Pennsylvania Workforce Development System: An Operational Analysis

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Executive Summary

In collaboration with The Heinz Endowments, the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State (Clearinghouse) conducted an operational analysis of Pennsylvania's Workforce Development System. This effort aimed to assess the on-the-ground implementation of workforce development initiatives across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania by gathering direct feedback from stakeholders and refining recommendations from the Clearinghouse's March 2025 report, *An Examination of Pennsylvania's Workforce Development System* which provided an in-depth analysis of policies and protocols of PA's workforce development system, federal funding, state-level programs, and veteran-specific employment initiatives.

Between June and September 2025, Clearinghouse researchers conducted 45-minute feedback sessions with 34 representatives from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry (DLI), the State Workforce Development Board, four Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs), business leaders and employers, trade unions, education providers, and veteran-serving non-profit organizations. Prospective participants were identified using the membership rosters of the Advance Central, Delaware County, Three Rivers, and Philadelphia Works LWDBs, and these were the four LWDBs examined in the March 2025 Workforce Development report.

Summary of Findings
This operational analysis underscores both the strengths and limitations of Pennsylvania's Workforce Development System (WDS). While the system is broadly collaborative, engaging government agencies, local boards, employers, unions, and education providers, persistent challenges limit its overall effectiveness. Chief among these are funding constraints, fragmented data systems, and structural barriers such as limited access to transportation and child care. In addition, individual characteristics of job seekers, including skill mismatches in interpersonal, professional, and digital competencies, continue to hinder their employment outcomes.

The vast majority of Pennsylvania's workforce programs are federally funded through the six core WIOA programs (i.e., Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser, Adult Basic Education, and Vocational Rehabilitation). These programs operate under highly prescriptive guidelines, which constrain flexibility and innovation. At the same time, the Commonwealth's WIOA Combined State Plan intentionally delegates operational and financial decision-making to LWDBs. This approach is designed to empower local entities to tailor services to regional needs; however, it also introduces variability in service provision, eligibility criteria, and reporting practices, which contributes to system inefficiencies and coordination challenges.

Recommendations
The recommendations presented below reflect the sustained insights gathered through

two phases of our effort to examine the PA workforce system: an in-depth analysis of policies and protocols presented in the *March 2025 Examination of Pennsylvania's Workforce Development System* and the current operational analysis (i.e., feedback sessions) conducted between June and September 2025. They are grounded in direct information gathered from individuals who work within and alongside the system and are intended to address persistent challenges while building on promising innovations identified across both reports.

1. Expand and Diversify Funding Streams
- The U.S. Congress should reauthorize, increase, and modernize WIOA funding to better meet current workforce needs and challenges.
- Pennsylvania should dedicate funds for community colleges and technical schools to create program pipelines based on local employer needs.
- Pennsylvania should increase investment in wraparound services that reduce barriers to program and workforce participation, especially child care and transportation.

2. Align Education and Training to Workforce Needs
- The State Workforce Development Board should implement a state-wide, annual needs assessment of employers.
- The DLI and complementary state workforce agencies (e.g., Department of Education, Department of Human Services) should prioritize training programs that are tied to interpersonal and professional skills based on data from employers about their needs.
- The DLI and workforce agencies should collaborate with employers and education providers to embed robust evaluation plans into new and/or existing programs to ensure effectiveness.

3. Embed Data into Workforce Development
- The DLI, workforce agencies should establish a working group to examine and reassess common metrics to be used in DLI and workforce programs.
- The DLI and workforce program administrators should embed data and/or evaluation requirements in program design and delivery to ensure accountability and continuous quality improvement.

4. Strengthen Workforce Development Infrastructure
- The DLI should conduct a comprehensive review of workforce programs to assess alignment and identify gaps in service coordination including (1) mapping existing programs, services, and funding streams to highlight overlaps, inefficiencies, and areas of improved integration; (2) developing a standardized referral process; (3) establishing shared performance metrics across programs; and (4) implementing cross-agency training to ensure a unified approach to workforce development.
- DLI, the PA Department of Education, and regional workforce boards should establish a working group with the aim of improving data sharing across core workforce programs by addressing legal barriers and funding integration efforts.
- DLI, the PA Department of Education, and regional workforce boards should

establish core programs and components that are consistent across their offerings while also allowing for some locally responsive components to be added.

- DLI, in collaboration with Pennsylvania state agencies and education institutions, should develop a common participant identifier to streamline data collection and improve tracking of workforce outcomes.

Conclusion

By expanding funding streams, strengthening data infrastructure, and scaling successful local models, Pennsylvania can build a more equitable and responsive workforce system. Robust collaboration among stakeholders and strategic investment in wraparound services and technology will be essential to meet the evolving needs of job seekers and employers across the Commonwealth.

