunities to participate. Researchers also conducted one-on-one interviews with customers who expressed

interest but did not have availability for either scheduled focus group (see Appendices B-4 and B-5 for the protocols). These focus groups and individual follow-up interviews with WIOA Title I customers took place in October and November 2022 (see Appendices J-1 through J-4 for the focus group recruitment and consent forms).

Appendix A provides a more detailed overview of the report methodology.

## Research Findings and Recommendations

This section aims to answer the research questions that guided the overall study and present findings that are supported by evidence across all data sources: a review of WIPS data from PY18, PY19, and PY20; a statewide survey of WIOA Title I staff; in-depth interviews with state NJDOL staff and six local One-Stop Career Center staff; and WIOA Title I customer focus groups. Based on the analysis of data from these multiple data sources, the findings provide a thorough understanding about the WIOA service delivery priorities and operations as they existed during PY20, the challenges state and local areas faced in providing services, and considerations for New Jersey's public workforce development system as the COVID-19 pandemic crisis winds down and the system resumes services in a more stable posture.

Additionally, based on the findings from the WIOA PY20 process study, researchers put forth the following recommendations to help New Jersey provide better, more customer-centered services and invest in service delivery mechanisms perceived to have worked well by local One-Stop Career Center staff. These recommendations come from direct observations in this study but are also informed by previous research, specifically the Heldrich Center's *Suddenly Virtual* and *Strategically Virtual* series; other WIOA-specific program evaluations conducted by the Heldrich Center; and Heldrich Center expertise on successful public workforce development strategies used across the nation. In providing these recommendations, researchers note

that NJDOL is positioned to take a leadership role in advancing the collaborative effort across organizational groups, such as SETC and GSETA, for jointly working

### Key Takeaways

#### Findings

- ▶ Expansion of services: Local areas felt they could reach more people with the ability to offer services via a range of service delivery models: in-person, hybrid, virtual, and remote.
- ▶ Lesson learned on service delivery: Areas that are perceived to better/more impactful with in-person services are intake and orientation.

#### Recommendations

- ▶ Investment in technological tool consistency across local areas should be the next frontier of investment for NJDOL.
- ▶ NJDOL could test and invest in modernization, technology tools, and ideas for innovation using small grants/pilots to continue to strengthen virtual service delivery infrastructure.
- ▶ NJDOL could invest in technology solutions to standardize the virtual "front door" for customers across all local areas, in collaboration with the New Jersey Office of Innovation.

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this study, youth customers were defined as individuals who accessed youth services, but were over the age of 18. No individuals under the age of 18 were contacted as part of the WIOA PY20 process study.

toward implementing the recommended actions. To that end, each recommendation should be considered with a collaborative approach for implementation in mind.

### Descriptive Analysis of WIOA Title I Participants

The findings and recommendations in this section address the research question about who accessed WIOA Title I services in PY20.

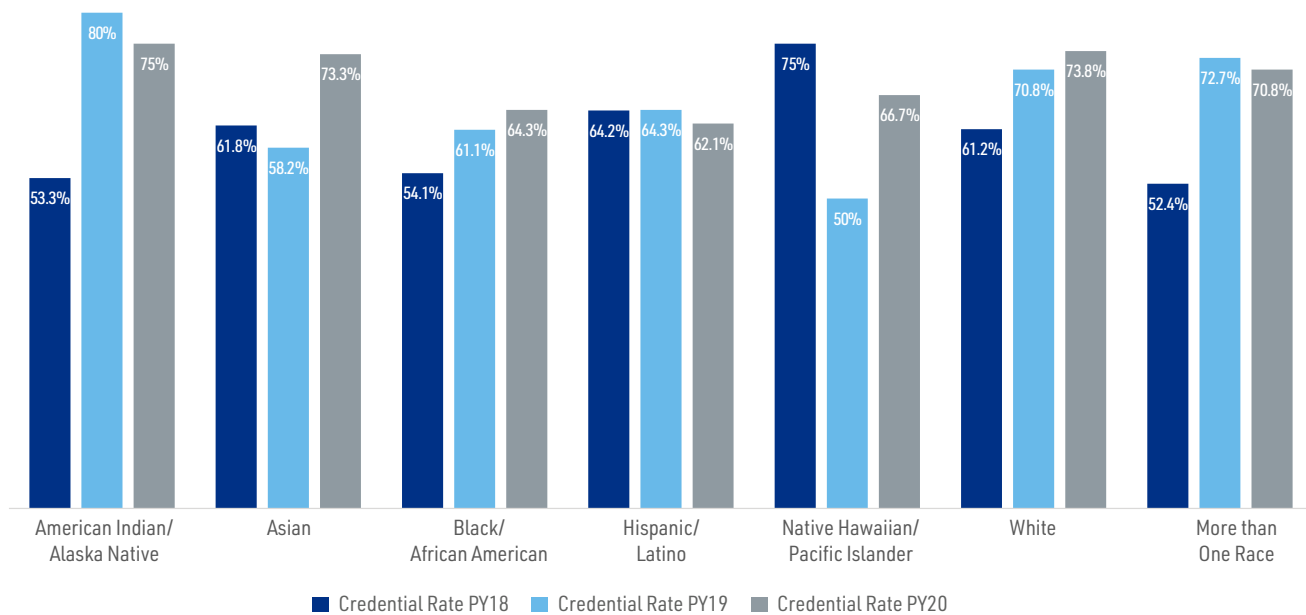
**Finding #1: The WIOA Title I population served in PY20 across all three WIOA Title I main populations – adult, dislocated worker, and youth – did not significantly differ from the population that received services in PY18 (a full non-pandemic year) and PY19 (a partial pandemic year).**

The WIPS data analysis of the WIOA Title I customer population for PY18, PY19, and PY20 revealed slight variations in the reported barriers and outcome measures across customers. However, no significant differences in the population were observed in the WIPS data across the program years examined. Overall, fewer WIOA Title I customers were served in PY20. This is understood given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its reverberations in the labor market and nearly

every facet of everyday life. Moreover, those who did receive services in PY20 appeared to have engaged with services that had significant impacts on certain outcome measures, such as credential rate and measurable skill gain.

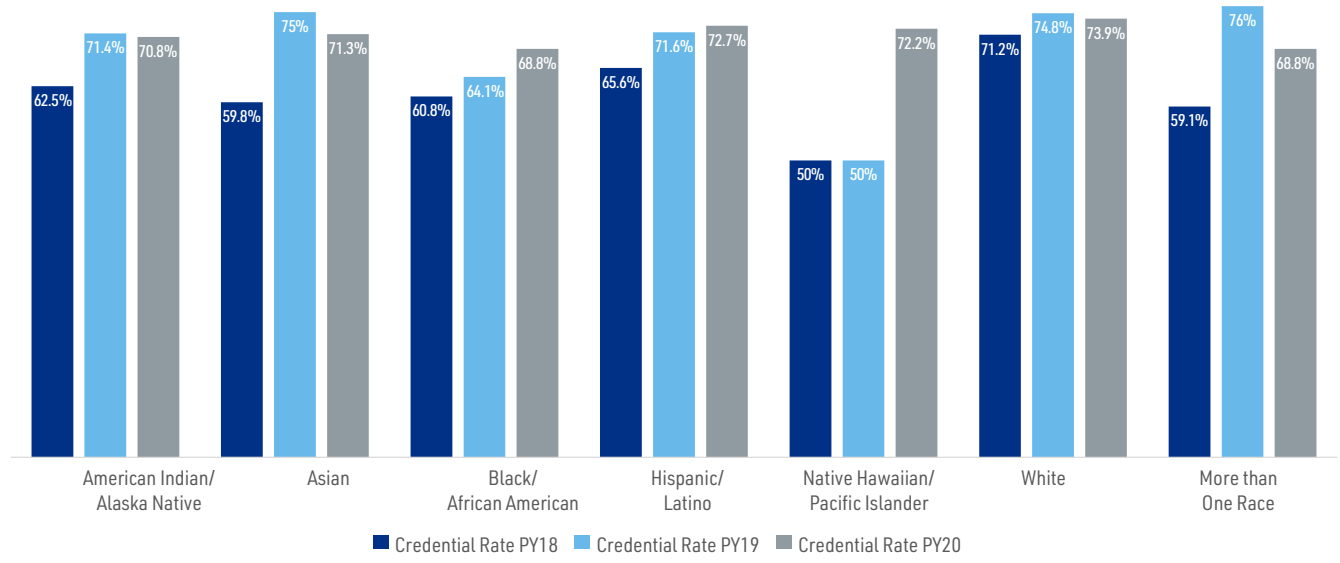
For the adult and dislocated worker population, the analysis of the WIPS PY20 data found that more customers participated in career services than training services. In terms of basic demographics, most customers who received WIOA Title I adult and dislocated worker services in PY20 were Black/African American or white, female, and/or between the ages of 22 and 44. The most common barriers among customers were English language learners, low levels of literacy, or cultural barriers;<sup>4</sup> low-income individuals; and single parents. Notably, employment rates decreased across demographics with few exceptions when looking at the PY20 data in comparison to previous program years. Dislocated worker customers increased substantially in PY20. (See Figures 2 to 5.) (These measures document the percentage of customers who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential or diploma, and the percentage of customers who are making documented progress toward such a credential, diploma, or employment, respectively.)

**Figure 2: Credential Rate for Title I Adult Customers in PY20**

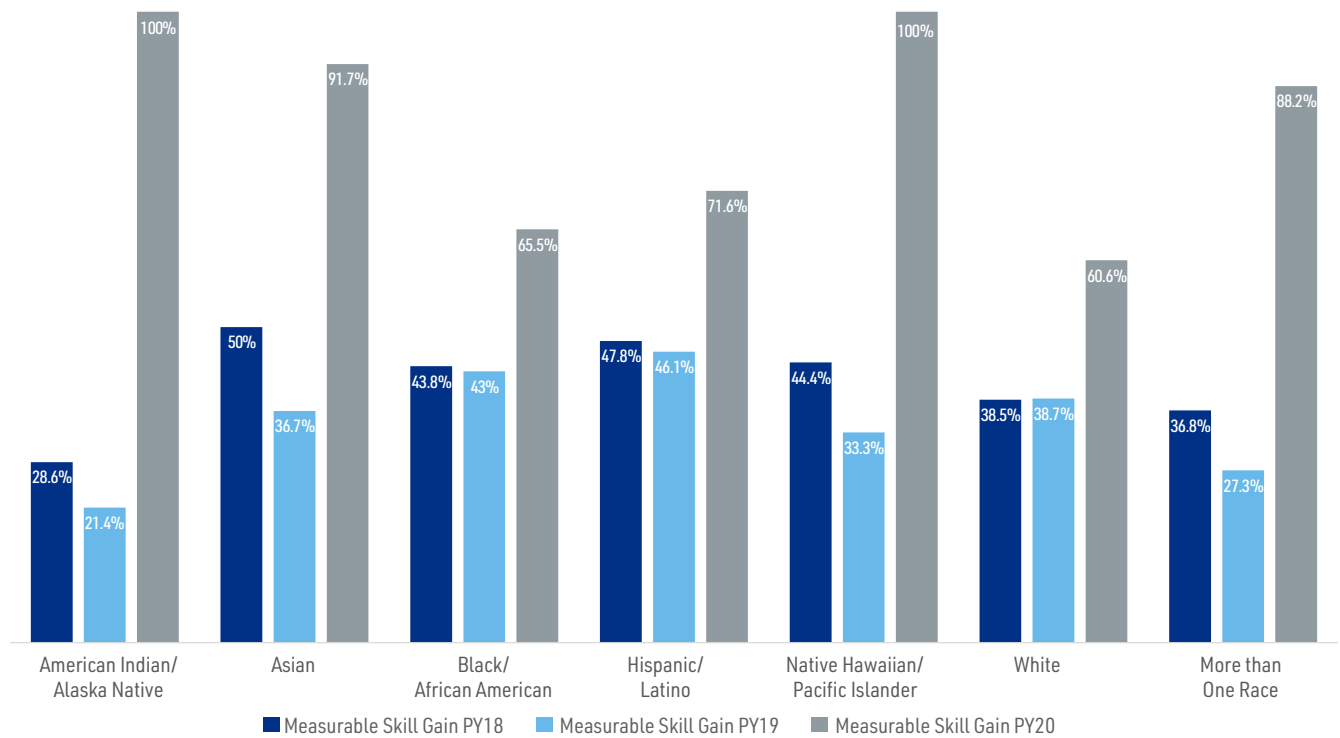


<sup>4</sup> Please note that “English language learners, low levels of literacy, or cultural barriers” constitutes one WIOA-recognized barrier to employment. See WIOA (2014).

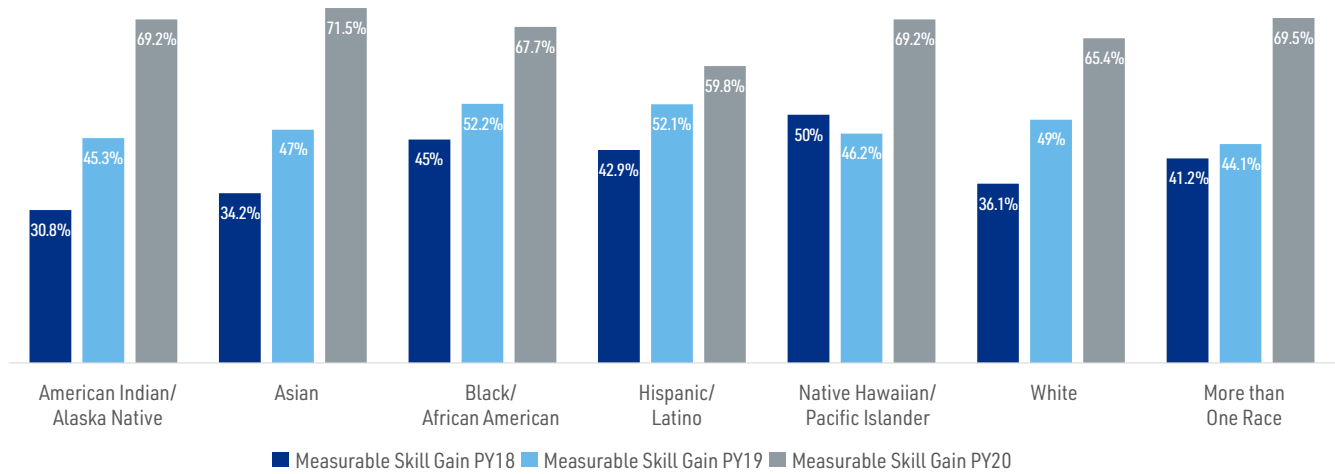
**Figure 3: Credential Rate for Title I Dislocated Worker Customers in PY20**



**Figure 4: Measurable Skill Gain for Title I Adult Customers in PY20**



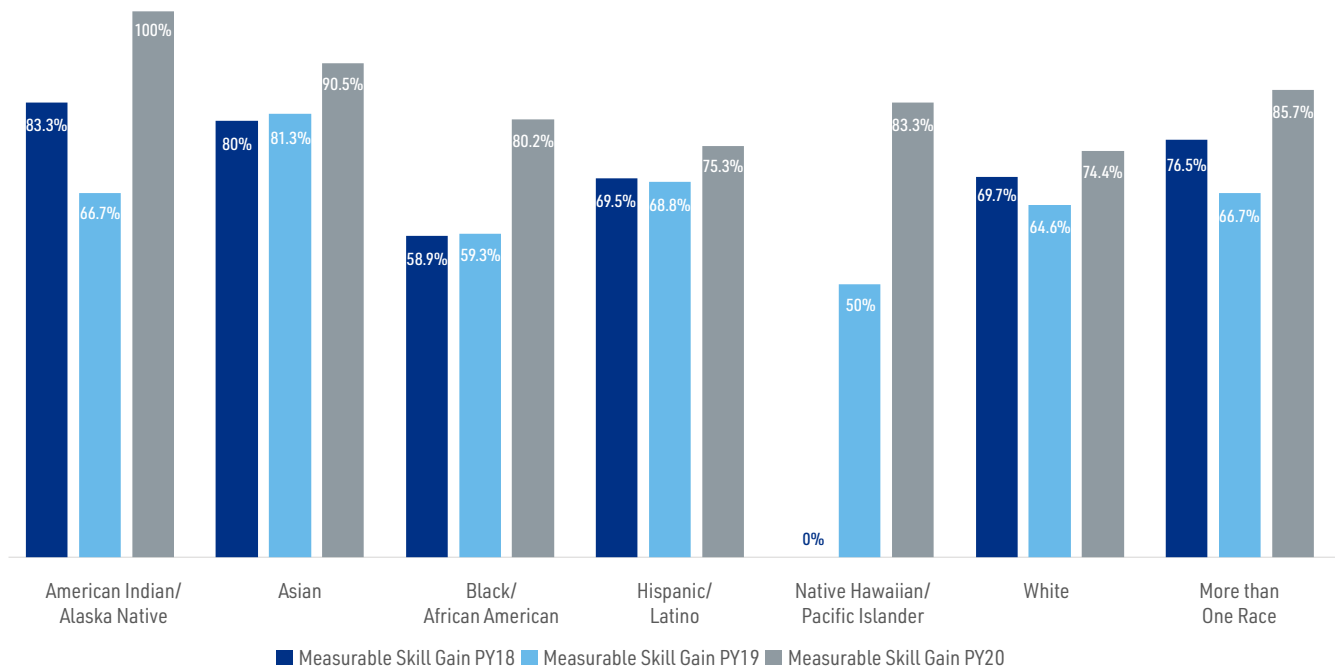
**Figure 5: Measurable Skill Gain for Title I Dislocated Worker Customers in PY20**



Demographically, customers who received WIOA Title I youth services were mostly Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, or white and between the ages of 16 and 18. Most youth customers received career services, as there were more than twice as many youth customers in career services (800) compared to training services (372) in PY20. The most common barriers among youth were English Language Learners, low levels of literacy, or cultural barriers and low-income individuals. Employment rates remained relatively consistent or slightly declined for many youth customers across race

and barrier. Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and white youth earned far less than Asian and Native American/Alaska Native youth. The average credential rate for youth customers statewide was approximately 54% in PY20. Measurable skill gain increased for many youth customers across demographics (see Figure 6). Most notably, all racial groups increased their measurable skill gain in PY20. Black/African-American youth, for example, increased their measurable skill gain on average from 58.9% in PY18 to 80.2% in PY20.

**Figure 6: Measurable Skill Gain for Title I Youth Customers in PY20**



For additional year-over-year (PY18 through PY20) credential rate and measurable skill gain comparisons for WIOA Title I customers, please see the Heldrich Center's WIPS data story.<sup>5</sup>

Interviews with local One-Stop Career Center staff also confirmed the trends observed in the WIPS data analysis with a majority of interviewees saying that the customer population in PY20 was largely the same as previous program years. Two local areas noted that the customer population in PY20 needed "more hand holding" to which one local One-Stop Career Center staff member stated:

***"These individuals are people who the staff worked with closely, mostly to help with the panic of trying to get through the system."***

Speaking of the WIOA PY20 customer population, another local One-Stop staff member shared:

***"The people who got engaged were in either two conditions: one was eager to get employed again (and did not want to be on Unemployment Insurance) and the other was folks who were comfortable with collecting unemployment and wanted to participate in training over time."***

While the majority of those interviewed viewed PY20 customers as largely the same as previous program years with no real differences, two local workforce areas had a different perspective worth noting. Based on their experiences, they stated that the population they served in PY20 was "the hardest-to-serve" population with a multitude of reasons why there may have been difficulty in finding gainful employment. A local One-Stop Career Center staff member shared:

***"When we do our assessment, what we saw was individuals that were probably the hardest to serve. We look at the different barriers and reasons for that, and we knew there was a reason why they were not employed – looking at their employment history and through the assessment process."***

Another One-Stop staff member added:

***"We saw an influx of people who were chronically unemployed."***

The qualitative data collected for this study illustrates the on-the-ground experiences and realities of the local workforce staff that engaged directly with job seekers daily during PY20. These understandings, along with the quantitative analysis of the WIPS data, should be taken together to form a comprehensive understanding of who accessed the WIOA system in New Jersey during PY20. Researchers have included this anecdotal evidence to illustrate the varied experiences of local workforce staff in PY20. While these quotes diverge from what the quantitative data profile suggests, it is important to include for illustrative purposes that the experience working with customers in PY20 may have been perceived by local area staff in a manner that is different from the story that examination of the data only portrays. While WIPS data indicate that the customer base for PY20 was similar to previous program years, it is important to consider the qualitative information provided by One-Stop Career Center staff for a more comprehensive understanding of service provision during this time. This additional context can be helpful for NJDOL to look ahead to any possible future periods of service disruptions and to better plan for customer needs.

**Short-term Recommendation #1: NJDOL should collect service-level data and combine them with existing data to gain a better understanding of how service delivery affects participant outcomes.**

The availability of service-level data would expand the data analysis and increase researchers' ability to pinpoint which services and/or modes of service delivery resulted in better participant outcomes. Researchers recommend that NJDOL invest in collecting and combining these service-level data with currently available outcomes data to provide a more robust picture as to which services and/or modes of service delivery affected specific participant outcomes such as employment, earnings, credential rate, and measurable skill gain. This would allow deeper analysis that could shed more light on **why** certain groups have disparate credential rates and measurable skill gains, for example. These data should be reported and presented at the individual level to provide a more granular analysis, which would facilitate

<sup>5</sup> The Heldrich Center research team created the WIOA Title I customers data story for NJDOL for internal review purposes only.



more learning and feedback opportunities. More specifically, this analysis would reveal who was served in PY20 and other program years, and how they were served, in order to inform future NJDOL investments.

**Long-term Recommendation #1: NJDOL should invest in a customer journey map<sup>6</sup> to gain a deeper understanding of how customers come to find and engage with One-Stop Career Center services.**

While the WIPS data showed that the customer population who engaged in services in PY20 did not significantly differ from the two previous program years, interviews with local One-Stop Career Center staff provided additional context and identified challenges to engaging with the customer population in PY20. Some identified challenges (that will be explored in depth in the findings in this report) included but were not limited to marketing and customer recruitment. For this reason, NJDOL should consider investing resources into understanding customer flows to a greater extent.

Customer journey maps, pipelines, and service flows have changed since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the move to virtual service provision in PY20. Interviewees noted that overall, they saw fewer customers in PY20, due to a variety of reasons, such as the provision of extended UI benefits, the lack of job opportunities, and the changes in individuals' priorities with eldercare and childcare concerns. To proactively address this in PY20, local One-Stop Career Centers highlighted that they tried to tap into more diverse sources of customer recruitment, at times engaging with social media platforms like Facebook, as well as contacting community- and faith-based institutions in order to bring people in for services. A One-Stop Career Center also noted how customers for dislocated worker services have faded since PY20 and others local workforce areas cited that the flow of customers from employment services has changed as well. For these reasons, a customer pipeline analysis/journey mapping<sup>7</sup> should be conducted in order to inform future investments, proactively recruit, and diversify recruitment sources.

An example of a customer journey map can be seen in Massachusetts' endeavor (Bagarella, 2019) to understand the user journey for its job seekers and career services user population. In a collaborative effort, the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development worked with Massachusetts Digital Service, as well as the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance and MassHire Department of Career Services, to improve customer interactions with the commonwealth's public workforce system when an individual needed to engage with UI and career services. To read more about the Massachusetts journey map project, see this [Medium blog post](#).

**Local Area Adaptations to WIOA Title I Service Delivery**

The findings and recommendations in this section answer the research question about how local area One-Stop Career Centers adapted to providing WIOA Title I services during the period when in-person services were not permitted.

**Finding #2: Most WIOA Title I services for adult, dislocated worker, and youth populations were successfully transitioned to a virtual environment, with a vast majority of services reported as being delivered in a hybrid – or a mix of in-person, remote, and/or virtual services – mode in PY20.**

From the statewide survey of WIOA Title I staff, a majority of the One-Stop Career Centers indicated that they provided a range of services that spanned the full spectrum of WIOA program offerings. Overall, 71% of the One-Stop Career Centers in New Jersey responded to the survey for each of the two WIOA Title I program areas. Seventeen (17) responses were recorded for WIOA Title I adult and dislocated worker services and 17 responses were recorded for WIOA Title I youth services.

For WIOA Title I adult and dislocated worker services, all survey respondents (17 of 17) reported offering preparation supports (training or individualized career services) and supportive services in PY20. A majority of respondents (14 of 17) reported offering work-based

<sup>6</sup> For more information on customer journey maps, see Addis (2020).

<sup>7</sup> Journey maps are defined as "a visual depiction of the sequence of events through which customers may interact with a service organization during an entire purchase process" (Rosenbaum, Losada Otalora, & Contreras Ramirez, 2017). While this article describes the process of creating a journey map for a shopping mall, the same processes can be used to investigate the ways in which people encounter the public workforce system.

training (training services) and classroom-based training (training services) (15 of 17) during PY20. Some, however, reported that they did not offer work experiences (5 of 17) and/or work-based training (3 of 17). As shown in Table 1, hybrid mode was the most

prevalent delivery modality for the One-Stop Career Centers that offered services to customers across the five WIOA Title I service categories for adult and dislocated worker services. (See Appendix E for the full WIOA PY20 survey and the service delivery mode definitions.)

**Table 1: Most Common Mode for Service Offerings by One-Stop Career Centers for WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker Services**

WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker Service Categories <sup>8</sup>	Mode of Service Delivery				
	Hybrid	In Person <sup>9</sup>	Virtual	Remote	Not Offered
Service engagement - Preparation supports (training or individualized career services)	14	0	3	0	0
Service engagement - Work experiences (individualized career services)	8	2	1	1	5
Service engagement - Classroom-based training (training services)	15	0	0	0	2
Service engagement - Work-based training (training services)	10	1	3	0	3
Supportive services (individualized career services)	15	0	2	0	0

N=17

Again, contextual factors explain the observed gaps in service provision. Due to the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic at the time, work experiences may have been hard to set up for customers as employers faced challenges in navigating safety protocols and procedures at the time and One-Stop Career Center customers may have felt uncomfortable in the work environment. Yet survey data also revealed how some sites “increased community outreach to nonprofit and faith-based organizations to ensure the public was aware that One-Stop Career Center services were available” and “engaged community organizations to braid services during the pandemic.” While nearly all WIOA Title I services for the adult and dislocated worker populations were offered and local One-Stop Career Centers made many attempts to increase this awareness in their respective communities, difficulties in participant uptake persisted.

Survey results for WIOA Title I youth services similarly point to hybrid mode as the most prevalent for service provision to customers, as shown in Table 2. Moreover, the vast majority of One-Stop Career Centers made

available the full range of WIOA Title I youth services in some format to meet customer needs. All respondents (17 of 17) reported offering tutoring, study skills, and dropout prevention services; occupational skills training; follow-up services; and services that provide labor market information. While numerous youth services were offered, engagement was a challenge.<sup>10</sup>

Certain youth services were more challenging to provide during the pandemic. For instance, 3 of 17 responding One-Stop Career Centers indicated that they did not offer the youth services of adult mentoring and paid/unpaid work experiences during PY20. A contributing factor, according to a survey respondent, was that work sites were “extremely limited and no one wanted to open the doors for youth to work due to uncertainty.” Other individuals interviewed for this study also expressed how a pervasive sense of uncertainty due to highly changeable public health conditions adversely affected the capacity to implement services that more typically occur in face-to-face settings. That context of operating

<sup>8</sup> Service categories from NJDOL (2021).

<sup>9</sup> Please note that while state offices may have been closed at the time, many local areas reported operating according to local/county guidance and began providing in-person services on a county schedule.

<sup>10</sup> Service categories from NJDOL (2021).

during PY20 cannot be understated when examining how service provision did or did not translate to a virtual environment.

While hybrid mode was reported as the most commonly used modality to provide services to the youth population, survey respondents indicated that virtual mode was used frequently for services such as financial literacy education, entrepreneurial skills training, and an education offered concurrently with workforce preparation. In addition, a respondent from a One-Stop Career Center indicated that an outside vendor was

used for provision of three of its education-focused services, which is captured in the column labeled “other” in Table 2. There were also a few instances in which the respondent selected “other” as the most common mode for delivering a specific service category but did not offer further explanation. Overall, the observed variation in the most common mode of delivery for WIOA Title I youth services reflects the efforts of the local One-Stop Career Center staff to have a variety of options for accommodating the individual situations of the customers they served.

**Table 2: Most Common Mode for Service Offerings by One-Stop Career Centers for WIOA Title I Youth Services**

WIOA Title I Youth Service Categories <sup>11</sup>	Mode of Service Delivery					
	Hybrid	In Person	Virtual	Remote	Not Offered	Other <sup>12</sup>
Tutoring, study skills, and dropout prevention	14	0	3	0	0	0
Alternative secondary school services or dropout recovery services	14	0	2	0	1	0
Paid and unpaid work experience	7	4	2	0	3	1
Occupational skills training	12	0	4	0	0	1
Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training	10	0	4	0	1	1
Leadership development	11	0	3	0	2	0
Supportive services	12	0	2	1	1	0
Adult mentoring	12	0	2	0	3	0
Follow-up services	14	0	1	2	0	0
Comprehensive guidance and counseling	13	0	2	0	1	1
Financial literacy education	8	0	5	1	2	1
Entrepreneurial skills training	9	0	5	0	2	1
Services that provide labor market information	14	0	3	0	0	0
Postsecondary preparation and transition activities	14	0	2	0	1	0

N=17

In terms of modifications made to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic conditions in PY20, many One-Stop Career Centers had to make service modifications such as revising materials and/or purchasing new technology to be able to deliver services in a virtual environment. Nearly all respondents (16 of 17) reported that they

both **revised existing materials** to be more suitable to a virtual environment and **created new materials** that are more suitable to a virtual environment. Over three-quarters of respondents (14 of 17) reported that they purchased new technology that altered pre-pandemic service delivery (i.e., software license or subscription to

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> In a few instances, survey respondents indicated that a specific service was offered in “other” modality; thus, the values across some rows in Table 2 do not sum to 17. The respondent for one location indicated that three of its youth services (alternative secondary school services or dropout recovery services, education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training, and entrepreneurial skills training) were offered by a third-party vendor. A respondent from another location indicated “other” as the modality for paid and unpaid work experience, and a respondent from a third location indicated “other” as the modality for occupational skills training and comprehensive guidance and counseling. However, these respondents provided no further information and perhaps were unsure.

a platform). Nine survey respondents indicated that they made modifications to how information was collected by switching to the use of digital forms, digitally obtaining customers' documentation for eligibility to receive services, and/or use of DocuSign to obtain signatures. Six respondents specified that they developed new, virtual (i.e., computer-based) services that included virtual orientation services, virtual workshops for job readiness activities, and webinars for virtual learning opportunities. Five respondents specified that they made modifications to enable remote (i.e., phone based) services for interviewing, outreach, obtaining verbal consent, and "having added ways to work with clients remotely." These adaptations indicate that a majority of the local workforce areas represented in this survey have made great strides in being able to deliver their services in a remote or virtual fashion throughout the course of PY20.

In terms of specific service modifications, a majority of the One-Stop Career Centers included in this survey revised their previously in-person materials, which included, but were not limited to, modifications such as "moved in-person workshops to webinars," "created new webinar topics," "conducted online orientation," "employed digital forms and digital signature platform," "added the SkillUp service," and "streamlined transferring of files from one organization to the other." These adaptations were specifically mentioned in the open-ended survey responses, but researchers acknowledge that these modifications do not capture the breadth and depth of the modifications local One-Stop Career Centers had to work through during PY20.

Finally, while in-person services were least likely in PY20, survey respondents noted that in-person service delivery was employed when it was the only means available to serve customers. As two local One-Stop Career Center staff members shared:

***"Allowed youth with limited access to technology to conduct activities in person, when necessary, under strict masking/social distancing and other COVID safety protocols."***

***"(We) quarantined documents that needed to be dropped off due to lack of access to technology."***

Overall, based on One-Stop Career Center staff survey responses, service provision was found to be most commonly hybrid, with staff utilizing a mixture of remote and virtual technologies to connect with customers during PY20.

**Short-term Recommendation #2: SETC should convene a subcommittee on innovative service delivery practices and to discuss service delivery modality preferences in depth.**

SETC is charged with creating and executing the vision for WIOA services within the state. Given this unique role, SETC is well situated to lead in this area and provide a vision for delivering WIOA services in a COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 world. This can be accomplished through a subcommittee structure, with dedicated SETC members exploring the issue of modality of services and working with local WDBs and/or peer state WDBs to identify promising practices. SETC can share information with NJDOL and/or local WDBs to inform service delivery throughout the state.

**Long-term Recommendation #2: NJDOL should conduct additional research to identify specific service delivery modality preferences for common One-Stop Career Center services.**

This exploratory research identified that many One-Stop Career Center services were delivered via a hybrid modality during PY20; however, upon examination, the modality of services used by One-Stop Career Centers was more ambiguous than expected, which was confirmed by the analysis of the survey findings and further validated by interviews. Researchers discovered a flexible public workforce system willing to provide services in the ways most appropriate to the customer and responsive to the needs of fluctuating COVID-19 lockdowns. Because hybrid service delivery persists, it would be useful for NJDOL to investigate what the current state of service delivery modality is, and what (if any) preferences exist at the local, service provider level for modality of individual services. This could be accomplished through a comprehensive study of all 25 One-Stop Career Centers in New Jersey, including a targeted data collection instrument (survey), interviews, focus groups, and/or site visits. This more

comprehensive approach could follow upon the above work of SETC and dig more deeply into specific One-Stop activities across the state.

### **Transitions to Remote and Virtual Services in PY20**

The findings and recommendations in this section answer the research question on how One-Stop personnel regard the success of the transitions to remote and virtual services during PY20.

**Finding #3: In PY20, after an initial period of adapting to operating in a virtual environment, local One-Stop Career Center staff felt that they could fully serve customers in a remote and/or virtual setting. Local area staff were confident and felt successful in their ability to transition most, if not all, of their services to be delivered virtually in PY20.**

Local area staff felt strongly that they were able to transition all of their customer-facing services to exist in a virtual environment, with each service being able to be delivered in a remote or virtual mode of service delivery. This was consistently reported as a success for One-Stop Career Center staff, specifically their ability to adapt their services and be operational for customers early in PY20.

The survey of all One-Stop Career Centers in New Jersey reveals that a majority of services were transitioned to operate in a hybrid, virtual, or remote environment in PY20. While there were a few exceptions where One-Stop Career Centers could not transition certain service categories, such as work experiences, classroom-based training, and work-based training for the adult and dislocated worker population, those challenges largely involved vendor and partner organizations working through their own transitions to virtual operations. The same observation can be made for the provision of youth services in PY20. In this way, a majority of One-Stop Career Centers reported that the transition of services within their control took shape more quickly and many local areas felt that they were able to offer their full range of services for PY20. As such, the least successful service transitions, specifically the services that were reported as not offered in PY20, were outside the purview of the One-Stop Career Centers' direct control.

Based on interview feedback, local One-Stop Career Centers largely embraced the mantra of "meeting customers where they are" and adopted flexibility when working with customers to ensure that the mode of service delivery used was most suitable for the customer and their specific needs. As local One-Stop Career Center staff members shared:

***"Anything can be adapted at this point. We are really driven by the customer and their preferences."***

***"We had to adapt and we are better off for it."***

The data collected in this study indicate that there is no clear distinguishment between specific services that work best in a virtual setting and those that work best in an in-person setting. When asked by Heldrich Center researchers, local One-Stop Career Center staff largely said that "it depends on the person" and "we can do it either way (in person or virtual)." As such, the emphasis is placed on what works best for a specific customer, with an eye toward building connection upfront. Interviews with NJDOL workforce staff suggested that there was an emphasis placed on New Jersey's public workforce system moving away from being a transactional system to a relational system in the way local One-Stop Career Center staff engage with WIOA Title I customers. This was a service priority, and reported as successful, in PY20 and remains a service priority in the current program year. For this reason, relationship building with customers was, and continues to be, a high priority in service provision. As an example, one local One-Stop Career Center staff member stated the high value placed on being reachable to customers in PY20, noting:

***"Just being available had an immense impact and gave people faith that there was someone there to help."***

Another local One-Stop staff member shared:

***"Staff was available during business hours virtually, over the phone, or in person if paperwork needed to be filled out or dropped off outside."***

Many One-Stop Career Center staff mentioned the technological limitations of virtual services with some customers not having the proper technology to

participate in a virtual environment. When probed about their least successful service transitions, many staff mentioned how virtual services are both a benefit and a hindrance, depending on who you are working with and what works best for that individual. More specifically, if customers lacked the technology to participate in a virtual environment, then the services that were transitioned to operate in a virtual environment were the least successful for that customer, based on their specific needs. As one local One-Stop Career Center staff member noted:

***“Some of the population we encounter do not have the ‘at home’ technology to participate in our services.”***

While these customer technology limitations are not under the purview of the One-Stop Career Centers, they were often cited as the primary challenge and/or hindrance of virtual services, rendering them unsuccessful in these customers’ interactions with the public workforce system.

Moreover, the majority of survey respondents across the WIOA Title I program areas used the survey’s open-ended responses to recommend retaining a hybrid model for service delivery, with several individuals explicitly stating “that customer preferences need to be considered on an individualized basis” because people differ in who has access to which tools/technology and transportation as their means of connecting to a One-Stop Career Center. One respondent for WIOA Title I youth services advocated for retaining options for service delivery modes by saying “it gives us the most flexibility to meet people where they are.” Another respondent recommended to “allow youth the opportunity to select whether services in person or virtual are best.” Similar sentiments were expressed by respondents who provide WIOA Title I adult/dislocated worker services, such as recommending to “continue to offer the option to participate in virtual services if that is easier for the career seeker. This was found to minimize the logistical challenges we had pre-pandemic.”

From the interviews with local One-Stop Career Center staff, the adoption of virtual services is viewed positively by staff, allowing them to use the mode of service

delivery most suitable for their customers and having expanded service delivery overall. Two local One-Stop staff members shared:

***“We now have the ability to see customers in any form or fashion that they are comfortable with.”***

***“We were able to provide services in a way that they never did before. We ripped the band aid off. We can put a variety of workshops online that people can access themselves. This is not something that we had before the pandemic. There is a lot of value here. We continue to do these things. It has expanded the way we deliver services.”***

In terms of identifying the most successful and least successful service transitions to virtual, multiple One-Stop Career Center staff reported that building connection with customers upfront was a critical factor in delivering successful services throughout the course of PY20. With few options available at the time, One-Stop Career Center staff indicated they were able to connect with their customers through remote and virtual means to establish rapport and connection, which ultimately had an impact on the service delivery that followed. In this way, local One-Stop Career Center staff seemingly prioritized offering high-touch services and establishing connection with customers, and used remote and virtual means to do so. To this end, two local One-Stop Career Center staff members noted:

***“You still need personal connection.”***

***“Having a basic connection to people was the number one challenge.”***



**Short-term Recommendation #3: A clearinghouse of best practice examples and guidance would be a valuable resource to local areas across New Jersey and the United States. State agencies, like NJDOL, would be ideal first stakeholders in curating the collection of local area ingenuity and entrepreneurship strategies that were employed to meet job seekers' virtual service needs. Similarly, USDOL and/or key stakeholder agencies, like NASWA, could also build on state efforts to curate and disseminate a national repository of states' efforts and best practices in delivering virtual WIOA services.**

USDOL and/or NASWA could lead a national effort to collect best practices for virtual service delivery to establish a single source of supportive materials and resources for states that continue with virtual and hybrid service provision for WIOA Title I services. In New Jersey, NJDOL should work to ensure that innovative practices can be replicated across the state. A good first step for New Jersey would be to create an online clearinghouse of useful materials, marketing collateral, written policies, and/or interviews, advice, or lessons learned from local leaders who implemented a promising or best practice. This kind of information can be kept on a publicly available website; however, if concerns exist about sensitive information being publicly available, there are a number of online services and/or community hubs that can host such information, including [Teams folders](#), [Box](#), [Moodle](#), and [Mighty Networks](#), to name a few. This documentation effort in New Jersey could serve as a model for other states to replicate as well as feed into the national collaborative effort spearheaded by USDOL or NASWA.

**Long-term Recommendation #3: NJDOL should institutionalize best practices by offering reliable technical assistance to local WDBs and/or One-Stop Career Center directors interested in replicating innovative practices.**

Once a clearinghouse of innovative practices exists, NJDOL should dedicate staff time to hold scheduled virtual "office hours" on a recurring basis as an easy entry point for local leaders interested in replicating best practices. Technical assistance offered by NJDOL can include but need not be limited to: facilitating connections and conversations between local policymakers and/or program implementation teams,

providing guidance about blending and braiding funding streams to support innovative practices, and providing and/or connecting local leaders with training and professional development to implement programs.

### **Recommendations for Current Service Delivery Mode: Lessons from PY20**

The findings and recommendations in this section answer the research question on recommendations local One-Stop Career Center personnel have about the ideal mix of services by mode of delivery and what investments could be made to support virtual and/or hybrid service delivery.

**Finding #4: One-Stop Career Center staff reported that the ideal service mix combines in-person and virtual services to maximize relationship building and ensure continued customer engagement. Investments in online learning tools, technology to allow for virtual handling of paperwork (such as DocuSign), and physical hardware (such as hotspot devices) were reported to all be beneficial to a quick and continuing transition to hybrid and virtual service delivery.**

When asked about the ideal service mix between in-person and virtual service delivery, a majority of One-Stop Career Center staff felt that they could fully operate in either modality and that the services they offered in each mode were of equally high quality. When asked more specifically about the challenges encountered with virtual service delivery in PY20, some preferences for service provision started to surface. Two local One-Stop Career Center staff members interviewed for this study commented:

***"Nothing that can't be one or the other at this point. Signing forms has been the biggest hang up. Things don't match up on different types of devices."***

***"It has expanded the way we deliver services."***

To this end, the intake process was noted as the service category that most benefited from in-person interaction with customers. While many local One-Stop Career Centers have made strides with the procurement of Personally Identifiable Information security platforms,



there still remains a lingering difficulty of processing that sensitive information with all customers. Another local One-Stop staff member shared:

***“Intake services are easier to do in person. It can still be difficult to gather signatures.”***

In addition to intake, another local One-Stop Career Center staff member described how the orientation process is often more impactful when done in person:

***“It is very easy for people to ignore videos and links in a virtual setting. Orientation in person increases engagement with customers. The education/skill upgrade programs and Metrix Learning are activities that can be virtual.”***

Thus, there is an observed preference made for the upfront services, such as an intake and orientation, to focus on ensuring customers feel comfortable, safe, and engaged when entering service provision. Then, once that relationship and comfort level is established, it is possible for education and skill upgrade programs to operate in a more virtual environment.