Philanthropic organizations also have a critical role to play in this transformation. Their flexible funding and mission-driven approach enable them to be innovative, take risks, and pilot innovative programs, fill emerging service gaps, especially in areas where public funding is limited or slow to adapt. Moreover, they are uniquely able to catalyze cross-sector collaboration. By supporting innovations and piloting promising models, philanthropies can help accelerate system transformation.

Moving forward, a unified vision, grounded in data, driven by community engagement, and supported by both public and private investment, can transform PA's WDS into a more impactful system.

Introduction

In collaboration with The Heinz Endowments, the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State (Clearinghouse) conducted an operational analysis of Pennsylvania's Workforce Development System. This effort aimed to assess the on-the-ground implementation of workforce development initiatives across the Commonwealth by gathering direct feedback from stakeholders and refining recommendations from the Clearinghouse's March 2025 report, *An Examination of Pennsylvania's Workforce Development System*.

The analysis incorporated the following: 45-minute feedback sessions with key stakeholders involved in the workforce development system at the state and local levels, refinements to the recommendations from the abovementioned workforce development report, and the development of new recommendations based on insights gathered during the feedback sessions.

Methods

Between June and September 2025, Clearinghouse researchers conducted feedback sessions with representatives from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry (DLI), the State Workforce Development Board, four Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs), business leaders and employers, trade unions, education providers, and veteran-serving non-profit organizations.

Prospective participants were identified using the membership rosters of the Advance Central, Delaware County, Three Rivers, and Philadelphia Works LWDBs, and these were the four LWDBs examined in the March 2025 Workforce Development report. Some people serve on multiple Workforce Development Boards (WDBs). To avoid overrepresentation, individuals who served on multiple boards were counted once based on their first listed affiliation. Participants were also chosen from Pennsylvania-based veteran employment non-profit organizations and referrals from feedback session participants.

Clearinghouse researchers contacted 63 potential participants and conducted feedback sessions with 34 individuals (54% response rate). The distribution of participants is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Distribution of Feedback Session Participants by Category

Participant Category	Location					
	Advance Central WDB	Three Rivers WDB	Philadelphia Works WDB	Delaware County WDB	Others	Totals
State Government	1	2	1	1	2	7
LWDBs	2	1	0	2	2	7
Business Leaders and Employers	2	3	3	1	0	9
Education Providers	2	1	1	1	1	6
Veteran Serving Non-Profit Organizations	0	1	2	0	0	3
Skilled Trade Unions	1	0	0	2	0	3
Total Feedback sessions	8	8	7	7	5	35

Note. Each feedback session was counted once regardless of the number of participants who attended it. The "Advance Central" State Government feedback session had 4 participants, and one of the "Others" State Government feedback sessions had 2 participants.

Feedback Session Questions

Tailored questions were developed for each participant category to gain insight into the organization's role within Pennsylvania's workforce development system. The feedback sessions explored the following topics: programs and services delivered, data used for decision-making and determining success, systemic challenges, barriers to individuals gaining employment, services provided to veterans, and opportunities for system improvement. The full list of questions is available in Appendix A: Operational Analysis Questions. A sample of the outreach email that was used to invite participants is included in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

Researchers used a mixed-methods approach and combined artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted text analysis with human review to identify common themes and key trends across the workforce development system. After completing and de-identifying the 35 feedback session transcripts, the notes were uploaded to NotebookLM, Google's AI research tool. Unlike other AI tools that may draw from external sources or the broader internet, NotebookLM analyzes only the content provided by the researcher. This feature was critical for maintaining the confidentiality of feedback session notes and ensuring the theme identification was grounded solely on the data collected during the operational analyses feedback sessions. In addition, NotebookLM offers intuitive summarization and theme extraction capabilities, and these capabilities helped to streamline the initial coding process. The outputs derived from the NotebookLM were then reviewed and validated by researchers to ensure accuracy and alignment with the objectives of this report.

To initiate the analysis, researchers used the following prompt:

"With these sources, can you find the main themes and any subsequent themes (e.g., sub-subthemes, etc.), throughout, summarizing these in one or a few sentences in a table and noting which sources (by PDF title) mention what theme in a separate column?"

To help refine the results or for additional clarity, other prompts were used. After NotebookLM generated its output, researchers manually cross referenced the extracted themes with the original feedback session notes to ensure accuracy and appropriate interpretation. Researchers also supplemented results with specific examples from the feedback session notes to contextualize and enrich the findings. Following this validation process, the results were compiled and synthesized into this report.

Findings

Participant feedback session results are grouped together by category (i.e., state government representatives, LWDBs, business leaders and employers, education providers, veteran-serving non-profit organizations, and union representatives) and are presented below.