Additionally, one local area described résumé services as difficult to deliver virtually and best suited for an in-person environment. As a local One-Stop Career Center staff member noted:

***“It is difficult to revise résumés virtually.”***

Accountability stood out as an important consideration when One-Stop staff weighed the pros and cons of service modalities. For some, the idea of accountability on following through on service requirements and expectations based on service mode was impossible to generalize across customer groups and was a very person-centric situation. Others were clear minded about it and felt accountability was better among customers who receive services in person. As a One-Stop staff member explained:

***“Folks feel more accountable when people are in person.”***

One local One-Stop Career Center referenced the WIOA Title I youth program’s adaptability to service provision, noting a strong preference for completely virtual services for youth in their specific workforce area. A local One-Stop Career Center staff member commented:

***“Youth have high comfort level with virtual, so nothing is not suitable for a virtual environment.”***

Conversely, another local One-Stop Career Center staff member with expertise in youth services noted:

***“Youth were more engaged when we went back to in-person trainings and orientations.”***

Conflicting comments such as these were present throughout the survey feedback and One-Stop Career Center interviews. Speaking to what an ideal service delivery system would look like, a local One-Stop Career Center staffer noted:

***“All career and training services will continue to be provided through a hybrid model using a blend of virtual, remote, and in-person modalities.”***

Another local One-Stop staff member who responded to the survey added:

***“We would change the ratio of in-person to virtual remote services, but we would like to retain all options. We learned from this experience (COVID-19 pandemic) that the virtual option can be very effective and results in increased youth engagement and retention.”***

Overall, the data collected from survey respondents and through local One-Stop Career Center interviews paints a picture of an adaptable system; however, these data do not include a clearcut modality preference on a service-level basis. From the data collected, researchers offer the following list of potential modes of service delivery for each service specifically identified by respondents and interviewees within the One-Stop Career Center’s purview (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Potential Modes of Delivery, by Service**

Service*	Mode
Intake	In person/virtual
Assessment	In person
Orientation	In person
Job search support (résumé writing, cover letter assistance, interviewing, etc.)	In person
Testing	In person/virtual
Counseling	Virtual
Training	In person/virtual
Certification/Exam	In person/virtual
Follow-up	Virtual

\* The mode of service used for each service outlined above varies by local area and by individual customer. Table 3 represents the most commonly described mode by service type in interviews with six local One-Stop Career Centers.

From interviews with local area staff, many interviewees cited the tools that assisted them in their transition to virtual operations in PY20. The tools specifically cited by survey respondents and interviewees are presented in Table 4. It is important to note that the quality and satisfaction with these tools was outside of the scope of this evaluation but warrants additional research. Such research would allow NJDOL to endorse certain tools that local areas could adopt with confidence and allow for easier peer-to-peer best practices between local areas.

This report offers examples of tools that were identified through the Heldrich Center’s previous national scan of the public workforce development system’s transition to virtual services in 2020 and 2021. While the widespread adoption of each of these tools varied considerably in workplaces throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the totality of tools identified through that research is presented in Table 5.

Table 6 describes additional technological tools and software platforms that have been used by workforce development professionals in the field. Included are tools and software platforms that the Heldrich Center is aware of (through business operations and project work) that have been used **or** could be used to support workforce development services.

In addition to the tools mentioned above, other investments NJDOL and county governments might consider include, but are not limited to: the procurement of mobile telephones and laptops for local workforce staff, hotspot devices for customers to borrow, and Chrome tablets for customer use. Local area workforce staff need equipment to be able to interact with customers and deliver services from the office or when working remotely. During data collection, many local staff commented about reaching customers on the devices that they have, namely mobile telephones. Some staff specifically mentioned how texting with customers was the best means of communication throughout PY20. Giving staff mobile telephones and laptops, designated for work purposes only, will empower local One-Stop Career Centers to be fully prepared for virtual and/or hybrid service delivery to continue. Additionally, creating lending programs for devices such as hotspots and Chrome tablets will give customers the opportunity to connect with local workforce staff and the public workforce system’s services at large through virtual means. Lending programs as seen in the Burlington County Library System’s tablet lending program (TAP into Bordentown, 2021) or the Camden County Library’s hotspot lending program (Camden County, 2020) are a great way to invest in communities and ultimately build a stronger, more resilient workforce. The public workforce system can emulate this model of service that many New Jersey libraries have adopted.

**Table 4: Virtual Tools Used in New Jersey in PY20**

Tool Category	Tool	Link
Video Conferencing	Zoom	<a href="https://zoom.us/">https://zoom.us/</a>
Video Conferencing	Google Meet	<a href="https://meet.google.com/">https://meet.google.com/</a>
Online Learning Platform	Google Classroom	<a href="https://edu.google.com/workspace-for-education/classroom/">https://edu.google.com/workspace-for-education/classroom/</a>
Online Learning Platform	SkillUp NJ (Metrix Learning)	<a href="https://www.metrixlearning.com/">https://www.metrixlearning.com/</a>
Online Learning Platform	1Huddle	<a href="https://1huddle.co/">https://1huddle.co/</a>
Online Learning Platform	LinkedIn Learning	<a href="https://www.linkedin.com/learning/">https://www.linkedin.com/learning/</a>
Online Learning Platform	Workforce Learning Link	<a href="https://www.nj.gov/labor/career-services/education-training/workforce-learning/">https://www.nj.gov/labor/career-services/education-training/workforce-learning/</a>
Survey Tool	Survey Monkey	<a href="https://www.surveymonkey.com/">https://www.surveymonkey.com/</a>
Appointment Reminders	Telegov Appointment System	<a href="https://telegov.njportal.com/">https://telegov.njportal.com/</a>
Digital Calendar	Calendly	<a href="https://calendly.com/">https://calendly.com/</a>
Electronic Signature	DocuSign	<a href="https://www.docusign.com/">https://www.docusign.com/</a>
Electronic Signature and Fillable Forms	Adobe Acrobat/Adobe Acrobat Sign	<a href="https://acrobat.adobe.com/us/en/">https://acrobat.adobe.com/us/en/</a>
Data Analytics	FutureWork Systems	<a href="https://futureworksystems.com/">https://futureworksystems.com/</a>
Recruitment and Marketing	Facebook (Meta)	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/">https://www.facebook.com/</a>
Recruitment and Marketing	Twitter	<a href="https://twitter.com/">https://twitter.com/</a>
Recruitment and Marketing	LinkedIn	<a href="https://www.linkedin.com">https://www.linkedin.com</a>

In addition to the tools mentioned in Table 6, other investments NJDOL and county governments might consider include, but are not limited to: the procurement of mobile telephones and laptops for local workforce staff, hotspot devices for customers to borrow, and Chrome tablets for customer use. Local area workforce staff need equipment to be able to interact with customers and deliver services from the office or when working remotely. During data collection, many local staff commented about reaching customers on the devices that they have, namely mobile telephones. Some staff specifically mentioned how texting with customers was the best means of communication throughout PY20. Giving staff mobile telephones and laptops, designated for work purposes only, will empower local One-Stop Career Centers to be fully prepared for virtual and/

or hybrid service delivery to continue. Additionally, creating lending programs for devices such as hotspots and Chrome tablets will give customers the opportunity to connect with local workforce staff and the public workforce system's services at large through virtual means. Lending programs as seen in the Burlington County Library System's tablet lending program (TAP into Bordentown, 2021) or the Camden County Library's hotspot lending program (Camden County, 2020) are a great way to invest in communities and ultimately build a stronger, more resilient workforce. The public workforce system can emulate this model of service that many New Jersey libraries have adopted.

**Table 5: Virtual Tools Used by Other States in PY20<sup>13</sup>**

Tool Category	Tool	Link
Phone and Text-based Communication	Google Voice	<a href="https://voice.google.com/u/0/about">https://voice.google.com/u/0/about</a>
Phone and Text-based Communication	Google Hangouts	<a href="https://hangouts.google.com">https://hangouts.google.com</a>
Phone and Text-based Communication	Cisco Jabber	<a href="https://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/products/unified-communications/jabber/index.html">https://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/products/unified-communications/jabber/index.html</a>
Phone and Text-based Communication	TextNow	<a href="https://www.textnow.com/">https://www.textnow.com/</a>
Phone and Text-based Communication	Guide by Cell (now known as Engage by Cell)	<a href="https://www.engagebycell.com">https://www.engagebycell.com</a>
Phone and Text-based Communication	FreeConferenceCall.com	<a href="https://www.freeconferencecall.com/">https://www.freeconferencecall.com/</a>
Video Conferencing	Adobe Connect	<a href="https://www.adobe.com/products/adobeconnect.html">https://www.adobe.com/products/adobeconnect.html</a>
Video Conferencing	Webex	<a href="https://www.webex.com/">https://www.webex.com/</a>
Video Conferencing	Jitsi Meet	<a href="https://meet.jit.si/">https://meet.jit.si/</a>
Video Conferencing	Skype	<a href="https://www.skype.com/en/">https://www.skype.com/en/</a>
Email-based Communication	Constant Contact	<a href="https://www.constantcontact.com/">https://www.constantcontact.com/</a>
Email-based Communication	MailChimp	<a href="https://mailchimp.com/">https://mailchimp.com/</a>
Team Web-based Communication	Slack	<a href="https://slack.com">https://slack.com</a>
Team Web-based Communication	Microsoft Teams	<a href="https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software">https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software</a>
Web-based Collaboration	Google Drive	<a href="https://www.google.com/drive/">https://www.google.com/drive/</a>
Web-based Collaboration	Microsoft 365 OneDrive	<a href="https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/onedrive/online-cloud-storage">https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/onedrive/online-cloud-storage</a>
Virtual Job Fair	vFairs	<a href="https://www.vfairs.com/">https://www.vfairs.com/</a>
Recruitment and Advertisement	YouTube	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/">https://www.youtube.com/</a>

Staff and customer access to technology was a major concern identified in the Heldrich Center’s brief, *Suddenly Virtual: Delivering Workforce Services in the COVID-19 Environment* (Martin & Volpe, 2020a). In April 2020, the Heldrich Center’s research revealed the following feedback from state workforce representatives:

- ▶ 86% of staff reported that their clients lack the appropriate technologies and skill sets for using online services, and
- ▶ 70% of staff said that they also do not have the tools and skills to function effectively in a remote service delivery environment.

While these statistics have likely improved since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, there still remains a persistent digital divide with some of the customer population seeking WIOA Title I services in New Jersey, as well as in many other states. In this regard, the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry (2022) released *Bridging the Digital Divide: A Vision for Digital Literacy and Connectivity*, speaking to its commitment to focus on digital literacy as a critical basis to creating a thriving workforce ecosystem.

<sup>13</sup> This information was collected by the Heldrich Center for the Suddenly Virtual and Strategically Virtual series in 2020 and 2021 through a series of surveys and roundtable discussions with stakeholders knowledgeable about the public workforce system in their respective states. The states included Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, and Washington.

**Table 6: Additional Virtual Tools Cited in *Suddenly Virtual* and *Strategically Virtual* Series**

Tool Category	Tool	Link
Text-based Communication	Simple Texting	<a href="https://simpletexting.com/">https://simpletexting.com/</a>
Digital Calendar	SignUp	<a href="https://signup.com/">https://signup.com/</a>
Digital Calendar	GenBook/Booksy	<a href="https://booksy.com/biz/en-us">https://booksy.com/biz/en-us</a>
Marketing/Video Creation	Animoto	<a href="https://animoto.com/">https://animoto.com/</a>
Design Virtual Learning	Gnowbe	<a href="https://www.gnowbe.com/">https://www.gnowbe.com/</a>
Design Virtual Learning	Arist	<a href="https://www.arist.co/">https://www.arist.co/</a>
Design Virtual Learning	ConveYour	<a href="https://conveyour.com/">https://conveyour.com/</a>
Design Virtual Learning	Remind	<a href="https://www.remind.com/">https://www.remind.com/</a>
Job Search	Vault	<a href="https://jobs.vault.com">https://jobs.vault.com</a>
Résumé Assistance	Jobscan	<a href="https://www.jobscan.co/home-v2">https://www.jobscan.co/home-v2</a>
Interview Assistance	Big Interview	<a href="https://www.biginterview.com/">https://www.biginterview.com/</a>
Wellness	Mind Ease	<a href="https://mindease.io/">https://mindease.io/</a>
Wellness	Headspace	<a href="https://www.headspace.com/">https://www.headspace.com/</a>
Wellness	Ten Percent Happier	<a href="https://www.tenpercent.com/">https://www.tenpercent.com/</a>
Wellness	Shine	<a href="https://www.theshineapp.com/">https://www.theshineapp.com/</a>
Wellness	HabitMinder	<a href="https://habitminder.com/">https://habitminder.com/</a>

Moreover, additional specific technological concerns noted in the *Suddenly Virtual* brief were:

- ▶ Inadequate hardware devices;
- ▶ Lack of access to affordable broadband services and needed equipment such as routers;
- ▶ Caps on mobile data plans, limiting the ability to use smartphones for services; and
- ▶ Lack of technological skills in using specific applications such as videoconferencing services and online learning.

While the public workforce system made strides throughout the course of PY20, as documented in additional *Suddenly Virtual* and *Strategically Virtual* products, as well as through the course of this evaluation, more technological device and software platform investments could be made by NJDOL and local WDBs to support virtual and/or hybrid service delivery. The procurement of these technologies will ensure that both staff and customers are able to fully participate in virtual and/or hybrid service delivery. The above technological tools and software platforms will be less effective if staff and customers are not equipped to operate in a virtual world.

**Short-term Recommendation #4: NJDOL’s procurement process was cited by local area staff as a barrier to being able to adapt to a virtual environment and acquire the necessary tools and services for virtual service provision. While potentially a difficult undertaking, NJDOL should consider how to improve its procurement process to be able to quickly process requests and acquire new technologies.**

Procurement processes and systems are notoriously cumbersome and slow moving; however, the emergency situation brought on by the pandemic required systems to be adaptive, flexible, and responsive. Procurement processes slowed NJDOL’s ability to rapidly respond with tangible technological resources, in some cases, during PY20. NJDOL should investigate how its procurement process can be improved and/or streamlined to be better positioned to acquire the necessary tools and services to fit a more virtual environment of continued service delivery. Moreover, improving the procurement process could also be of help should there be another public emergency in the future. Researchers acknowledge that changing procurement processes would be a difficult undertaking; however, a subcommittee with representatives from multiple departments and divisions could be formed to start a discussion about streamlining and/or taking the steps to revise the current procurement

process. Additionally, while considerations are made to NJDOL's procurement processes, more cross-agency and cross-departmental efforts could be made to build contingency plans with existing resources, hardware, technological tools, and other supports to continue to build a more resilient system for future periods of disruption and/or a public emergency.

**Long-term Recommendation #4: Investments in modernization, including procurement of technology and hotspot devices, software programs, reporting systems, etc., should be prioritized by NJDOL and local areas to continue to update and strengthen the virtual service delivery infrastructure at the local level.**

NJDOL and local WDBs can work to ensure that the local areas are properly equipped with the technology to reach customers where they are, on the platforms and devices that are most suitable for connection and service delivery. Local WDBs can ensure that there is adequate local leadership and policy guidance about this issue. NJDOL can provide small grants from flexible funding streams, such as the Governor's set-aside funds, to ensure that there is funding to procure the necessary devices and technologies, and update existing resources, for each fiscal year. Based on interviewee feedback, the specific technologies that should be prioritized, if they have not already been acquired, are [DocuSign](#), [LinkedIn Learning](#), [Adobe Acrobat](#), [Guide By Cell](#), and [vFairs](#).

When purchased in aggregate, it is often the case that these technologies and/or software licenses are more affordable. In this way, the statewide purchase of technologies is a much more cost-efficient option that reaps significant benefits for the staff and customer populations, as evidenced by NJDOL's purchase of SkillUp NJ (Metrix Learning). Specifically, NJDOL acquired SkillUp NJ (Metrix Learning), a free online learning platform with access to 5,000 online Skillsoft courses, for use by every local workforce area in New Jersey. Previously, local areas were engaged with SkillUp NJ (Metrix Learning) on an individual basis, which was not an efficient manner of technology or tool acquisition or provision. As such, NJDOL should consider these longer-term statewide investments in technology.

Additionally, NJDOL could convene a committee of One-Stop Career Center directors in New Jersey to conduct a deeper dive into preferred vendors for technologies that support virtual service delivery. A committee could generate a list of preferred vendors to share amongst the local workforce areas as a working resource guide for more avenues of support for their local virtual operations.

### **Data Collection for Changing Modes of Service Delivery**

The findings and recommendations in this section answer the research question on what changes to processes and/or data systems should be made to ensure service delivery is adequately documented in a hybrid or virtual mode of delivery.

**Finding #5: AOSOS has limitations as a reporting system. AOSOS needs to be updated to reflect the modality of service delivery to help local One-Stops better capture their service delivery operations. AOSOS language and functionality could be clarified and improved to help local areas more seamlessly document the services they deliver to customers.**

In interviews with local One-Stop Career Center staff, many stated that AOSOS has general limitations and ongoing issues, such as system glitches and other data processing errors. They also noted challenges with the extent to which the system adequately captures how much local staff do to serve each customer. In this way, local One-Stop Career Center staff highlighted the limitations of AOSOS as a reporting system overall, specifically citing the ways in which the extent of the services delivered to customers is not efficiently captured in the fields available in AOSOS. Two local One-Stop Career Center staff members remarked:

***"Clicking a box that you provided 'counseling services' does not reflect the amount of time spent providing those services."***

***"The activities module does not capture the work being done here. Some of their categories do not accurately reflect the work. Work gets accredited to other staff."***



To more adequately capture the extent to which local One-Stops are providing services to customers, as well as to document the modality of service delivery in a more hybridized environment, AOSOS will require significant updates. First, each service code should be updated to include an option to indicate whether that service took place in person, virtually (computer based), or remotely (phone based). Capturing this critical information will enable local One-Stop Career Centers and NJDOL to better assess how services are currently delivered, and how customers access them. This information will also inform future investments in technology and/or facilities to ensure that local One-Stop Career Centers are supported in their provision of services to customers. Additionally, more fields, such as time spent with customer, service modality preferred, and more, could be added to AOSOS to more systematically collect the details of the services being provided to customers.

The Heldrich Center research team also heard from interviewees that AOSOS updates are needed to remove “useless” tabs to streamline the data entry process for local area workforce staff. Moreover, state workforce staff and local area staff mentioned the need for more real-time information-sharing capabilities with AOSOS, including but not limited to: AOSOS internal dashboards and quicker feedback loops with data reporting for performance purposes. The need for “more learnings” from the data in AOSOS was noted throughout the Heldrich Center’s data collection process. Additionally, state workforce staff as well as one local area staff member noted AOSOS’ lack of an upload feature, which could streamline the data entry process for staff when working with customers. These changes to AOSOS could improve the data entry process and turn AOSOS into a more robust case management system.

In regard to AOSOS challenges, one local One-Stop Career Center noted that AOSOS data entry was not an issue for his staff, but rather the language around reporting and ensuring that staff entered the information correctly, per AOSOS guidelines, was the primary challenge. According to one local One-Stop Career Center staff member interviewed for this study:

***“What we found difficult was not necessarily doing the data entry, but instead it was the language around the reporting. This has changed quite a lot in the last three years. The language around how they are supposed to enter data has changed.”***

Despite the ongoing challenges that AOSOS experienced before, during, and after PY20, recent improvements and technical guides for how to use AOSOS were noted as areas of progress. One local One-Stop Career Center staff member stated:

***“There have been recent updates to AOSOS that seem better.”***

Additionally, NJDOL staff interviewed also remarked that efforts have been and continue to be under way to address AOSOS guidance and provide greater technical assistance to the local One-Stop Career Center staff in their use of AOSOS. As one NJDOL workforce staff member shared:

***“We have built up a lot of capacity about understanding AOSOS as a system. It’s an old system that has challenges and can be difficult to use and understand.”***

Efforts to update AOSOS, where possible, as well as having technical assistance teams and One-Stop Career Center liaisons provide support to the local workforce areas, are significant steps to ensure that all entities using the system are sufficiently equipped to accurately and efficiently document services to the fullest extent possible. These efforts were noted by some local One-Stop Career Centers as positive in preventing duplication of work and amendments to reporting. While great strides have been under way, more efforts can be made to continue to modernize AOSOS to ensure that the reporting system adequately captures the extent of services being delivered to customers as well as the modality of the service delivery.



**Short-term Recommendation #5: Updates to AOSOS should be prioritized to begin to systematically capture modality of services to inform future investments in technology and/or physical spaces for local One-Stop Career Centers and NJDOL.**

Documentation of mode of service delivery is a critical piece of information that should accompany the accounting of every customer interaction and every service delivered. Capturing this information is fundamental to operating in the new normal, which is a more virtual environment. Additional updates to AOSOS, include but are not limited to: eliminating unnecessary tabs and fields and adding greater functionality that would systematically capture the details of services delivered beyond a generalized comments section. Making updates such as these would make AOSOS a more robust system of record for service delivery.

**Long-term Recommendation #5: While NJDOL is currently engaged in workforce modernization efforts to update and upgrade the case management system, specific consideration should be given to adding more robust real-time feedback mechanisms and other functionality to AOSOS in the short term so that local areas can derive more timely learnings from the data to make interim, as-needed changes to local area practices.**

AOSOS updates should include mechanisms that allow local workforce areas to interact with AOSOS data in real time and derive learnings from the data. Local workforce areas reported wanting better feedback mechanisms by which to gauge performance, understand individual service impacts, create more robust customer experience records, and more. In this way, some local areas noted that AOSOS is not a case management system, but rather functions as a system of record. To have a more robust case management system would assist local workforce areas in strengthening their operations by understanding how they are performing and identifying areas for continued improvement.

**Supporting One-Stop Personnel in a Changing Service Delivery Environment**

The findings and recommendations in this section are aligned toward preparing the public workforce system for possible future emergency disruptions of services, including One-Stop Career Center personnel's needs and ways New Jersey could support local workforce staff during such emergencies.

**Finding #6: Local One-Stop Career Center staff agreed that, with the support of their local and county partners, the autonomy and flexibility they had during PY20 to make service modifications and/or to implement new service strategies to meet the needs of their WIOA customers was beneficial and recommend it be continued to be able to adapt more quickly to a public emergency in the future. Additionally, staff noted that the technologies procured in PY20 should remain a regular component of service provision moving forward to better equip staff for future emergencies.**

The need to make quick decisions in an uncertain, changing environment was a recurring theme that dominated interviews with local staff. The One-Stop Career Centers described the need to act quickly to procure technological devices and software programs as well as make decisions about staff operations, change operating and safety procedures, and ensure staff were fully equipped to work from home. A majority of interviewees highlighted turning to their local partners and county governments, as well as organizations like GSETA, for guidance on how to adapt their service model and daily operations. This localized support empowered many One-Stop Career Centers to make the necessary pivots and quick decisions to set up their remote operations and virtual service delivery infrastructure. One-Stop Career Center staff believe that this localized support and quick decision-making was critical for quick service adaptations, and therefore should be continued in the event of a future public emergency.

In terms of NJDOL support, many interviewees cited that there were weekly conversations and convenings with state-level staff about what was happening in the local areas. One local One-Stop Career Center staff member noted:

***“We had a lot of meetings and the state was pretty involved when trying to figure out how to provide the best services.”***

Most agreed that these conversations were informative. However, many local areas reported that more tangible support and follow-up resources from these weekly conversations, in the form of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) documents and writable PDF (Portable Document Format) registration forms, would have been helpful. In a future public emergency, the state could support local area personnel by offering more tangible and readily accessible guidance and resources (FAQs, registration forms, written policy decisions, etc.) to help with the process of service adaptation and ensure that local area personnel feel supported and empowered to make the adaptations needed and also remain in compliance with NJDOL and the WIOA law.

Moreover, in terms of NJDOL support, interview respondents reported that NJDOL leadership was beneficial in accessing and acquiring virtual/remote learning tools. The purchase of SkillUp NJ (Metrix Learning) by NJDOL was cited as beneficial by local workforce areas. Without the aggregate statewide purchase of this learning platform, local areas would have had to engage in individual contracts with the vendor, wasting local staff’s limited time and resources on procurement. This kind of tangible contribution was valued by One-Stop Career Centers as they negotiated delivering services virtually/remotely. As shared by one local One-Stop Career Center staff member:

***“Something that the state did really well was that they purchased the SkillUp NJ (Metrix Learning) tool and they made it available throughout the state.”***

More policies and specific guidance on how to adapt to the changing environment, and how to simultaneously remain in compliance with regulations and federal policies, were specifically noted as supports that were at times missing from state leadership. This is an area of state support that could be improved in future public emergencies. Moreover, the need for quick decision-making was cited as another pain point in the local areas’ dealings with NJDOL in PY20. To this end, one local One-Stop Career Center staff member commented:

***“Not pointing fingers at the state, we just couldn’t wait.”***

Despite the local areas’ need for greater state-level support, there was general consensus among local staff interviewed for this study that the transition to virtual operations and service delivery was basically successful, with many citing the gains that have been made in PY20 to the present. While many local areas referenced wanting more guidance from NJDOL leadership, it was also recognized that the context of operating in PY20 was exceedingly difficult for entities at all levels of government. To this end, some interviewees remarked that NJDOL “did that the best that they could” and “experienced a lot of the same challenges.”

It was also recommended by interviewees and survey respondents that the One-Stop Career Centers should keep the tools and technologies procured during the course of PY20 and the COVID-19 pandemic. Many survey respondents noted that their PY20 service adaptations were “here to stay” and felt that the modifications made to pre-pandemic service provision were overall beneficial to their service delivery infrastructure. In this way, staff noted their belief that these tools will help them be more responsive and adaptive in the future, should another public emergency arise.

The use of technologies, such as those that supported Personally Identifiable Information transfers, are highly recommended to remain as a regular part of WIOA Title I service provision. Specifically, a local One-Stop Career Center staff member commented:

***“Recommend continue to utilize digital forms/ digital signature platform for efficiency and safety purposes.”***

Speaking to the exact technological platform preferred by one local area, a One-Stop Career Center staff member remarked:

***“DocuSign was a blessing and allowed us to complete and receive paperwork and eligibility documentation in a timely and efficient manner.”***

In regard to the broader service mode changes, another local One-Stop staff member shared:

***“We will continue to offer the option to participate in virtual services if that is easier for the career seeker. This was found to minimize the logistical challenges we had pre-pandemic.”***

Additionally, NJDOL, both at the state and local level, could deepen its partnerships with community-based institutions and libraries to create a more robust localized network of support should another public emergency occur. During the COVID-19 pandemic, as has historically been seen in other instances of public emergencies, many people in need of services turned to the organizations that they were most familiar with, namely their community organizations, faith-based centers, and local public libraries. To adapt more quickly to a public emergency in the future, NJDOL and local One-Stop Career Center personnel could invest in building more localized partnerships to create a stronger network of support in a time of crisis. Specifically, NJDOL could engage with the New Jersey State Library and local workforce areas could form and/or deepen their relationships with their respective library branches.

**Short-term Recommendation #6: NJDOL and/or SETC should encourage local WDBs and/or One-Stop directors to engage in asset mapping to identify additional supports, partners, and community touch points to consider in the face of future recessions, public health emergencies, or other as-yet-unanticipated emergencies.**

Asset mapping<sup>14</sup> can provide a solid foundation for understanding what resources are available to One-Stop Career Center customers. Through an asset-mapping process, local workforce development leaders and staff can identify important community assets and form or strengthen community partnerships that can be relied upon to help weather any potential future crises.

While the COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the importance of having an alternative to place-based services, it is difficult to determine what will be required of the public workforce system during a future crisis. Some One-Stop Career Centers were already familiar

with and/or using the technologies identified in research question #4 to delivery virtual services during shutdowns and many were not. Researchers believe asset mapping to be a useful exercise to prepare for future service delivery interruptions (as well as strengthen current services and/or partnerships) for each local WDB and/or One-Stop Career Center. Additionally, once established, each asset map should be updated on an annual basis to ensure information is current.

**Long-term Recommendation #6: NJDOL should identify a team (if not already in existence) to engage in a robust targeted and specific emergency planning effort.**

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, USDOL has created a comprehensive set of tools for infrastructure recovery and capacity building within the public workforce system (Workforce GPS, n.d.-a). One tool of particular note is a *Quick Start Action Planner* (Workforce GPS, n.d.-b), which is intended for state workforce professionals to use as a guiding document to evaluate preparedness. Heldrich Center researchers encourage NJDOL to use this as an initial jumping-off point to evaluate preparedness in the areas of staffing, training and upskilling, technology, and self-service options for customers. Additionally, if desired, New Jersey can consider inviting local leaders into this process to capture their valuable input, ensure transparency, and increase open communication (please also refer to recommendation #3).

## **Perspectives from PY20 WIOA Customers**

The findings and recommendations in this section center around the WIOA Title I customer experience in PY20 and customers' perceptions of services after interacting with the public workforce system.

<sup>14</sup> Many templates for asset mapping are publicly available and easily found via an Internet search. See [https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/programs/health-data/trainings/documents/tw\\_cba20.pdf](https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/programs/health-data/trainings/documents/tw_cba20.pdf) for a comprehensive example.

**Finding #7: Customers experienced customized, high-touch services that addressed their needs. While some customers expressed desire for more in-person services (specifically around training), flexible services were valued and desired. Strong connections with career counselors were made; however, inability to access a specific counselor could lead to confusion and frustration as customers tried to navigate the broader system to receive assistance.**

PY20 WIOA customers who participated in the focus groups indicated that they accessed services in a variety of manners, including virtual, remote, and in-person services, throughout the course of PY20. As three PY20 WIOA customers noted:

***“I remember going in...it wasn’t a training room, it was a presentation room, where people explained their services.”***

***“I largely spoke with people on the phone, especially with my counselor.”***

***“I received in-person services, but my counselor would reach out via email when things were locked down.”***

Customers who participated in the focus groups felt positive about their experiences with services in PY20 and did not express any clear preference about the mode of service delivery. Mode of delivery was not something any focus group participant felt strongly about, with some customers citing, “It’s neutral...either works” and “I have no preference” when asked about their feelings about in-person or virtual service delivery. Additionally, no one who participated in the focus groups reported not being able to access certain services in PY20, overall expressing appreciation for the ways in which the services supported them in moving toward their personal and professional goals in various capacities. A notable exception was for training, as one focus group respondent said, “I prefer in-person learning and want to sit face-to-face” for that experience.

In conversations with the research team, focus group respondents were more focused on the outcomes they derived from engaging in One-Stop Career Center services rather than how they engaged in the services. Focus group participants primarily spoke of how the

services aided, or did not aid, their learning and/or employment journeys. The research team believes that this focus on outcomes could in part be attributed to issues with focus group participant recall.

Overall, as seen in the WIPS data and as reported by a majority of One-Stop Career Center staff, the WIOA Title I customer population did not significantly differ from previous program years in terms of general demographics. However, despite being similar demographically, PY20 customers had a significantly higher credential rate and measurable skill gain than the previous two program years. One explanation for this could be that this population appears to have been served with high-touch impactful services that significantly increased credential rates and measurable skill gains during a difficult period. One local area described the extent of their processes to ensure that no customers were left behind in the transition to virtual:

***“As we pivoted to remote work situation and virtual services, my first and foremost primary task was to figure out how to have everybody perform all the functions they were providing in person and shift that to virtual. Initially we started out just by reaching out to the people who were engaged before all of the mandated closures, and stayed in touch with them, and talked to them about ‘okay, this is what is happening now, we are going to be in touch with training providers to find out what they are doing and how they are pivoting.’ It was a lot of coordination between staff, participations, and training providers. At the same time, we were looking at all the career services we offered in our facilities and finding virtual platforms for those.”***

From the focus groups with customers, this relationship-building service priority was felt by some individuals who received services in PY20, as noted by one WIOA customer who shared:

***“I want to shout out to my counselor... because he stayed in touch with me all the time.”***

Customers valued their relationships with their career counselors. When expressing negative views, customers always couched their views in terms that their individual career counselor was helpful, but the system is not

necessarily set up in ways that benefit them most directly. They also felt “lost” when their specific career counselor was not available. A WIOA PY20 customer shared:

***“I think they should have more than one person who customers can reach out to. There were times that my counselor could not show up and I did not know who to go to when this happened.”***

Other local areas indicated that it was important to them to be accessible, even when the staff did not have the expertise or answers that the customers were seeking. One local One-Stop staff member stated:

***“Staff would always answer the phone, even though they could not help with a particular issue.”***

Moreover, one local One-Stop Career Center staff member interviewed for this study spoke about the extent to which she went above and beyond in PY20 to ensure that her customers felt supported and that they could talk to someone about the difficulties they were experiencing. This individual indicated that she forwarded calls from her office to her personal cell phone and would answer calls throughout the evening every day. The interviewee noted:

***“I made the decision to not be an unanswered phone.”***

In this way, local One-Stop Career Center staff should be credited with trying to – often successfully – provide a positive experience for customers interacting with the public workforce system in PY20. As one local One-Stop Career Center staff member noted:

***“These programs take a specialized skill set and employees with a passion for working with youth. We would not have been successful with our transition from in person to virtual and then to hybrid without dedicated staff.”***

As similarly noted in the *Suddenly Virtual* and *Strategically Virtual* series, this study identified a strained public workforce system staffed by workforce professionals dedicated to providing the highest quality

services possible in PY20. While the professionalism of local area staff should be commended, more can be done to offer technological solutions to support their efforts.

**Short-term Recommendation #7: Local One-Stop Career Centers need to consider how they can offer more touch points or clear and standardized avenues for communication to their customer population to ensure that every customer is supported throughout their experience engaging with the public workforce system.**

This recommendation is congruent with the “no wrong door approach” to service provision more broadly. In focus groups, customers reported that having only one point of contact sometimes caused confusion and worry, particularly when their counselor was not accessible or did not respond in a timely manner. Customers worried that they were not in compliance with what they needed to be doing and expressed frustration over having to wait until they received a response from their counselor, despite multiple follow-up attempts at times. Researchers acknowledge that more intensive services can be costly; however, a cross-training approach can help increase touch points without drastically increasing staffing levels. Additionally, NJDOL could engage with the New Jersey Office of Innovation, as well as other organizational or agency partners, to consider the technological solutions that could assist with creating a more robust, no wrong door approach model of service, particularly around the introduction to services in a virtual space. For example, NJDOL and the New Jersey Office of Innovation could engage in a project to standardize “the front door” of the public workforce system at the local level. At present, local areas maintain their own websites and manage their own virtual presences, which could contribute to a general lack of clarity on how to access services at the county level. Standardization of the local-level introduction to WIOA services could assist with creating more touch points and avenues of communication for the customer population in New Jersey.



**Long-term Recommendation #7: Operating within the constraints of existing funding allocations, NJDOL can contribute to a positive customer experience by facilitating the ability to quickly (and/or temporarily) increase staffing levels and by ensuring adequate staff training.**

This recommendation follows the long-term recommendation from research question #6 and centers on staffing and training preparedness. Researchers heard from staff and customers that staff burnout was common due to long hours, the collective trauma of COVID-19, and, in some cases, feeling the need for more training to properly fulfill their job responsibilities. One way to lessen this potential burnout is for NJDOL to ensure that policies, procedures, and system knowledge is in place to be able to quickly increase staffing and/or reallocate staff to areas of need. Additionally, encouraging (or requiring) the cross-training of staff can help ensure that knowledge gaps do not exist and can increase customer experiences and decrease burnout among staff.

**Preparing for Future Service Disruptions**

The findings and recommendations in this section answer the research question on how the public workforce system can be prepared for future disruptions and/or disaster recovery.

**Finding #8: The public workforce system can be prepared for future disruptions to services by continuing multi-modal service delivery by allowing greater flexibility and autonomy at the local level, and by continually working to dismantle silos across state agencies, units within agencies, between the UI program and other parts of workforce, and increase knowledge across WIOA titles and programs.**

To be prepared for future disruptions and disaster recovery, local One-Stop Career Center staff suggested continuing the multi-mode model of service developed in PY20, which offers all WIOA Title I services in a variety of modes, namely in person, remote, and virtual. Specifically, One-Stop Career Center staff made a clear suggestion for a strong menu of aligned virtual services in addition to their existing in-person service provision

infrastructure. When asked what PY20 modifications should continue, two local One-Stop Career Center staff members shared:

***“Continue to provide services to customers how they wish to receive where they are most comfortable – in person, remote, etc...”***

***“All of the changes we made as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic will remain in place as permanent options for service delivery.”***

This multi-modal service delivery model suggestion was most commonly described as the best path forward for local One-Stop Career Centers from the local One-Stop staff’s perspective.

The variability among One-Stop Career Centers throughout New Jersey should be noted. The ideal mode of service mix depends on the specific customer population and the expertise and comforts of the counselors at each One-Stop Career Center location. While some agreed that services such as intake and orientation should take place in an in-person mode of service, that may not be ideal for all 25 One-Stop Career Centers in New Jersey. Thus, One-Stop Career Center staff reported that decisions about service mode, and the ideal service mode mix, should remain local. Modalities of service provision is an area where the state can provide support and guidance while also allowing the local areas the latitude to make the best decisions for their customers.

Researchers heard from local staff that they greatly valued autonomy and the ability to implement strategies that worked for their local area, staff, and customers during the pandemic. Local areas have proven that ingenuity and leadership were important components to how and why they were able to navigate through a tough transition to virtual services in PY20. Local areas were forced to adapt quickly, and sometimes independently, in PY20 and have demonstrated to NJDOL that, with state-level guidance and support, they can lead the way.

Finally, both state and local staff discussed siloed operations as a difficulty affecting program operations and service delivery. As one local One-Stop Career Center staff member interviewed for this study indicated:

***“(There is) a lot of separation between the agencies at the state...a lack of coordination and collaboration has made things hard to decipher for local One-Stop Career Centers.”***

In addition to silos between agencies involved in the workforce development system, interview respondents mentioned siloing within NJDOL as a challenge, with the need for “better engagement across units.” As mentioned previously in this report, cross-training staff at the local level can help ensure continuity of services and help to quickly redeploy staff when unexpected service delivery disruptions and/or emergencies occur. Strong leadership and coordination at the state level would likely contribute to the success of attempts at diminishing silos and cross-training at the local level. Additionally, working across departments and programs can help speed up changes. As one interview respondent noted, state governments often have a lot of “red tape” and change can take time. Forming stronger partnerships within NJDOL, across state agencies, between NJDOL and local leaders, and between and among community partners (libraries were mentioned in interviews with state staff as particularly helpful partners) can offer a strong foundation for working together to address future crises.

Survey respondents and interviewees were strong proponents of incorporating the lessons learned and technologies acquired during PY20 in their permanent service models and to be better prepared for any future service disruptions and/or disaster recovery. With a few systematic changes in technologies, division of powers and authority, and investment in knowledge-sharing programs and opportunities, a more robust and resilient public workforce system could be created, which could more proactively handle any future, unanticipated public emergencies.

**Short-term Recommendation #8: NJDOL and/or local WDBs should foster innovation at the local WDB and One-Stop Career Center level by encouraging a spirit of innovating pilots and assessing and sharing their results.**

Similar to recommendation #3, NJDOL should collect best practices in disaster preparedness from locals to identify and disseminate across the state (see

this [Google form](#) used by the Colorado Workforce Development Council to collect such information). Once these best practices have been collected, NJDOL should share them widely within the public workforce system, and also consider sharing more publicly through press releases to acknowledge and encourage innovative work that is being done at the local level. NJDOL can also offer small innovation grants to encourage, and provide some funding support for, innovative service delivery methods. See this [National Governors Association brief](#) that contains more information about specific policy levers and flexible funding sources within WIOA available (specifically the governor’s set-aside funds) that could be used toward this purpose.

**Long-term Recommendation #8: NJDOL should consider how to break program siloes and deepen the institutional knowledge of staff so that there is a greater shared understanding of how the entire public workforce system and its respective programs work together.**

During PY20, a criticism of NJDOL was that, at times, the state issued conflicting guidance that was not congruent with program operations or the WIOA law.<sup>15</sup> This criticism made by local One-Stop Career Center staff also speaks to siloed decision-making across state agencies and within units of NJDOL that likely contributed to the confusion. Greater system integration and more opportunities for cross-program sharing and/or professional development might be of help to ensure that there is more system knowledge from which to draw. This recommendation is congruent with developing and maximizing staff talent and specialization. Investing in people will, in turn, lead to investment in systems that become more resilient to weather any future disruptions to the traditional service delivery model.

<sup>15</sup> Statements about NJDOL’s conflicting guidance were made by multiple local workforce area staff in the study’s data collection process. The Heldrich Center research team cannot confirm the veracity of these statements or comment on which guidance was being referenced.



## Future Investments in WIOA Title I Service Delivery

The findings and recommendations in this section answer the research question about where future investments in WIOA Title I service delivery can be made.