State Government Representatives

Clearinghouse researchers had informative conversations with five individuals who serve on the four LWDBs of interest and who work within the Pennsylvania DLI at the Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO) and in the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). To provide a state-wide government perspective, researchers met with the Director of the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA) and the DLI Assistant Secretary for Workforce Development.

These participants serve on the Advance Central, Delaware, Three Rivers, and Philadelphia Works LWDBs. In their roles, they represent the interests of the BWPO and the OVR, report on PA CareerLink activities, discuss funding and programming, and advocate for Pennsylvanians who have disabilities. In addition, the government representatives administer workforce development funding, oversee programs, and analyze data within the state government. Participants were asked targeted questions to help researchers determine their perspectives on the Workforce Development System (WDS). These questions explored their specific roles and responsibilities within the WDS; key challenges facing the system; common barriers individuals encounter when seeking employment; methods for collecting, analyzing, and applying workforce data; programs and services tailored for veterans; and recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the WDS.

Role in the Workforce Development System

The Pennsylvania WDS is primarily governed by federal legislation, including the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the Wagner-Peyser Act. DLI oversees the system at the state level by disbursing federal and state funding, implementing policies and programs, collecting data, enforcing compliance, and

governing apprenticeship programs.

Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO). Housed within the DLI, the BWPO implements WIOA and Wagner-Peyser programs and collaborates with One-Stop partners (e.g., state and federal agencies and programs) at PA CareerLink sites. BWPO is also responsible for managing foreign labor certification, rapid response to large-scale layoffs, the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, and state staff at PA CareerLink offices. The BWPO works closely with LWDBs and employers to identify regional employer needs and the required skills that are needed to fill those positions. BWPO uses this information to create grant programs that allocate training dollars toward regionally driven, industry-specific workforce training.

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). OVR is also housed within the DLI, and it helps Pennsylvanians who have disabilities gain and maintain employment. As a mandated WIOA partner, OVR serves individuals who have disabilities (e.g., physical, learning, mental) from age 14 through retirement, and this support includes operating a transition program for in-school youth (14–18 years old).

Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA). CWIA collects and reports performance metrics for the workforce system (e.g., employment, wages, credential attainment). CWIA uses these metrics and other data to produce labor market information that is distributed throughout the WDS for strategic planning and operational decision-making. CWIA's other data sources include the United States (U.S.) Census, American Community Survey, National Center for Education Statistics, Census of Agriculture, Pennsylvania New Hire Reporting Program, and local employer data. These data sources are widely utilized within and outside of the state government to help officials make decisions regarding workforce development, economic development, and education.

CWIA also supports LWDBs by responding to questions from boards, assisting with investment of limited training dollars, and evaluating local initiatives. Every 6 months, CWIA hosts a Workforce Forum at an LWDB site to convene CWIA customers to discuss how they utilize information, connect with local boards, and showcase CWIA services. Moreover, CWIA aids career seekers by providing occupational and career information to help individuals identify potential career paths. In addition, CWIA assists educational institutions in aligning their training programs with current occupational information. CWIA produces High Priority Occupation lists annually, and these lists align workforce-training funding with in-demand, family-sustaining jobs.

Use of Metrics and Data

State government representatives emphasized the importance of collecting and using data to evaluate program effectiveness and guide decisions. Programs collect federally required metrics, including the number of job seekers served, wages, job retention at two and four quarters after program exit, and whether participants gained new skills or credentials.

Additional data are collected based on program type. For example, veteran-specific

programs track the number of veterans engaged. Reemployment programs record participants' duration in the program to assess reductions in unemployment compensation. Dislocated-worker programs measure outreach and participation rates, and disability-based programs document how quickly services are received if a participant is working at a competitive integrated employer and if employment was maintained 3, 6, and 12 months after program competition.

Veteran Services

Most of the government representatives (n = 5) reported that specialized programs and staff are embedded within the PA CareerLink system to serve veterans. Veterans are eligible for all the PA CareerLink services that are available to the public and receive priority service.

Intensive Services for Veterans with Employment Barriers. If a veteran identifies during intake as having a "significant barrier to employment," government representatives (n = 4) stated that these veterans are referred for more intensive services through Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPs). DVOPs provide employment services to disabled veterans, such as creating individualized employment plans, coaching veterans on job searching and skill development, and connecting veterans with employers. These same representatives also utilize Local Veteran Employment Representatives (LVERs), also located at PA CareerLink sites, who help connect veterans with jobs by conducting outreach to employers and facilitating job placement.

Match Meetings to Connect Veterans to Employers. One state government representative discussed Match Meetings and indicated this was where DVOPs and LVERs advocate for individual veterans who are seeking employment by marketing their skills to employers. Employers may attend these meetings to share hiring needs and engage directly with veterans.