**Finding #9: Service delivery during PY20 alerted One-Stop Career Center staff to the specific needs of providing services in a hybrid or virtual format (technology and people-based needs). Targeted investments in technology and staff capacity will result in a more robust and versatile service delivery landscape, specifically one that can weather public emergencies better in the future. Additionally, lessons learned from other states (as profiled in the Heldrich Center's *Suddenly Virtual* and *Strategically Virtual* series and from peer-to-peer conversations) can and should be assessed for applicability within New Jersey.**

Previous recommendations in this report point to specific technologies and hardware investments NJDOL should consider for WIOA Title I service delivery. Those technologies and hardware would be a tangible jumping-off point to continue to invest in a new multi-modal service delivery infrastructure. Staff need to have the knowledge and expertise to properly deploy and maximize the use of such technologies. Investments in people are equally important to the technology and hardware investments previously mentioned.

Investments in staff, including professional development and cross-training, are not necessarily particular to providing service delivery during times of widespread disruption, but can strengthen the public workforce system to be better equipped to handle such disruptions. Local workforce areas reported varied levels of comfort with technology, access to technology, expertise in navigating procurement processes, infrastructure and expertise in acquiring new technologies, and much more. The unevenness within and among local workforce areas could be addressed with future targeted investments in WIOA Title I service delivery. In this way, those investments fall into two main areas: technology and people.

For an example of people investment done at the local level, one One-Stop Career Center noted its PY20 process for ensuring local staff were able to navigate the

new service delivery landscape. As one local One-Stop Career Center staff member interviewed for this study noted:

***“What worked for us was being able to keep staff engaged with weekly Zoom staff meetings and daily updated emails about what was going on, professional development and trainings when possible.”***

Processes such as this could be expanded and scaled up to the statewide level to provide greater opportunities for shared learning, professional development, and training in the areas most frequently cited as challenges for local One-Stop Career Centers. From this research, areas of interest could include, but are not limited to: virtual resource sharing, virtual tool sharing, technology platform training sessions, soft skills training, and integrated service delivery.

Furthermore, other areas of potential investment for New Jersey were brought to light in the *Suddenly Virtual* series (Martin & Volpe, 2020a), which New Jersey can continue to expand on. In April 2020, the primary lessons learned from the *Suddenly Virtual's* multi-state research included:

- ▶ Work with “low-hanging fruit” in going virtual;
- ▶ Provide ongoing, transparent two-way communications with staff;
- ▶ Attend to both the technological and emotional needs of staff;
- ▶ Foster a spirit of innovation and opportunity in the midst of crisis; and
- ▶ Communicate and collaborate with other local areas across state lines.

These are all identified areas of investment that continue to apply to New Jersey. Virtual service provision is largely under way and operational across New Jersey's One-Stop Career Centers, but now low-hanging fruit can be perceived as the adoption of and investment in proven technologies across the state. Technological tool consistency across local areas should be the next frontier of investment for NJDOL. Ongoing transparent two-way communication with staff continues to be an area

requiring more investment of staff time and resources. Technological and emotional needs of staff should be addressed through additional professional development opportunities for staff growth. Investing in professional development could also help retain employees, which will deepen the knowledge shared amongst state and local staff. Fostering a spirit of innovation remains as the gift of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced change in the public workforce system that might have otherwise not occurred. Investing resources into innovation could be operationalized through NJDOL's continued partnership with the New Jersey Office of Innovation. Investments in innovation could include, but are not limited to, the standardization of a county-level website for WIOA services and the development of a single-entry point for state-level job seeker resources. Efforts such as these could be led by the New Jersey Office of Innovation, working in conjunction with NJDOL. Additionally, New Jersey could engage in technical assistance projects with other states to apply practical insights and learning from the pandemic and the PY20 era of service provision.

**Short-term Recommendation #9: To invest in WIOA Title I service delivery technology, infrastructure, and service flows, NJDOL should consider partnering with SETC and/or GSETA to provide local One-Stop Career Centers with desk aids, informational graphics, and other toolkits to support local service delivery. A statewide, multi-organizational partnership could help to ensure technological tool consistency at the local level of service provision.**

For topics that have been reported frequently as challenging to staff (adjusting to virtual modes of service delivery, soft-skills training, engaging in integrated models of service delivery, etc.) NJDOL (and any applicable partner organizations) should leverage existing desk aids and tools (such as those on [WorkforceGPS](#)) and/or create new resources for local staff to reference. NJDOL should ensure that every local workforce area has access to consistent information, such as the [CareerOneStop guide](#) or [System Alignment - Resources for Integrated Service Delivery](#). Partner organizations can assist in identifying needs, identifying existing resources, and distributing tools and resources to the field. Additionally, as mentioned

earlier in this report, the state can also create an online clearinghouse and/or directory of available tools for ease of access by local staff. Moreover, partnering with other statewide organizations, such as SETC and GSETA, could assist with moving toward greater technological tool consistency for service provision at the local level. Collaborative partnerships such as this will guide the public workforce system toward a more uniform and informed approach to service delivery.

**Long-term Recommendation #9: There is a need for greater investment in professional development for local One-Stop Career Center staff to further develop and enhance the hard and soft skills that are required to continue to move toward and fully adopt a hybridized relationship-building-centric, high-touch service model.**

While many local staff reported having gained comfort with technological devices and tools throughout PY20, it was reported that savviness with technology is often uneven among staff in the local workforce development areas. This issue can also be addressed through targeted professional development opportunities to ensure that all staff have a baseline comfort and experience with the technologies most often employed to interface with customers and deliver services virtually when needed. Relatedly, One-Stop Career Centers must consider how to maximize the talent of their staff in addition to fostering this talent with professional development training and resources. Resources may need to be allocated differently to prioritize the services and delivery modalities most needed in a post-COVID-19 world. One-Stop Career Center customers who spoke with Heldrich Center researchers attributed successes to direct, personal relationships with their career counselors. While it may not be feasible for every WIOA customer to receive such high-touch services, customers perceived one-on-one relationships with One-Stop Career Center staff to be of great value during the job search. NJDOL should consider what policies and/or funding models should be in place to best support such high-touch services for job seekers who desire and/or need them. This can and should be done in tandem with earlier recommendations about consulting with local areas about what is working best, gathering innovative practices, and incentivizing innovation at the local level.

Overall, these findings and recommendations offer a variety of potential avenues for future investments in technology, relationship building, professional development for staff, and more. NJDOL can consider the

ways it needs to adapt to the changing work landscape and continue to modernize existing legacy systems and structures from its former place-based, in-person-only service model.

## Conclusion

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This evaluation used a combination of qualitative data and quantitative techniques to better understand WIOA service provision in PY20 – who accessed services, how the public workforce system in New Jersey adapted to service provision changes necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and what lessons were learned during that time that are applicable across program years and/or can help better prepare the public workforce system for any possible future disruptions of services. The mixed-method data collection approach allowed Heldrich Center researchers to collect critical feedback from multiple stakeholders involved in the provision of WIOA Title I services in PY20. The WIPS data review shed light on who accessed WIOA Title I adult, dislocated worker, and youth services in PY20. The statewide survey to local workforce staff cast a broad net to collect the variety of adaptations to services and service delivery made by every local One-Stop Career Center in the state in PY20. The in-depth interviews and focus groups with the three core stakeholder groups – NJDOL staff; local One-Stop Career Center staff; and WIOA Title I adult, dislocated worker, and youth services customers from PY20 – yielded feedback and insights that addressed adaptations that were perceived to have worked well, service priorities, and recommendations for NJDOL for future investments. In this way, each stakeholder group shed light on a different component of the service delivery priorities, pipeline, and operations as they existed in PY20.

Overall, this study finds there were fewer WIOA Title I customers in PY20, but that those who did access services in this program year received high-touch, intensive services that resulted in significant gains, particularly in the realm of credential attainment and measurable skill gains. In PY20, WIOA Title I adult, dislocated worker, and youth customers received significant upskilling supports, during a time in which

the job market was exceedingly difficult, which accounts for the decreases in outcome measurements such as employment rate. The context of these data is critical, as the pandemic's effect on the labor market cannot be understated when looking at PY20. From the perspective of local One-Stop Career Center staff, it appears that the mode of service delivery did not seem to matter as much as ensuring that the counselor and customer were able to connect in productive ways, and that the customer felt supported in their interactions with their One-Stop Career Center.

The Heldrich Center research team found that the most common mode of service delivery during PY20 was hybrid (a flexible, catch-all characterization of services that are a mix of in-person, remote, or multi-modal service delivery based on customers' preference), indicating that many local staff adopted a "meet the customers where they are" service mantra in PY20. However, given the variability that exists in mode of service, care should be taken to ensure provision of quality services, irrespective of mode of delivery. In this way, importance is placed on the continued investment in and improvement of virtual service provision, but not at the expense of in-person services. Researchers believe that the "no wrong door approach" can be applied to ensure that there is equity in the provision of in-person and virtual service delivery, with the possibility of having some local One-Stop Career Center counselors specialize in their preferred mode of delivery to maximize efficiency and deliver the highest quality services possible. Playing to individual counselors' strengths, while also investing in people and offering greater professional development opportunities for frontline staff, will undoubtedly strengthen the public workforce system as a whole, and ensure that the system is prepared for any future disruptions to the traditional service model. As the sudden transition to virtual

services has subsided, and there appears to be a “new normal” for WIOA Title I service provision, NJDOL can consider how to strategically double down on the lessons learned and return to a focus on WIOA service priorities to ensure that there is greater system integration and continuous improvement for the administration and delivery of customer-centered services to New Jersey residents in search of support.

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## Appendix A: Sampling Methodology

### Survey

Researchers intended to capture at least one survey response per adult/dislocated worker and youth service provider from each of the 25 One-Stop Career Centers in New Jersey. The survey was initially distributed on June 15, 2022 to WDB directors, followed by three email reminders to all WDB directors and two targeted email reminders to One-Stop Career Centers that were not already represented in the survey responses. Researchers also followed up with two phone calls to each One-Stop Career Center not yet represented in the survey responses. In addition, the WDB directors received an explanation about the survey at the SETC meeting on June 23, 2022, and a follow-up email was sent from Gary Altman, SETC Executive Director, on June 29, 2022 to bolster the response rate. Dr. Yolanda Allen at NJDOL also distributed the survey on July 7, 2022. The response rate to the survey was 71%, with 17 responses recorded from WIOA Title I adult/dislocated worker programs and 17 responses from WIOA Title I youth service programs from the 25 One-Stop Career Centers in New Jersey.<sup>16</sup> Although researchers exhausted all options to generate survey responses from all service providers, there were a few One-Stop Career Centers that did not respond. The follow-up emails and phone calls ultimately increased the number of survey responses despite falling short of 100% representation. However, since there was no regional clustering of non-responsive sites, the findings may be generalizable to the state of New Jersey.

### Interviews

The Heldrich Center developed criteria for selecting six One-Stop Career Centers for in-depth interviews (see Appendices H-1 and H-2 for more information). Site selection criteria were based on several key factors. First, researchers selected two One-Stop Career Centers based on WBD region of the state: north, central, and south. Next, WDBs were selected by the total number of WIOA Title I adult, dislocated worker, and youth customers served during PY20, as identified by the WIPS PY20 data provided by ORI. From each region, the WDB with the highest number of total Title I customers and the site with the lowest number of Title I customers were selected. The original selected sites include Cumberland-Salem-Cape May, Gloucester County, Greater Raritan, Mercer County, Monmouth County, and Union County. Mercer County was replaced by Ocean County. While this sampling approach reflects an intent to reduce bias in the interview data, the small sample size for interviewees limits the generalizability of findings from the interview data collected for this evaluation (see Appendix K for more information).

### Focus Groups

Researchers conducted four focus groups with PY20 WIOA Title I customers. Two focus groups each were scheduled for adult/dislocated worker and youth customers, one during the day and one during the evening, to accommodate the schedules of working customers. To recruit individual customers, researchers requested and received contact information for those who received WIOA Title I services in PY20. Contacting potential focus group customers via email proved only moderately successful, so researchers deployed additional efforts by calling potential focus group customers by phone. Since participation in the four scheduled focus groups did not meet desired levels, one-on-one interviews were conducted with additional customers who registered for a focus group but were unable to attend. In total, five adult and dislocated worker customers and four youth customers participated in research activities with the research team. Focus group data should be considered carefully due to the small sample size of study participants and due to participants relying on their recall about services received nearly two years earlier. Despite these limitations, the job seeker data from interviews and focus groups provides rich anecdotal insights from the perspective of the WIOA customer and is included as such in the overall findings (see Appendix K for more details).

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<sup>16</sup> Researchers combined survey responses that represented the same One-Stop Career Centers and population served. A total of 24 adult/dislocated worker program responses included 17 distinct One-Stop Career Centers. A total of 19 youth programs included 17 distinct One-Stop Career Centers. To avoid giving excess weight to any location's input, a pair or a trio of responses were combined for having a single response per service area per site. The method for combination used any respondent's affirmative indicators of a service being provided at a location and retained all respondents' open-ended data describing situations at that site.

# Appendix B-1: State-level Stakeholders and Staff Interview Protocol

## Questions for State-level Stakeholders (IT, state staff, etc.)

*P1.RQ1. What does the quality and consistency of the data in AOSOS tell us about New Jersey's ability to study the effectiveness of its workforce programs, especially in a virtual or remote delivery mechanism?*

*P1.RQ2. What data points are best suited for analyzing the impact of the pandemic on service delivery by comparing PY20 outcomes with PY19 outcomes?*

1. What are the most reliable, consistent data points collected through AOSOS? [Probe: Meaning clear, understandable measures, consistent over time, fully understood by local staff]
2. Which data are reported for federal and state reporting?
3. Which data points are problematic from a data entry standpoint? Which are messiest from a reporting standpoint? Which data points are the "messiest"? [Probe: Why?]
4. How are efforts to update and improve AOSOS implemented, if at all?
5. How, if at all, did AOSOS adapt in PY20 given changes in service delivery? [Probe: Be specific.] What challenges did these changes present to reporting for the local areas?
6. What improvements do you want to see made to AOSOS to reflect changes to service delivery, if any?
7. What are the strengths of the AOSOS system in collecting and reporting WIOA performance measures? [Probe: What are its weaknesses?]
8. How did the state offer support to the local workforce areas during PY20? Please be as specific as possible.
  - a. Were there other ways you think the state could have offered support to the local workforce areas in PY20?
9. Have you spoken to local workforce area staff about their experience delivering services in PY20?
  - a. If yes, what feedback have you collected about service delivery preferences from the local workforce areas?
10. What can the state do to be prepared for future disruptions of the traditional service model?
11. In which specific areas do you think the state should make investments if virtual services are to continue for the foreseeable future? (Examples: technology tools, technology devices, training staff, reconfiguring in-person physical spaces, reconfiguring in-person services, etc.)



# Appendix B-2: Local One-Stop Career Center Staff Interview Protocol - Adult/Dislocated Worker

## Guiding Research Questions

1. When reflecting on the adaptations in service delivery in PY20 for WIOA Title I services, what do local area One-Stop personnel believe were the most successful and least successful service transitions to a remote/virtual mode of delivery?
2. If virtual and/or hybrid service delivery continues, what recommendations do local area One-Stop personnel have about what such a hybrid mode and mix of services should ideally look like? What investments could be made to support virtual and/or hybrid service delivery?
3. What changes to processes and/or to data systems, if any, should be made to ensure that service delivery is adequately documented in a hybrid or virtual mode of service delivery?
4. What do local area One-Stop personnel need to be able to adapt more quickly to a public emergency in the future? How could the state support local area personnel during a future public emergency?
5. What was the WIOA Title I customer experience like in PY20? How do customers who received WIOA Title I services feel about their experience interacting with the public workforce system virtually, remotely, and/or in person?

## WIOA Services

1. Was your local area able to provide the full menu of services in PY20 as it had in previous years?
  - a. If not, what services were you not able to provide?
2. How did you change your services to adjust to the COVID-19 pandemic? [i.e., operational changes, technical changes, process changes, reporting changes, etc.]
3. As compared to previous program years (PY18/PY19), what were the strengths of the services offered in PY20? What were the weaknesses or challenges of the services offered in PY20?
4. What were your planned service priorities in PY20? And how did the pandemic shift those priorities (if at all)?
5. In your opinion, what do you see as the barriers to higher enrollment in Title I programs?
6. What do you see as the barriers to offering the full range of Title I services for adults/dislocated workers?
7. How did the state offer support to local workforce areas in PY20?

## Demographic Characteristics

1. In general, could you describe the demographic characteristics of the typical job seeker you worked with in PY20? Who took up services in PY20?
2. Was this population similar to or different from the job seekers who received services in PY19?
  - a. [Probe: How did they vary in their demographic characteristics? How did these populations vary in terms of their comfort with technology? How did these populations vary in terms of their education level? How did these populations vary in terms of their service needs?]
3. Is there a specific sub-population that you interact with most frequently in your One-Stop?

## WIOA Service Delivery

1. To what extent did you shift Title I services to hybrid, remote, or virtual service delivery?
  - a. What services are you continuing (in PY23) to offer hybrid, remote, or virtual?
  - b. What services are you continuing (in PY23) to deliver in person?
2. What services do you think are most suitable for virtual delivery? What services do you think are most suitable for in-person delivery?
3. From your experience, do you think delivering services in PY20 was less effective or more effective than delivering services in previous program years when services were primarily in-person based?
4. From your experience, what were the most significant challenges to delivering WIOA services to job seekers in PY20?
5. In your assessment, were job seekers responsive or not responsive to the modified WIOA Title I services in PY20?
  - a. Did job seekers engage with the services more or less in PY20, as compared to previous program years when services were primarily in person?
  - b. How, if at all, do you think that trend may have shifted since PY20?
6. From what you can tell, were the job seekers you worked with in PY20 more or less likely to achieve their optimal employment outcomes?
7. What were the impacts on staff – positive and negative – of delivering services with modifications to job seekers in PY20, compared to previous program years?
  - a. In general, how did staff at your One-Stop respond to the modifications to be able to deliver services in PY20?
  - b. With the benefit of hindsight, what do you think should have been handled differently to enable better staff responses to the modified ways of delivering services in PY20?
8. What steps has your One-Stop taken to continue to develop virtual service delivery throughout PY20? And after PY20?
9. What is your comfort level with using technology?
  - a. How comfortable were you with using technology pre-pandemic?
  - b. How comfortable were you with using technology in PY20?
  - c. Has your comfort level with using technology changed since then? [If so, how and what seems to have made a difference?]
10. Looking ahead, from your perspective, do you want the modifications made in PY20 to continue? Please specify which modifications and why.
11. What do you see as barriers to continued provision of hybrid, remote, and/or virtual services?
12. Do you have any recommendations for ways to change and/or improve WIOA services and/or service delivery?

## **AOSOS**

1. We know PY20 had many changes to the way service provision took shape, but in terms of reporting in AOSOS, in what data elements and/or service codes did the most improvisations occur in PY20 (if at all)?
2. When do you do your AOSOS data entry? Is this done in real time when interacting with a job seeker or is it done after the job seeker appointment?
3. We have heard data entry was a difficulty in PY20. Was this a challenge for you or your staff? If so, in what ways?
4. What services are the most difficult to document and track in a virtual setting? [Probe: Do you have any recommendations from your experience on how local areas can improve their ability to document and/or track virtual services?]

## Appendix B-3: Local One-Stop Career Center Staff Interview Protocol - Youth

### WIOA Services

1. What were your planned service priorities in PY20? And how did the pandemic shift those priorities (if at all)?
2. In your opinion, what do you see as the barriers to higher enrollment in Title I youth programs?
3. What do you see as the barriers to ensuring that youth have access to the full range of program elements offered? Do such barriers arise in general, or more commonly with particular services?
4. What services do you think are most suitable for virtual delivery? What services do you think are most suitable for in-person delivery?
5. How did the state offer support to local workforce areas in PY20?

### WIOA Service Delivery

1. Can you describe how your One-Stop operations generally were performed during PY20?
  - a. Were they in person, remote, virtual, hybrid?
  - b. Was this uniform across WIOA titles/populations or were youth services handled differently?
    - i. If so, how?
2. What challenges did your local area encounter in transitioning some, or all, youth services to virtual and/or remote? Do you believe remote, virtual, and/or hybrid service delivery should continue in some form for youth services?
  - a. If so, what recommendations would you make to ensure success of service delivery in those modalities?
  - b. Which particular services seem to be better delivered in those modalities and why so?
3. What do you see as barriers to continued provision of hybrid, remote, and/or virtual services?
4. What steps has your One-Stop taken to continue to develop virtual service delivery throughout PY20? And after PY20?
5. Looking ahead, from your perspective, do you want the modifications made in PY20 to continue? Please specify which modifications and why.

### AOSOS

1. We know PY20 had many changes to the way service provision took shape, but in terms of reporting in AOSOS, in what data elements and/or service codes did the most improvisations occur in PY20 (if at all)?
2. When do you do your AOSOS data entry? Is this done in real time when interacting with a job seeker or is it done after the job seeker appointment?
3. We have heard data entry was a difficulty in PY20. Was this a challenge for you or your staff? If so, in what ways?

4. What services are the most difficult to document and track in a virtual setting? [Probe: Do you have any recommendations from your experience on how local areas can improve their ability to document and/or track virtual services?]

### **WIOA Customer Experience**

1. What is your perception of the customer experience during PY20?
  - a. Were there modalities that customers seemed to prefer?
  - b. Among the customer feedback that you got, what suggestions/preferences stand out?
2. Reserve space for specifically following up on anything learned in the survey.
3. Do you have any recommendations for ways to change and/or improve WIOA Title I youth services and/or service delivery?
4. Is there anything else that would be helpful for us to know about youth service delivery in PY20?

## Appendix B-4: Focus Group Protocol - Adult/Dislocated Worker

1. Thinking back to between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021, can you describe what services you received from NJDOL to help you find a new job or a better job? Such services may have been: résumé assistance, interview assistance, job search assistance, short-term job training, and small group networking but it could also include other things. [Probe: Did you receive those services in person or via telephone or via Internet (website, etc.)?]
  - a. Did you work with a career counselor? How was that experience?
  - b. How easy/difficult was it for you to access the services being offered to you?
2. Overall, how would you describe the quality of the workforce development services you received?
3. Do you believe the workforce development services you received impacted your employment/reemployment outcome? Did the services you received help you achieve your goals?
4. Had you ever received job search assistance by your One-Stop before this period? If so, how did this experience compare to previous experiences in using the One-Stop for job search assistance?
5. What were the best aspects of the services you received? [Note to interviewer: the strengths of the services you received – could be the staff, the ease of access, the quality of the assistance]
6. What challenges, if any, did you experience in receiving services (WIOA Title I services)? [Note to interviewer: could be access to services, quality of services]
  - a. Were there any services that you had hoped to get through the One-Stop system that were not provided?
  - b. If yes, do you recall what the issue/challenge was that stood in the way of getting it?
7. If you received any services in a virtual (computer based) or remote (phone based) mode, did that way of getting employment services work for you meet your needs? Why or why not?
8. Now that you have gone through the public workforce development system, in your opinion, do you think more services should be offered virtually or remotely? Do you think services should remain mostly in person? Please explain. [Probe: Can you give specific examples of a service (or assistance) you received from the One-Stop that would have been better if it was offered in a different way?]
9. From the job seeker's perspective, what should your One-Stop know about how services are provided here? If you could give them advice on improving services for job seekers, what would it be?
10. What could have been done differently by your local One-Stop or by the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development to make it easier for you to take advantage of job search assistance?
11. Would you recommend that a friend or family member in a similar situation also go to the One-Stop for services?



## Appendix B-5: Focus Group Protocol - Youth

### Guiding Research Questions

1. When reflecting on the adaptations in service delivery in PY20 for WIOA Title I services, what do local area One-Stop personnel believe were the most successful and least successful service transitions to a remote/virtual mode of delivery?
2. If virtual and/or hybrid service delivery continues, what recommendations do local area One-Stop personnel have about what such a hybrid mode and mix of services should ideally look like? What investments could be made to support virtual and/or hybrid service delivery?
3. What changes to processes and/or to data systems, if any, should be made to ensure that service delivery is adequately documented in a hybrid or virtual mode of service delivery?
4. What do local area One-Stop personnel need to be able to adapt more quickly to a public emergency in the future? How could the state support local area personnel during a future public emergency?
5. What was the WIOA Title I customer experience like in PY20? How do customers who received WIOA Title I services feel about their experience interacting with the public workforce system virtually, remotely, and/or in person?

### Questions

1. Can you tell us about your interactions with the One-Stop system?
2. Do you recall what services you received from the One-Stop system (help with school, help finding a job, mentoring, other services)?
3. Did you physically go to a One-Stop or other location to access these services? If not, how did you access services (over the phone, through text/email, through a website, etc.)?
4. How easy/difficult was it for you to access the services offered to you through the One-Stop?
5. How did you learn about the services available to you at the One-Stop?
6. What are your feelings about the services you received? Do you believe they adequately met your needs? Do you believe the services helped you achieve your goals?
7. Were there any services that you had hoped to get through the One-Stop system that were not provided? If yes, do you recall what the issue/challenge was that stood in the way of getting it?
8. Overall, how would you describe the quality of the workforce development services you received?
9. Would you recommend that a friend or family member in a similar situation also go to the One-Stop for services?

## Appendix C: WIOA PY20 Process Study Plan, March 2022

Phase	Research Questions	Method WIPS Data	Method Survey	Method Focus Groups	Method In-depth Interviews	State Workforce Staff	One-Stop Directors	One-Stop WIOA Staff	Job Seeker Customers
1	Who accessed WIOA Title I adult career services in PY20?	●			●			●	
2	How did local area One-Stops in New Jersey adapt to providing WIOA Title I adult career services to job seekers during the July 2020 to June 2021 period when it was no longer possible to implement a fully in-person mode of service delivery?		●		●		●	●	
3	When reflecting on the adaptations in service delivery in PY20 for WIOA Title I adult career services, what do local area One-Stop personnel believe were the most successful and least successful service transitions to a remote/virtual mode of delivery?			●	●		●	●	
3	To what extent are local area One-Stop personnel prepared for another public emergency in the future? What do local area One-Stop personnel need to be able to adapt more quickly to a public emergency in the future? What does the state need to do to be prepared for a future public emergency? How could the state support local area personnel during a future public emergency?			●	●	●	●	●	

Phase	Research Questions	Method WIPS Data	Method Survey	Method Focus Groups	Method In-depth Interviews	State Workforce Staff	One-Stop Directors	One-Stop WIOA Staff	Job Seeker Customers
3	To what extent do local area One-Stop personnel support continuation of a hybrid service delivery mode for WIOA Title I adult career services? What recommendations do local area One-Stop personnel have about what such a hybrid mode and mix of services should ideally look like?			●	●		●	●	
3	When considering data collection for WIOA Title I adult career services specifically, what changes to processes and/or to data systems, if any, must be made to ensure that service delivery is adequately documented in a hybrid or virtual mode of service delivery?			●	●	●	●	●	
3	How do job seeker customers who received WIOA Title I adult career services feel about their experience interacting with the public workforce system virtually, remotely, and/or in person?			●					●
4	How can the public workforce system, state and local, be prepared for future disruptions and/or disaster recovery?		●	●	●	●	●	●	●

# Appendix D: Survey Instrument

## WIOA PY20 Process Study Survey on Title I Service Offerings

### Landing Page

This research study is being conducted by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University on behalf of New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development (NJDOL) on WIOA Title I Services in Program Year 2020 (PY20). The purpose of this study is to document the transition to virtual and remote WIOA Title I services necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic and to assess which services should remain virtual and/or remote and which services should revert back to in person in future program years. The research entails conducting a process evaluation of New Jersey's services to job seekers via the One-Stop Centers, which are funded by WIOA during PY20 (July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021).

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. This short survey asks about your experience with delivering WIOA Title I services in PY20 at your local One-Stop Career Center in the state of New Jersey. Participation in this survey is voluntary. Your name and personal information will not be collected or connected to your responses. Individual responses to this survey will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team.

For this survey, researchers are using the following definitions for modes in which WIOA Title I services may have been delivered during PY20:

- ▶ *In person*: Service delivery that takes place in the One-Stop office location in a face-to-face setting
- ▶ *Remote*: Service delivery that utilizes phone-based technology platforms and devices
- ▶ *Virtual*: Service delivery that utilizes computer-based technology platforms and devices
- ▶ *Hybrid*: A mixture of service delivery modes

If you have questions about taking part in this study, you can contact the study's Principal Investigator: Laurie Harrington, John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at [lharrington@ejb.rutgers.edu](mailto:lharrington@ejb.rutgers.edu)

By clicking the arrow below, you consent to participate in the research study.

### Intro 1

Of the following, which services provided by your local area during PY20 are you most knowledgeable about?

- 1 WIOA Title I adult and dislocated worker services
- 2 WIOA Title I youth services
- 3 Neither

## Intro 2

In which New Jersey One-Stop Career Center location do you work?

- 1 Atlantic
- 2 Bergen
- 3 Burlington
- 4 Camden
- 5 Cape May
- 6 Cumberland
- 7 Essex
- 8 Gloucester
- 9 Hudson
- 10 Hunterdon
- 11 Mercer
- 12 Middlesex-New Brunswick
- 13 Middlesex-Perth Amboy
- 14 Monmouth
- 15 Morris
- 16 Newark
- 17 Ocean
- 18 Passaic-Paterson
- 19 Passaic-Passaic
- 20 Salem-Salem
- 21 Salem-Penns Grove
- 22 Somerset
- 23 Sussex
- 24 Union-Elizabeth
- 25 Union-Plainfield

**If Intro1 = 1 skip to Adult 1, if Intro1 = 2 skip to Youth 1, if Intro1 = 3 terminate**

## Youth 1

Which of the following WIOA Title I youth services below were offered at your One-Stop Career Center during PY20?  
(Yes/No)

- 1 Service Engagement - Tutoring, study skills, and dropout prevention
- 2 Service Engagement - Alternative secondary school services or dropout recovery services
- 3 Service Engagement - Paid and unpaid work experience
- 4 Service Engagement - Occupational skills training
- 5 Service Engagement - Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training
- 6 Service Engagement - Leadership development
- 7 Service Engagement - Supportive services
- 8 Service Engagement - Adult mentoring
- 9 Service Engagement - Follow-up services
- 10 Service Engagement - Comprehensive guidance and counseling

- 11 Service Engagement - Financial literacy education
- 12 Service Engagement - Entrepreneurial skills training
- 13 Service Engagement - Services that provide labor market information
- 14 Service Engagement - Post-secondary preparation and transition activities

### Youth 2

How was "Service Engagement - Tutoring, study skills, and dropout prevention" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Youth 3

How was "Service Engagement - Alternative secondary school services or dropout recovery services" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Youth 4

How was "Service Engagement - Paid and unpaid work experience" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Youth 5

How was "Service Engagement - Occupational skills training" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_



### Youth 6

How was "Service Engagement - Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Youth 7

How was "Service Engagement - Leadership development" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Youth 8

How was "Service Engagement - Supportive services" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Youth 9

How was "Service Engagement - Adult mentoring" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Youth 10

How was "Service Engagement - Follow-up services" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Youth 11

How was "Service Engagement - Comprehensive guidance and counseling" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Youth 12

How was "Service Engagement - Financial literacy education" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Youth 13

How was "Service Engagement - Entrepreneurial skills training" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Youth 14

How was "Service Engagement - Services that provide labor market information" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Youth 15

How was "Service Engagement - Post-secondary preparation and transition activities" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Youth 16

In PY20, did you do engage in any of the following actions? Check all that apply.

- 1 Engaged new vendors who provided a service function directly to customers
- 2 Purchased new technology that altered pre-pandemic service delivery (i.e., software license or subscription to a platform)
- 3 Changed the way you documented service delivery
- 4 Revised existing materials to be more suitable to a virtual environment
- 5 Created new materials that are more suitable to a virtual environment
- 6 Created entirely new service offering to fill a gap brought about by changing circumstances
- 7 Changed any practices for gathering customer satisfaction data
- 8 Continued with pandemic policy changes for participation in services
- 9 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Youth 17

To expand on the previous question, please describe any specific service modifications to your Title I youth services program that were put into place for PY20.

Text box

### Youth 18

Of the changes made to services during PY20, which would you recommend stay in place in future program years and which changes would you recommend revert back as they were pre-COVID? Please explain.

Text box

## Youth 19

Is there anything not mentioned above that you feel like would be helpful to understand about Title I youth services provision in PY20?

Text box

## Youth Survey End

### Adult 1

Which of the following WIOA Title I adult and dislocated worker services below were offered at your One-Stop Career Center during PY20? (Yes/No)

- 1 Service Engagement - Preparation supports (training or individualized career services)
- 2 Service Engagement - Work experiences (individualized career services)
- 3 Service Engagement - Classroom-based training (training services)
- 4 Service Engagement - Work-based training (training services)
- 5 Service Engagement - Supportive services (individualized career services)

### Adult 2

How was "Service Engagement - Preparation supports (training or individualized career services)" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Adult 3

How was "Service Engagement - Work experiences (individualized career services)" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

**Adult 4**

How was "Service Engagement - Classroom-based training (training services)" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

**Adult 5**

How was "Service Engagement - Work-based training (training services)" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

**Adult 6**

How was "Service Engagement - Supportive services (individualized career services)" offered most of the time in PY20?

- 1 In person
- 2 Virtual - Online/asynchronous
- 3 Virtual - Online/synchronous
- 4 Remote (phone based)
- 5 Hybrid (any combination of above)
- 6 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

**Adult 7**

In PY20, did you engage in any of the following actions? Check all that apply.

- 1 Engaged new vendors who provided a service function directly to customers
- 2 Purchased new technology that altered pre-pandemic service delivery (i.e., software license or subscription to a platform)
- 3 Changed the way you documented service delivery
- 4 Revised existing materials to be more suitable to a virtual environment
- 5 Created new materials that are more suitable to a virtual environment
- 6 Created entirely new service offering to fill a gap brought about by changing circumstances
- 7 Changed any practices for gathering customer satisfaction data
- 8 Continued with pandemic policy changes for participation in services
- 9 Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

**Adult 8**

To expand on the previous question, please describe any specific service modifications to your Title I adult and dislocated worker program that were put into place for PY20.

Text box

**Adult 9**

Of the changes made to services during PY20, which would you recommend stay in place in future program years and which changes would you recommend revert back as they were pre-COVID? Please explain.

Text box

**Adult 10**

Is there anything not mentioned above that you feel would be helpful to understand about Title I adult and dislocated worker service provision in PY20?

Text box

**Adult Survey End**



## Appendix E-1: Survey Topline Results - Adult/Dislocated Worker

**Adult 1.** Which of the following WIOA Title I adult and dislocated worker services were offered at your One-Stop Career Center during PY20?

N=17

Service	Yes, Offered	No, Didn't Offer
Service engagement - Preparation supports (training or individualized career services)	17/17	0
Service engagement - Work experiences (individualized career services)	12/17	5/17
Service engagement - Classroom-based training (training services)	15/17	2/17
Service engagement - Work-based training (training services)	14/17	3/17
Supportive services (individualized career services)	17/17	0

**Adult 2.** How was "Service engagement - Preparation supports (training or individualized career services)" offered most of the time in PY20?

N=17

Mode of Delivery	Number	Percent
In person	0	
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	0	
Virtual - Online/synchronous	3	17.5%
Remote (phone based)	0	
Hybrid (any combination of above)	14	82%
Other	0	

**Adult 3.** How was "Service engagement - Work experiences (individualized career services)" offered most of the time in PY20?

N=12

Mode of Delivery	Number	Percent
In person	2	16.7%
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	1	8.3%
Virtual - Online/synchronous	0	
Remote (phone based)	1	8.3%
Hybrid (any combination of above)	8	66.7%
Other	0	

**Adult 4.** How was “Service engagement - Classroom-based training (training services)” offered most of the time in PY20?

N=15

<b>Mode of Delivery</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
In person	0	
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	0	
Virtual - Online/synchronous	0	
Remote (phone based)	0	
Hybrid (any combination of above)	15	100%
Other	0	

**Adult 5.** How was “Service engagement - Work-based training (training services)” offered most of the time in PY20?

N=14

<b>Mode of Delivery</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
In person	1	7.1%
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	1	7.1%
Virtual - Online/synchronous	2	14.3%
Remote (phone based)	0	
Hybrid (any combination of above)	10	71.4%
Other	0	

**Adult 6.** How was “Service engagement - Supportive services (individualized career services)” offered most of the time in PY20?

N=17

<b>Mode of Delivery</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
In person	0	
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	1	5.9%
Virtual - Online/synchronous	1	5.9%
Remote (phone based)	0	
Hybrid (any combination of above)	15	88.2%
Other	0	

**Adult 7.** In PY20, did you engage in any of the following actions? Check all that apply.

N=17

<b>Action</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Engaged new vendors who provided a service function directly to customers	7	41.2%
Purchased new technology that altered pre-pandemic service delivery (i.e., software license or subscription to a platform)	14	82.4%
Changed the way you documented service delivery	11	64.7%
Revised existing materials to be more suitable to a virtual environment	16	94.1%
Created new materials that are more suitable to a virtual environment	16	94.1%
Created entirely new service offering to fill a gap brought about by changing circumstances	10	58.9%
Changed any practices for gathering customer satisfaction data	9	53%
Continued with pandemic policy changes for participation in services	10	58.9%
Other	2	11.8%

## Appendix E-2: Survey Topline Results - Youth

**Youth 1.** Which of the following WIOA Title I youth services were offered at your One-Stop Career Center during PY20?

N=17

Service	Yes, Implement	No, Don't Implement
Tutoring, study skills, and dropout prevention	17/17	0/17
Alternative secondary school services or dropout recovery services	16/17	1/17
Paid and unpaid work experience	14/17	3/17
Occupational skills training	17/17	0
Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training	16/17	1/17
Leadership development	15/17	2/17
Supportive services	16/17	1/17
Adult mentoring	14/17	3/17
Follow-up services	17/17	0
Comprehensive guidance and counseling	16/17	1/17
Financial literacy education	15/17	2/17
Entrepreneurial skills training	15/17	2/17
Services that provide labor market information	17/17	0
Postsecondary preparation and transition activities	16/17	1/17

**Youth 2.** How was "Service engagement - Tutoring, study skills, and dropout prevention" offered most of the time in PY20?

N=17

Mode of Delivery	Number	Percent
In person	0	
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	2	11.7%
Virtual - Online/synchronous	1	5.9%
Remote (phone based)	0	
Hybrid (any combination of above)	14	82.4%
Other	0	

**Youth 3.** How was “Service engagement - Alternative secondary school services or dropout recovery services” offered most of the time in PY20?

N=16

<b>Mode of Delivery</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
In person	0	
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	0	
Virtual - Online/synchronous	2	12.5%
Remote (phone based)	0	
Hybrid (any combination of above)	14	87.5%
Other	0	

**Youth 4.** How was “Service engagement - Paid and unpaid work experience” offered most of the time in PY20?

N=14

<b>Mode of Delivery</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
In person	4	28.6%
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	0	
Virtual - Online/synchronous	2	14.3%
Remote (phone based)	0	
Hybrid (any combination of above)	7	50%
Other	1	7.1%

**Youth 5.** How was “Service engagement - Occupational skills training” offered most of the time in PY20?

N=17

<b>Mode of Delivery</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
In person	0	
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	1	5.9%
Virtual - Online/synchronous	3	17.6%
Remote (phone based)	0	
Hybrid (any combination of above)	12	70.6%
Other	1	5.9%

**Youth 6.** How was “Service engagement - Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training” offered most of the time in PY20?

N=16 (one yes respondent did not answer modality)

<b>Mode of Delivery</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
In person	0	
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	1	6.3%
Virtual - Online/synchronous	3	18.8%
Remote (phone based)	0	
Hybrid (any combination of above)	10	62.5%
Other	1	6.3%

**Youth 7.** How was “Service engagement - Leadership development” offered most of the time in PY20?

N=15 (one yes respondent did not answer modality)

<b>Mode of Delivery</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
In person	0	
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	2	14.3%
Virtual - Online/synchronous	1	7.1%
Remote (phone based)	0	
Hybrid (any combination of above)	11	78.6%
Other	0	

**Youth 8.** How was “Service engagement - Supportive services” offered most of the time in PY20?

N=15

<b>Mode of Delivery</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
In person	0	
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	2	13.3%
Virtual - Online/synchronous	0	
Remote (phone based)	1	6.6%
Hybrid (any combination of above)	12	80%
Other	0	



**Youth 9.** How was “Service engagement - Adult mentoring” offered most of the time in PY20?

N=14

<b>Mode of Delivery</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
In person	0	
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	1	7.1%
Virtual - Online/synchronous	1	7.1%
Remote (phone based)	0	
Hybrid (any combination of above)	12	85.7%
Other	0	

**Youth 10.** How was “Service engagement - Follow-up services” offered most of the time in PY20?

N=17

<b>Mode of Delivery</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
In person	0	
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	1	5.9%
Virtual - Online/synchronous	0	
Remote (phone based)	2	11.8%
Hybrid (any combination of above)	14	82.4%
Other	0	

**Youth 11.** How was “Service engagement - Comprehensive guidance and counseling” offered most of the time in PY20?

N=16

<b>Mode of Delivery</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
In person	0	
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	0	
Virtual - Online/synchronous	2	12.5%
Remote (phone based)	0	
Hybrid (any combination of above)	13	81.3%
Other	1	6.2%

**Youth 12.** How was “Service engagement - Financial literacy education” offered most of the time in PY20?

N=15

Mode of Delivery	Number	Percent
In person	0	
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	1	6.7%
Virtual - Online/synchronous	4	26.7%
Remote (phone based)	1	6.7%
Hybrid (any combination of above)	8	53.3%
Other	1	6.7%

**Youth 13.** How was “Service engagement - Entrepreneurial skills training” offered most of the time in PY20?

N=15

Mode of Delivery	Number	Percent
In person	0	
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	0	
Virtual - Online/synchronous	5	33.3%
Remote (phone based)	0	
Hybrid (any combination of above)	9	60%
Other	1	6.7%

**Youth 14.** How was “Service engagement - Services that provide labor market information” offered most of the time in PY20?

N=17

Mode of Delivery	Number	Percent
In-person	0	
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	1	5.8%
Virtual - Online/synchronous	2	11.8%
Remote (phone based)	0	
Hybrid (any combination of above)	14	82.4%
Other	0	

**Youth 15.** How was “Service engagement - Postsecondary preparation and transition activities” offered most of the time in PY20?

N=16

<b>Mode of Delivery</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
In person	0	
Virtual - Online/asynchronous	2	12.5%
Virtual - Online/synchronous	0	
Remote (phone based)	0	
Hybrid (any combination of above)	14	87.5%
Other	0	

**Youth 16.** In PY20, did you do engage in any of the following actions? Check all that apply.

N=17

<b>Action</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Engaged new vendors who provided a service function directly to customers	6/17	35.3%
Purchased new technology that altered pre-pandemic service delivery (i.e., software license or subscription to a platform)	15/17	88.2%
Changed the way you documented service delivery	10/17	58.8%
Revised existing materials to be more suitable to a virtual environment	16/17	94.1%
Created new materials that are more suitable to a virtual environment	16/17	94.1%
Created entirely new service offering to fill a gap brought about by changing circumstances	8/17	47%
Changed any practices for gathering customer satisfaction data	9/17	53%
Continued with pandemic policy changes for participation in services	15/17	88.2%
Other	1/17	5.8%

## Appendix F-1: Site Selection Memo

### ***WIOA PY20 Process Study: Outlined Selection Process for Six One-Stop Career Centers for Interviews***

For the purposes of part 3 of the WIOA PY20 process study, Heldrich Center researchers have selected six One-Stop Career Centers that meet the study's goal of ensuring equal representation from each **WBD region**: north, central, and south. Two WDBs have been selected from each region and were identified by the total number of Title I adult, dislocated worker, and youth customers (as defined by the WIPS data) served during Program Year 2020 (the primary evaluation year for this investigation).<sup>1</sup> From each region, the WDB with a highest number of total Title I customers and the site with the lowest number of WIOA Title I customers were selected. For WDBs with only one One-Stop Career Center, that site was selected. For WDBs with more than one One-Stop (Greater Raritan, Union County, Monmouth, and Cumberland-Salem-Cape May WDBs), a random number generator was used to randomly select a One-Stop Career Center for inclusion in the investigation.

Using the WIPS data again, researchers have separately created site performance reports for each One-Stop that take a closer look at who was served by each local area to inform the in-depth interviews with each site. These site performance reports will be included in the final report for the WIOA PY20 process study.

#### **North Region**

For the north region, the WDBs selected were Union County WDB (with 651 total Title I customers) and Greater Raritan WDB (with 105 total Title I customers). Because both WDBs have more than one One-Stop Career Center, a random number generator was deployed to select the **Hunterdon One-Stop** (for Greater Raritan) and the **Plainfield One-Stop** (for Union County).

#### **Central Region**

In the central region, Monmouth County saw the most WIOA Title I customers (448 total Title I customers), and Mercer County saw the fewest (149 total Title I customers). **Mercer County** has only one One-Stop Career Center location. Monmouth County has two, and of those, the **Eatontown One-Stop** was randomly selected to be included in this study.

#### **South Region**

The sites selected for the south region were Cumberland-Salem-Cape May WDB and Gloucester County WDB. Cumberland-Salem-Cape May WDB saw 370 Title I customers, and Gloucester County WDB saw 64 customers, across Title I adult and youth populations. Cumberland-Salem-Cape May WDB oversees four One-Stop Career Center locations. Of those, the **Cumberland One-Stop** location was randomly selected for inclusion in the study. **Gloucester** WDB only oversees one location.

These six One-Stop Career Center sites will be contacted to schedule in-depth interviews with Heldrich Center researchers. Researchers will request interviews with the WIOA Title I administrators most knowledgeable about services and service delivery from PY20. Specifically, researchers are interested in speaking with the adult and dislocated worker services director and the youth services director at these six One-Stop Career Centers in the state of New Jersey. Upon initial contact, Heldrich Center researchers will also request any and all documentation local area One-Stop Career Center personnel can provide regarding WIOA Title I services delivered in PY20 to understand what was offered, how it was provided, and what went well from the point of view of local area One-Stop Career Center staff. It is anticipated that these interviews will commence in late August or early September 2022.

# Appendix F-2: Site Selection Performance Reports

## Executive Summary

Fewer customers were served overall in PY20 compared to previous program years. Most customers were Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and white. Many customers identified as low-income individuals, single parents, or English Language Learners (ELLs), and indicated that they have low levels of literacy and/or cultural barriers. While many of these racial and barrier groups had lower employment rates in PY20, they often managed to increase their median earnings, measurable skill gains, and credential rates. Much of the data on measurable skill gains and credential rates at the local level are reported inconsistently across racial and barrier groups and/or are completely missing for entire program years. Though the data were reported more consistently in PY20 (or appeared to at the very least), it raises concerns about data collection and data quality. The findings below highlight trends and statistics specific to customers served by WBDs in **Great Raritan, Union County, Ocean County, Monmouth County, Cumberland-Salem-Cape May counties, and Gloucester County**. This report focuses on PY20, but often references comparisons to previous program years.

## Summary Demographics by Local Area

### 1. Greater Raritan

**Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker.** Most customers served were Black/African American and white as well as low-income individuals, single parents, ELL customers, and customers with low levels of literacy and/or cultural barriers. Data for median earnings, measurable skill gains, and credential rates were either inconsistently reported across groups and/or missing for an entire program year. While employment rates decreased year over year for most racial groups, they experienced greater measurable skill gains in PY20. Interestingly, all racial groups except for white customers and all barrier groups who received services through Title I dislocated services reported measurable skill gains of 100% in PY20. This is highly unusual. Credential rate, however, remained relatively consistent or decreased for many racial and barrier groups.

**Title I Youth.** There were fewer total customers served year over year across most demographics. Data for median earnings, measurable skill gains, and credential rates are missing for broad swaths of demographic groups, but most notably, racial and barrier groups. While available data show that employment rates decreased for many demographic groups year over year, those same customers increased their median earnings, measurable skill gains, and credential rates. A particularly interesting anomaly is that Greater Raritan reported that all female customers had credential rates of 100% in both PY19 and PY20.

## Specific Statistics to Note

### Title I Adult

- ▶ Most customers were Black/African American and white.
- ▶ The Q2 employment rate for Black/African-American customers decreased by 38.3 percentage points from PY19 to PY20. Interestingly, the Q2 employment rate for male customers declined from 63.6% to 9.1% year over year.
- ▶ Male customers increased their median earnings from \$2,012 to \$9,115 year over year.
- ▶ White customers increased their measurable skill gain by 66.7 percentage points and Black/African-American customers by 50 percentage points in PY20.

- ▶ ELL customers, and customers with low levels of literacy and/or cultural barriers experienced a decline of 50 percentage points year over year.

#### **Title I Dislocated Worker**

- ▶ Most customers identified as low-income, single parents, and/or ELLs or individuals with low levels of literacy and/or cultural barriers across all three years.
- ▶ Median earnings increased year over year for female customers, but decreased for male customers.
- ▶ Available measurable skills data show that all racial groups (except for white customers) and all barrier groups represented (e.g., low-income individuals, single parents, etc.) reported their measurable skill gain as 100% in PY20. This is not the case for *any* other local area.
- ▶ Credential rate either remained relatively consistent or decreased for many racial and barrier groups.

#### **Title I Youth**

- ▶ White customers had the lowest employment rates in PY19 and PY20. Specifically, average employment rates fell between 46.2% and 72.7% year over year for white customers.
- ▶ Available data show that median earnings increased substantially for 16- to 18-year-olds, rising from \$241 to \$5,057 in PY20.
- ▶ Measurable skill gain is reported inconsistently and/or is missing entirely.
- ▶ Greater Raritan is also missing large swaths of data (e.g., age, race, barrier) for credential rate. Female customers had credential rates of 100% for both PY19 and PY20, while male customers experienced a decrease of 50 percentage points year over year.

## **2. Union County**

**Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker.** While customers served decreased year over year for many groups with few exceptions (e.g., Black/African-American customers), there were more Hispanic/Latino and ELL customers, and customers with low levels of literacy and/or cultural barriers in PY20 compared to prior years. Employment rates remained relatively consistent or decreased for several racial and barrier groups, but these same groups (with a few exceptions) often increased their measurable skill gains and credential rates. There are significant gaps in reported data for measurable skill gains and credential rates, especially among barrier groups.

**Title I Youth.** There were more Black/African-American and white customers served in PY20 compared to prior years. Many barrier groups experienced a substantial increase in median earnings, including homeless individuals, low-income individuals, and single parents. Both Hispanic/Latino and white customers had high measurable skill gains year over year at 100%, which is unusual because they represent a considerable proportion of total customers served.

## **Specific Statistics to Note**

#### **Title I Adult**

- ▶ There were more ELL customers and customers with low levels of literacy and/or cultural barriers.
- ▶ Average employment rates for Hispanic/Latino customers were relatively high (83.3% to 93.1%) compared to other racial groups. Female customers experienced a relatively significant decline in employment rates in PY20, from 100% to 66.7% (Q2) and 83.3% to 37.5% (Q4).

- ▶ While median earnings increased for female customers, male customers reduced their median earnings by nearly half in PY20 (\$6,330 to \$3,294).
- ▶ Measurable skill gain data are missing across certain groups year over year with the exception of age.
- ▶ Credential rate, however, was reported slightly more consistently. Black/African-American and Hispanic/Latino customers, on average, experienced lower credential rates than other racial groups (between 73% and 76.9%).

#### **Title I Dislocated Worker**

- ▶ More Hispanic/Latino and white customers were served in PY20 compared to prior years, whereas participation among Blacks/African Americans steadily decreased year over year. Additionally, more ELL customers and customers with low levels of literacy and/or cultural barriers were served year over year.
- ▶ Employment rates decreased year over year for Black/African-American and Hispanic/Latino customers.
- ▶ Median earnings were reduced by nearly half for white customers, decreasing from \$10,410 to \$5,670 in PY20. Homeless individuals/runaway youth earned more than any other barrier group, with average median earnings of \$13,130 in PY20.
- ▶ Available data show that single parents increased their measurable skill gain from 60% to 100% in PY20. Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and white customers all increased their measurable skill gains year over year.
- ▶ There are missing data for credential rate, especially among barrier groups.

#### **Title I Youth**

- ▶ There were 56 Black/African-American customers in PY19 compared to 126 in PY20.
- ▶ Some employment rate data are missing for age groups.
- ▶ Median earnings increased year over year for homeless individuals, low-income individuals, and single parents.
- ▶ Measurable skill gains were unusually high for Hispanic/Latino and white customers at 100% year over year. This is especially the case when one considers that they are groups that are highly represented among customers. Black/African-American customers had lower measurable skill gains, which fell between 66.7% and 57.1% on average.

### **3. Ocean County**

**Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker.** The total number of customers decreased year over year across most demographic characteristics. While median earnings remained relatively consistent for Black/African-American and white customers who received dislocated worker services, Hispanic/Latino customers increased their median earnings substantially year over year from \$5,475 to \$9,190 in PY20. The average measurable skill gain for all racial groups of dislocated workers was considerably lower (24.3% to 58.5%) than their respective credential rates (86.7% to 100%). Those who identified as ELLs; individuals with low levels of literacy, cultural barriers, or low income; and single parents who received adult services had relatively consistent employment rates year over year. Much of the data on measurable skill gains and credential rates are spotty, especially across barrier groups.

**Title I Youth.** Most customers decreased year over year with few exceptions. Employment rates decreased for most racial groups, some by more than 30 percentage points. All barrier groups present had fewer earnings in PY20 compared to PY19. At the same time, the measurable skill gain for those who identify as ELLs, and individuals with low levels of literacy, cultural barriers, disabilities, and low income increased by more than 60 percentage points year over year. Similar to adult and dislocated worker, there are some missing data for certain barrier groups in terms of measurable skill gains and credential rates.



## Specific Statistics to Note

### Title I Adult

- ▶ Median earnings for Hispanic/Latino and white customers increased substantially year over year, growing from \$3,117 to \$5,992 and \$4,345 to \$6,197 in PY20, respectively.
- ▶ Measurable skill gain increased considerably for single parents from 7.7% to 50% in PY20.
- ▶ Male and female customers had incredibly low measurable skill gains ranging from 6.7% to 39.1% in both PY19 and PY20, yet the same groups had credential rates between 72.5% and 91.4%.
- ▶ Credential rates increased significantly for some racial groups, especially Black/African-American (76.2% to 86.7%), Hispanic/Latino (81.8% to 100%), and white customers (74.6% to 91.4%).

### Title I Dislocated Worker

- ▶ Measurable skill gain decreased for most racial groups, with the exception of Black/African-American and white customers who increased their measurable skill gain by more than 10 percentage points each year over year.
- ▶ Low-income individuals increased their credential rate by 20 percentage points from PY19 (80%) to PY20 (100%).
- ▶ Credential rates decreased year over year for Black/African-American (92.9% to 75%) and Hispanic/Latino customers (100% to 92.9%), but increased for white customers (85.7% to 92.7%).
- ▶ Employment rates decreased for most barrier groups with few exceptions.

### Title I Youth

- ▶ Employment rates decreased for most racial groups, with some groups experiencing a decrease of more than 30%.
- ▶ Hispanic/Latino youth experienced a year-over-year decline in their Q2 employment rate (80% to 66.7%) and the Q4 employment rate (80% to 50%).
- ▶ White youth had fewer earnings in PY20 (\$1,441) compared to PY19 (\$2,558).
- ▶ All barrier groups present had fewer earnings in PY20 than PY19. For example, low-income individuals earned \$4,800 in PY19 compared to \$1,134 in PY20.
- ▶ Measurable skill gain increased substantially year over year for ELLs and individuals with low levels of literacy and/or cultural barriers (24.4% to 91.7%), individuals with disabilities (21.2% to 83.3%), and low-income individuals (20% to 90%).

## 4. Monmouth County

**Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker.** There were more Black/African-American and white customers in PY20 compared to previous program years. The major barrier groups were low-income individuals, single parents, ELLs, and individuals with low levels of literacy and/or cultural barriers. Employment rates were lower in PY20 for many racial and barrier groups, while measurable skill gains remained relatively consistent or increased. Some groups increased their credential rates (e.g., female customers, low-income individuals, etc.), while other groups experienced a decrease in PY20, including ELL customers and customers with low levels of literacy and/or cultural barriers. Interestingly, Monmouth County reported that male customers who received services through Title I adult had a credential rate of 100% in PY20. This is unusually high compared to customers at other local areas.

**Title I Youth.** The major barrier groups among customers served were low-income individuals and individuals with disabilities. Unlike other service areas, many racial groups and a handful of barrier groups had lower measurable skill gains in PY20 compared to the prior program year. While Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and white customers had lower credential rates, Monmouth County reported increased credential rates for homeless individuals/runaway youth, ELL customers, and customers with low levels of literacy and/or cultural barriers.

### Specific Statistics to Note

#### Title I Adult

- ▶ There were more Black/African-American customers in PY20 (42) compared to prior years. The barrier groups represented were mostly low-income individuals and single parents.
- ▶ White customers had some of the lowest employment rates on average year over year (between 63.6% and 73.3%).
- ▶ Measurable skill gains were relatively high across racial groups that were served, falling between 81.5% and 100%.
- ▶ Male customers had a credential rate of 100% in PY20, while female customers had credential rates of 83% and 76.9% year over year.

#### Title I Dislocated Worker

- ▶ More white customers were served in PY20 (178) compared to prior years. Participation also increased year over year among Black/African-American and Hispanic/Latino groups. Most customers identified as being ELLs or having low levels of literacy and/or cultural barriers.
- ▶ Employment rates decreased year over year for Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and white customers.
- ▶ Median earnings decreased for low-income individuals, falling from \$8,071 to \$2,658.
- ▶ Measurable skill gain remained relatively consistent or slightly increased for most racial and barrier groups with few exceptions.

#### Title I Youth

- ▶ Most customers identified as low-income individuals and individuals with disabilities.
- ▶ White customers had some of the lowest employment rates and often had fewer median earnings compared to other groups.
- ▶ Homeless individuals/runaway youth increased their median earnings substantially from \$809 to \$8,860 in PY20.
- ▶ Measurable skill gain decreased for most racial groups and several barrier groups. Measurable skill gain for individuals with disabilities decreased from 60% to 11.1% in PY20.

## 5. Cumberland-Salem-Cape May Counties

**Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker.** While there were fewer total customers served, there were slightly more white customers in PY20 compared to PY18. Employment rates decreased for many customers across racial and barrier groups, while many customers increased their median earnings (e.g., Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and white customers). Interestingly, Asian customers who received services through the Title I dislocated worker program had median earnings of \$65,521 in PY19. This is exponentially higher than any other group in any service area across the state. There are significant gaps in the data for measurable skill gain, as all data are missing for PY20. Many racial and barrier groups increased their credential rates during PY20.

### **Title I Youth**

Fewer customers were served in PY20. Employment rates were often lower for customers across racial and barrier groups in PY20 compared to previous program years. There are considerable gaps in the data on measurable skill gain across demographics. However, all racial groups (except Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander customers), in addition to a handful of barrier groups, increased their credential rates.

#### **Specific Statistics to Note**

##### **Title I Adult**

- ▶ There were slightly more white customers in PY20 than PY18.
- ▶ Employment rates decreased for most groups with a few exceptions.
- ▶ Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino, and white customers increased their median earnings year over year. Ex-offenders increased their median earnings from \$2,892 to \$10,894 in PY20.
- ▶ All data related to measurable skill gain are missing for PY20.
- ▶ Several barrier groups, including ELL customers and customers with low levels of literacy and/or cultural barriers, increased their credential rates year over year.

##### **Title I Dislocated Worker**

- ▶ There was a consistent number of customers served in PY18 and PY19, but a substantial drop-off in PY20. There were 126 customers in PY19 compared to 51 in PY20.
- ▶ Employment rates decreased year over year for many racial and barrier groups, but particularly low-income individuals, single parents, and Black/African-American customers.
- ▶ Asian customers had median earnings of \$65,521 in PY19, which is significantly higher than any other group across the state.
- ▶ Several racial and barrier groups increased their credential rates year over year, including Black/African-American customers and single parents.

##### **Title I Youth**

- ▶ Low-income individuals had marginally higher employment rates than other barrier groups.
- ▶ American Indian/Alaska Native customers increased their median earnings substantially from \$271 to \$3,697 in PY20.
- ▶ Some of the data are missing for measurable skill gain, especially year-over-year data, so it is difficult to make claims about performance.
- ▶ Most racial groups (except Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander customers) increased their credential rates. Homeless individuals/runaway youth increased their credential rate by 50 percentage points in PY20.

## **6. Gloucester County**

**Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker.** There were far fewer customers served in PY20 compared to previous program years. Customers across racial and barrier groups reported lower employment rates with few exceptions, yet many customers increased their median earnings at the same time. Gloucester County did not provide any data on measurable skill gain for PY19. Additionally, there are some gaps in the data across demographic groups. A handful of groups increased their credential rates (e.g., white customers), but most other racial and barrier groups had lower credential rates in PY20.

**Title I Youth.** There were fewer customers served in PY20, especially low-income individuals. Yet this group, in particular, experienced lower employment rates. Unfortunately, much of the data for median earnings, measurable skill gain, and credential rate are either inconsistent and/or entirely missing for specific program years.

### **Specific Statistics to Note**

#### **Title I Adult**

- ▶ Employment rates decreased for many racial and barrier groups, especially Black/African-American customers and low-income individuals.
- ▶ Displaced homemakers earned significantly more than any other barrier group (or other demographic group, for that matter) in PY19 with \$16,126 in median earnings on average.
- ▶ Measurable skill gain is inconsistent across racial and barrier groups and is actually entirely missing for PY19.
- ▶ Many barrier groups reported relatively high credential rates, including low-income individuals (84.6% and 89.5%), single parents (86.4% and 85.7%), and ELLs and individuals with low levels of literacy and/or cultural barriers (86.2% and 80%). White customers increased their credential rate year over year, while it decreased for Black/African-American and Hispanic/Latino customers.

#### **Title I Dislocated Worker**

- ▶ Black/African-American customers and single parents had employment rates in PY20 that were nearly half of their employment rates in PY19.
- ▶ Hispanic/Latino customers increased their median earnings from \$6,514 to \$12,500 in PY20. ELL customers and customers with low levels of literacy and/or cultural barriers increased their median earnings from \$10,382 to \$20,764 in PY20.
- ▶ Measurable skill gain data are inconsistent across demographics and entirely missing for PY19.
- ▶ Asian customers decreased their credential rate from 100% to 50% in PY20. Credential rates also decreased for every barrier group represented (e.g., ELLs, individuals with low levels of literacy and/or cultural barriers, ex-offenders, low-income individuals, single parents, and so on).

#### **Title I Youth**

- ▶ There were fewer customers served year over year, especially low-income individuals.
- ▶ Employment rates decreased year over year for several barrier groups, including low-income individuals.
- ▶ Median earnings, measurable skill gain, and credential rate data are also inconsistent across demographic groups and are entirely missing for PY19.

## Appendix G-1: Interview Recruitment - State Staff Interviews

### **Recruitment Letter Requesting Participation via Email - State and Local Workforce Development Staff**

Dear [Name],

The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University is conducting an evaluation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I services in Program Year 2020 (PY20) on behalf of the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

The purpose of this evaluation is to document the impact of the pandemic and the recession on the state's ability to provide Title I unemployment services. The research entails conducting a three-part evaluation of New Jersey's services to the job-seeking public via the One-Stop Centers, which are funded by WIOA, during PY20 (July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021). The evaluation also examines the interventions employed to mitigate the effects of the unprecedented levels of unemployment within the state.

We are requesting your participation as an expert in New Jersey Department of Labor WIOA Title I service delivery, administration, and reporting. Participation in the evaluation is entirely voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time. If you take part in the research, you will be asked to take part in a virtual interview with Heldrich Center research staff. Your participation in this evaluation will take approximately one hour. We will be happy to answer any questions you may have about this evaluation. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Laurie Harrington  
Assistant Director of Research and Evaluation  
Principal Investigator

## Appendix G-2: Interview Recruitment - Local One-Stop Career Center Staff Interviews

**Subject Line:** Heldrich Center WIOA Process Study PY20; Request to Interview

**Email:**

Dear [Name],

The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University has contracted with the New Jersey Department of Labor to conduct a process study examining Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I services as they were deployed and delivered in Program Year 2020 (PY20), spanning July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021.

The purpose of this process study is to broadly document the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the state's ability to provide WIOA Title I services during that time. The overall goal is to understand how local areas transitioned to virtual/remote services to mitigate the effects of the unprecedented unemployment within the state. It will also aim to inform state and local policymakers on how best to provide virtual/remote services.

The Heldrich Center team is conducting in-depth interviews with six local One-Stops in the state of New Jersey. You have been selected as one of the six locations. We are asking for your help in understanding how your local area provided WIOA Title I adult/dislocated worker and Title I youth services in PY20. **We are requesting to conduct interviews with two individuals at your location: 1) the person most knowledgeable about adult and dislocated worker services and service delivery in PY20, and 2) the person most knowledgeable about youth services and service delivery in PY20.**

Please let us know who those individuals are, and how we can get in contact with them to have a conversation.

We continue to appreciate all of your cooperation in our efforts to evaluate WIOA services in New Jersey!

Thank you,

Liana Volpe

## Appendix G-3: Consent Form for Interviews (State-level Stakeholder and Local Staff Consent Forms)

### CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY

**TITLE OF STUDY:** Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Program Year 2020 Evaluation

**Principal Investigator:** Laurie Harrington, MPAP

This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you decide whether you want to take part in this study. It is your choice to take part or not. After all of your questions have been answered and you wish to take part in the research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. Keep this copy for your records. The alternative to taking part in the research is not to take part in it.

#### **Who is conducting this research study and what is it about?**

You are being asked to take part in research being conducted by Laurie Harrington, who is Assistant Director of Research and Evaluation at the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development based at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. The purpose of this study is to document the impact of the pandemic and the recession on the state's ability to provide Title I employment services to job seekers.

#### **What will I be asked to do if I take part?**

The interview will take about 60 minutes to complete. We anticipate 18 to 24 subjects will take part in the study.

#### **What are the risks and/or discomforts I might experience if I take part in the study?**

Breach of confidentiality is a risk of harm, but a data security plan is in place to minimize such a risk. Also, some questions may make you feel uncomfortable. If that happens, you can skip those questions or withdraw from the study altogether. If you decide to quit the interview your responses will NOT be saved.

#### **Are there any benefits to me if I choose to take part in this study?**

There are no direct benefits to you for taking part in this research. You will be contributing to knowledge about the key successes and challenges to WIOA Title I services during Program Year 2020, which are intended to inform policy decisions in the future.

#### **Will I be paid to take part in this study?**

You will not be paid to take part in this study.

#### **How will information about me be kept private or confidential?**

This research will NOT collect identifiable information. What you say will not be connected with you personally and your name will not appear in any publication or presentation on this study, including the final report to the New Jersey Department of Labor (NJDOL).



### **What will happen to information I provide in the research after the study is over?**

The information collected about you for this research will not be used by or distributed to investigators for other research or publication. However, it will be distributed to the NJDOL as part of the study's final report.

### **What will happen if I do not want to take part or decide later not to stay in the study?**

Your participation is voluntary. If you choose to take part now, you may change your mind and withdraw later. In addition, you can choose to skip interview questions that you are not comfortable answering or stop the interview at any time. You may also withdraw your consent for use of responses you provided during the interview, but you must do this in writing to the Principal Investigator, Laurie Harrington.

### **Who can I call if I have questions?**

If you have questions about taking part in this study, you can contact the Principal Investigator: Laurie Harrington, John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at [lharrington@ejb.rutgers.edu](mailto:lharrington@ejb.rutgers.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you can contact the IRB Director at:

New Brunswick/Piscataway Arts and Sciences IRB (732) 235-2866 or the Rutgers Human Subjects Protection Program at (973) 972-1149 or email us at [humansubjects@ored.rutgers.edu](mailto:humansubjects@ored.rutgers.edu).

Please keep this consent form if you would like a copy of it for your files.

By beginning the interview, you acknowledge that you are 18 years of age or older, have read the information and agree to take part in the research, with the knowledge that you are free to withdraw your participation without penalty.

## **ADDENDUM: CONSENT TO AUDIO/VISUALLY**

### **RECORD OR PHOTOGRAPH SUBJECTS**

You have already agreed to take part in a research study entitled: Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Evaluation of Program Year 2020 conducted by Laurie Harrington. We are asking your consent to allow us to audio-record the telephone interview as part of the research. You do not have to consent to be audio-recorded in order to take part in the main research.

The audio recordings will be used for analysis by the research team.

The audio recordings may include the following information that can identify you: name.

The audio recordings will be stored securely as a digital file in a secure Rutgers Box folder. The files will be destroyed upon the completion of the study procedures.

The audio recordings will not be used by us or distributed to investigators for other research.

Your signature on this form permits the investigator named above to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written consent.

**AGREEMENT TO BE RECORDED**

Subject

Name (Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Verbal acknowledgement: yes no      Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix H-1: Focus Group Email Recruitment

## **Recruitment Letter Requesting Participation in Focus Group via Email**

### **WIOA Title I Service Recipients/Job Seeker Customers**

Dear [Name],

The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University is conducting an evaluation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I services in Program Year 2020 (PY20) on behalf of the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

The purpose of this evaluation is to document the impact of the pandemic and the recession on the state's ability to provide Title I unemployment services. The research entails conducting a process evaluation of New Jersey's services to the job-seeking public via the One-Stop Centers, which are funded by WIOA, during PY20 (July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021). The evaluation also examines the interventions employed to mitigate the effects of the unprecedented levels of unemployment within the state.

We are requesting your participation as a recipient of the New Jersey Department of Labor WIOA Title I adult career services in PY20. Participation in the evaluation is entirely voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time. If you take part in the research, you will be asked to take part in a virtual focus group with Heldrich Center research staff to discuss your experience with the services you received via your local One-Stop. The focus group will be conducted via Zoom teleconferencing services. Your participation in this evaluation will take approximately one hour. For your participation, we are offering a \$50 electronic gift card.

We will be happy to answer any questions you may have about this evaluation. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Laurie Harrington  
Assistant Director of Research and Evaluation  
Principal Investigator

## Appendix H-2: Focus Group Call Script

Hello,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am calling from the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University. We are a research organization working with the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development conducting an evaluation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I services in Program Year 2020 (PY20).

From the state's records, it appears that you took part in WIOA Title I services during Program Year 2020, which could have been some kind of job search assistance, training, or other program. Does that sound familiar to you? [Pause for response]

I can tell you a little bit more about our project and why we are calling today if that sounds all right to you? [Pause for response]

The purpose of this evaluation is to document the impact of the pandemic and the recession on the state's ability to provide services to job seekers. The research entails conducting a process evaluation of New Jersey's services to the job-seeking public via the One-Stop Centers, which are funded by WIOA, during PY20 (July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021).

**Since you are familiar with the services we are evaluating, we are requesting your participation in a focus group with other individuals who also received similar services.** Participation in the evaluation is entirely voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time. The focus group will be conducted via Zoom teleconferencing services. Your participation in this evaluation will take approximately one hour. **For your participation, we are offering a \$50 electronic gift card.**

Are you interested in taking part in a focus group? [Pause for response]

(If yes) Great! Could you please give me your email address so I can send you all the details to join the virtual focus group?

Thank you for your time today.

## Appendix H-3: Consent Form for Focus Group - English

### CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY

#### Job Seekers

**Title of Study:** Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Program Year 2020 Evaluation

**Principal Investigator:** Laurie Harrington, MPAP

This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you decide whether you want to take part in this study. It is your choice to take part or not. After all of your questions have been answered and you wish to take part in the research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. Keep this copy for your records. The alternative to taking part in the research is not to take part in it.

#### **Who is conducting this research study and what is it about?**

You are being asked to take part in research being conducted by Laurie Harrington, who is Assistant Director of Research and Evaluation at the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development based at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. The purpose of this study is to document the impact of the pandemic and the recession on the state's ability to provide Title I services to job seekers.

#### **What will I be asked to do if I take part?**

This focus group will take about 60 minutes to complete. We anticipate 18 to 34 subjects will take part in the study.

#### **What are the risks and/or discomforts I might experience if I take part in the study?**

Breach of confidentiality is a risk of harm, but a data security plan is in place to minimize such a risk. Also, some questions may make you feel uncomfortable. If that happens, you can skip those questions or withdraw from the study altogether. If you decide to quit the focus group, your responses will NOT be saved.

#### **Are there any benefits to me if I choose to take part in this study?**

There are no direct benefits to you for taking part in this research. You will be contributing to knowledge about the key successes and challenges to WIOA Title I services during program year 2020, which are intended to inform policy decisions in the future.

#### **Will I be paid to take part in this study?**

You will not be paid to take part in this study. However, you will receive a \$50 electronic gift card, which will be emailed to you as a thank you for your participation if you complete the focus group.

### **How will information about me be kept private or confidential?**

This research will NOT collect identifiable information. What you say will not be connected with you personally and your name will not appear in any publication or presentation on this study, including the final report to the New Jersey Department of Labor (NJDOL).

### **What will happen to information I provide in the research after the study is over?**

The information collected about you for this research will not be used by or distributed to investigators for other research or publication. However, it will be distributed to the NJDOL as part of the study's final report.

### **What will happen if I do not want to take part or decide later not to stay in the study?**

Your participation is voluntary. If you choose to take part now, you may change your mind and withdraw later. In addition, you can choose to skip focus group questions that you are not comfortable answering or stop your participation in the focus group at any time. You may also withdraw your consent for use of responses you provided during the focus group, but you must do this in writing to the Principal Investigator, Laurie Harrington.

### **Who can I call if I have questions?**

If you have questions about taking part in this study, you can contact the Principal Investigator: Laurie Harrington, John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University, at [lharrington@ejb.rutgers.edu](mailto:lharrington@ejb.rutgers.edu).

If you have questions, concerns, problems, information, or input about the research or would like to know your rights as a research subject, you can contact the Rutgers IRB or the Rutgers Human Subjects Protection Program via phone at (973) 972-3608 or (732) 235-2866 or (732) 235-9806 OR via email [irboffice@research.rutgers.edu](mailto:irboffice@research.rutgers.edu), or you can write them at 335 George Street, Liberty Plaza Suite 3200, New Brunswick, NJ 08901.

Please keep this consent form if you would like a copy of it for your files.

By beginning the focus group, you acknowledge that you are 18 years of age or older, have read the information and agree to take part in the research, with the knowledge that you are free to withdraw your participation without penalty.

## **ADDENDUM: CONSENT TO AUDIO/VISUALLY**

### **RECORD OR PHOTOGRAPH SUBJECTS**

You have already agreed to take part in a research study entitled: Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Evaluation of Program Year 2020, conducted by Laurie Harrington. We are asking your consent to allow us to audio-record the telephone focus group as part of the research. You do not have to consent to be audio-recorded in order to take part in the main research.

The audio recordings will be used for analysis by the research team.

The audio recordings may include the following information that can identify you: name.

The audio recordings will be stored securely as a digital file in a secure Rutgers Box folder. The files will be destroyed upon the completion of the study procedures.

The audio recordings will not be used by us or distributed to investigators for other research.

Your signature on this form permits the investigator named above to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written consent.

**AGREEMENT TO BE RECORDED**

**SUBJECT CONSENT**

I have read this entire consent form, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed. All of my questions about this form and this study have been answered. I agree to be recorded in this study.

Verbal acknowledgment: yes   no                      Date \_\_\_\_\_

**SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR/INDIVIDUAL OBTAINING CONSENT**

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed all the important details about the study, including all of the information contained in this consent to be recorded form.

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent Name

(Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



# Appendix H-4: Consent Form for Focus Group - Spanish

## CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY

### Job Seekers

**TITLE OF STUDY:** Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Program Year 2020 Evaluation

**Principal Investigator:** Laurie Harrington, MPAP

Este formulario de consentimiento es parte de un proceso de consentimiento informado para un estudio de investigación y proporcionará información que lo ayudará a decidir si desea participar en este estudio. Es su elección participar o no. Una vez que se hayan respondido todas sus preguntas y desee participar en el estudio de investigación, se le pedirá que firme este formulario de consentimiento. Guarde esta copia para sus registros. La alternativa a participar en la investigación es no participar en ella.

### ¿Quién está realizando este estudio de investigación y de qué se trata?

Se le pide que participe en una investigación que está realizando Laurie Harrington, directora adjunta de Investigación y Evaluación en el Centro John J. Heldrich para el Desarrollo de la Fuerza Laboral con sede en la Escuela de Planificación y Políticas Públicas Edward J. Bloustein, en Rutgers, el Universidad Estatal de Nueva Jersey. El propósito de este estudio es documentar el impacto de la pandemia y la recesión en la capacidad del estado para brindar servicios de Título I a quienes buscan trabajo

### ¿Qué se me pedirá que haga si participo?

El grupo de enfoque tomará alrededor de 60 minutos en completarse. Anticipamos que de 18 a 34 sujetos participarán en el estudio.

### ¿Cuáles son los riesgos y/o molestias que podría experimentar si participo en el estudio?

La violación de la confidencialidad es un riesgo de daño, pero existe un plan de seguridad de datos para minimizar dicho riesgo. Además, algunas preguntas pueden hacerle sentir incómodo. Si eso sucede, puede omitir esas preguntas o retirarse del estudio por completo. Si decide abandonar el grupo de enfoque sus respuestas NO se guardarán.

### ¿Hay algún beneficio para mí si decido participar en este estudio?

No hay beneficios directos para usted por participar en esta investigación. Contribuirá al conocimiento sobre los éxitos y desafíos clave de los servicios del Título 1 de WIOA durante el año del programa 2020, que tienen como objetivo informar las decisiones de política en el futuro.

### ¿Me pagarán por participar en este estudio?

No se le pagará por participar en este estudio. Sin embargo, recibirá una tarjeta de regalo electrónica de \$50, que se le enviará por correo electrónico como agradecimiento por su participación si completa el grupo de enfoque.

### **¿Cómo se mantendrá privada o confidencial la información sobre mí?**

Esta investigación NO recopilará información identificable. Lo que diga no estará relacionado con usted personalmente y su nombre no aparecerá en ninguna publicación o presentación de este estudio, incluido el informe final al Departamento de Trabajo de Nueva Jersey (NJDOL).

### **¿Qué pasará con la información que proporcione en la investigación después de que finalice el estudio?**

La información recopilada sobre usted para esta investigación no será utilizada ni distribuida a investigadores para otras investigaciones o publicaciones. Sin embargo, se distribuirá al NJDOL como parte del informe final del estudio.

### **¿Qué pasará si no quiero participar o decido más tarde no permanecer en el estudio?**

Su participación es voluntaria. Si elige participar ahora, puede cambiar de opinión y retirarse más tarde. Además, puede optar por omitir las preguntas del grupo de enfoque que no se sienta cómodo respondiendo o detener el grupo de enfoque en cualquier momento. También puede retirar su consentimiento para el uso de las respuestas que proporcionó durante el grupo de enfoque, pero debe hacerlo por escrito a la investigadora principal, Laurie Harrington.

### **¿A quién puedo llamar si tengo preguntas?**

Si tiene preguntas sobre cómo participar en este estudio, puede comunicarse con la investigadora principal: Laurie Harrington, John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Rutgers University, en [lharrington@ejb.rutgers.edu](mailto:lharrington@ejb.rutgers.edu)

Si tiene preguntas, inquietudes, problemas, información o comentarios sobre la investigación o desea conocer sus derechos como sujeto de investigación, puede comunicarse con el IRB de Rutgers o el Programa de Protección de Sujetos Humanos de Rutgers por teléfono al (973) 972-3608 o (732) 235-2866 o (732) 235-9806 O por correo electrónico [irboffice@research.rutgers.edu](mailto:irboffice@research.rutgers.edu), o puede escribirnos a 335 George Street, Liberty Plaza Suite 3200, New Brunswick, NJ 08901.

### **Guarde este formulario de consentimiento si desea una copia para sus archivos.**

Al comenzar el grupo de enfoque, reconoce que tiene 18 años de edad o más, ha leído la información y acepta participar en la investigación, con el conocimiento de que es libre de retirar su participación sin penalización.

ANEXO: CONSENTIMIENTO PARA AUDIO-/VISUALMENTE

#### SUJETOS DE REGISTRO O FOTOGRAFÍA

Ya aceptó participar en un estudio de investigación titulado: Evaluación de la Ley de Oportunidades e Innovación de la Fuerza Laboral del Programa-Año 2020, realizado por Laurie Harrington. Le pedimos su consentimiento para permitirnos grabar en audio el grupo de enfoque telefónica como parte de la investigación. No tiene que dar su consentimiento para ser grabado en audio para participar en la investigación principal.

Las grabaciones de audio se utilizarán para el análisis por parte del equipo de investigación. Las grabaciones de audio pueden incluir la siguiente información que puede identificarlo: nombre.

Las grabaciones de audio se almacenarán de forma segura como un archivo digital en una carpeta segura de Rutgers Box. Los archivos serán destruidos al finalizar los procedimientos del estudio.

Las grabaciones de audio no serán utilizadas por nosotros ni distribuidas a los investigadores para otras investigaciones.

Su firma en este formulario permite que el investigador mencionado anteriormente lo registre como se describe anteriormente durante su participación en el estudio mencionado anteriormente. El investigador no utilizará la(s) grabación(es) por ningún otro motivo que no sea el establecido en el formulario de consentimiento sin su consentimiento por escrito.

**ACUERDO PARA SER GRABADO**

**CONSENTIMIENTO DEL SUJETO:**

He leído todo este formulario de consentimiento, o me lo han leído, y creo que entiendo lo que se ha discutido. Todas mis preguntas sobre este formulario y este estudio han sido respondidas. Acepto ser registrado en este estudio.

Reconocimiento verbal: sí      no      Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

**FIRMA DEL INVESTIGADOR/INDIVIDUO QUE OBTIENE EL CONSENTIMIENTO**

En la medida de mis posibilidades, he explicado y discutido todos los detalles importantes sobre el estudio, incluida toda la información contenida en este formulario de consentimiento para ser registrado.

Nombre del investigador/persona que obtiene el consentimiento (en letra de imprenta): \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

## Acknowledgments

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This report was produced by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey for NJDOL. The authors were Heldrich Center staff members Liana Volpe, Research Project Coordinator; Savannah Barnett, Research Associate; Grace Maruska, Research Project Assistant; Brittney Donovan, Research Project Assistant; Marjory Palius, Ed.D., Research Project Manager; and Laurie Harrington, Assistant Director of Research and Evaluation. Kevin Dehmer reviewed this report and provided substantive feedback. Robb C. Sewell was the editor. [Eric Tuvel](#) was the graphic designer. That authors wish to thank all who took the time to share their perspectives and expertise, which were invaluable in preparation of this report.

## About the Heldrich Center

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The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University is devoted to transforming the workforce development system at the local, state, and federal levels. The center, located within the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, provides an independent source of analysis for reform and innovation in policymaking and employs cutting-edge research and evaluation methods to identify best practices in workforce development, education, and employment policy. It is also engaged in significant partnerships with the private sector, workforce organizations, and educational institutions to design effective education and training programs. It is deeply committed to assisting job seekers and workers attain the information, education, and skills training they need to move up the economic ladder.

As captured in its slogan, “Solutions at Work,” the Heldrich Center is guided by a commitment to translate the strongest research and analysis into practices and programs that companies, community-based organizations, philanthropy, and government officials can use to strengthen their workforce and workforce readiness programs, create jobs, and remain competitive. The center’s work strives to build an efficient labor market that matches workers’ skills and knowledge with the evolving demands of employers. The center’s projects are grounded in a core set of research priorities:

- ▶ Career and Technical Education
- ▶ Data Collection and Analysis
- ▶ Disability Employment
- ▶ Job Seekers in Transition
- ▶ Program Evaluation
- ▶ Trend Analysis

Learn more: [www.heldrich.rutgers.edu](http://www.heldrich.rutgers.edu)