Outreach. To ensure veterans are aware of available resources, government representatives (n = 2) reported that DLI conducts outreach during military transition periods through Veterans Affairs offices, Veteran Centers, Transition Assistance Program locations, and SkillBridge employers, since direct marketing of services to veterans is not allowed. In addition, representatives indicate outreach is conducted at non-traditional locations, such as homeless shelters and correctional facilities.

Measure Veteran Participation and Employment. A few state government representatives (n = 3) indicate that program outcomes such as the number of veterans contacted and served and veteran employment and salaries are tracked. According to one state representative, approximately 4,000 veterans seek assistance at PA CareerLink annually, and about 2,000 receive support from DVOPS and/or LVERs.

Another state representative highlighted the use of various data sources to identify workforce trends and needs, including Bureau of Economic Analysis reports, U.S. Census data, National Center for Education Statistics data, and Pennsylvania's New Hire Reporting Program in collaboration with the Department of Human Services.

Services for Individuals with Disabilities

Three representatives from OVR described how this office provides tailored workforce services to Pennsylvanians who have disabilities. These services address individual barriers, skill gaps, and career interests and include resume and job placement assistance, upskilling, and formal training opportunities.

Moreover, OVR also supports in-school youth (ages 14–21) in high school, post-secondary, or alternative educational settings to help them transition from learning to employment (n = 2). Approximately 15% of WIOA funds are allocated to support this effort.

OVR representatives (n = 3) also collaborate with PA CareerLink offices through designated liaisons who participate in PA CareerLink awareness days and job fairs and meet regularly with DVOPs and LVERs to coordinate veteran support.

According to an OVR representative veteran-specific programs are no longer available through OVR. Veterans now access general services that are available to everyone. However, one OVR representative emphasized that OVR continues veteran-outreach efforts at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities, transitional housing and homeless shelters, correctional facilities and drug rehabilitation centers. OVR maintains an inter-agency agreement with the VA to enhance benefits and avoid service duplication. While veterans cannot receive the same service from the state and the federal VA programs simultaneously, OVR leverages state funding and external partnerships to maximize support within allowable limits.

Workforce Challenges

Officials identify workforce challenges by holding regular meetings with PA CareerLink administrators and staff, by reviewing reports from the CWIA, and by evaluating core data compiled by a DLI team. These core data reports draw information from multiple sources, including the U.S. Department of Labor's Participant Individual Record Layout, job-posting trends, service-delivery metrics from One-Stop system partners, and the number of veterans served. Despite these efforts, significant gaps remain in obtaining comprehensive supply-side data, such as the educational background and skillsets of PA residents. In addition, the lack of standardized, measurable indicators of success hampers efforts to evaluate workforce initiatives. Moreover, declining response rates to surveys from employers, census survey recipients, and program participants further reduce sample sizes, and this situation undermines data validity and complicates analysis.

Several persistent challenges continue to affect Pennsylvania's labor market:
- **Skill Mismatch.** A majority of officials (n = 7) reported a growing mismatch between the skills job seekers possess and those employers require. This mismatch is exacerbated by rapid technological change and demographic shifts.
- **Technology Gaps.** According to one state representative, many job seekers lack

proficiency in digital tools, including emerging technologies like AI.

- **Rising Educational Requirements.** Three officials noted that more jobs require job seekers to have post-secondary education or an associate's degree. In addition, entry-level opportunities are increasingly demanding proof of skills beyond a high school diploma.
- **Aging Workforce.** The retirement of the baby boomer generation and a limited pipeline of younger workers are creating labor shortages. Employers are struggling to find qualified workers according to one government representative. CWIA expects that demand may soon exceed supply; however, automation and AI may potentially fill the gap.
- **Soft-Skill Deficit.** Another frequently cited challenge and a major barrier to hiring are that individuals lack essential interpersonal and professional skills, such as teamwork, flexibility, and work ethic. These skills are seen as difficult to teach but are critical to workplace success (n = 2).

State officials (n = 5) identified several region-specific workforce challenges. In Chester and Montgomery counties, wages offered by employers often lag behind the region's high cost of living. In Pittsburgh and similar areas, access to mental health services is limited, and long waiting lists and a shortage of mental health providers hinder job seekers who need support before entering or re-entering the workforce.

Before they can secure employment, job seekers across the Commonwealth face complex barriers that must be addressed such as living in poverty, extended time away from the workforce, criminal history, limited English proficiency, and the lack of foundational documents like birth certificates. Additional systemic challenges include the following:

- **Child Care.** The high cost and scarcity of child care are impediments.
- **Transportation.** In rural areas, limited transportation options restrict access to education, job-search assistance, and employment opportunities.
- **Infrastructure.** In some North Central PA regions, poor infrastructure, including limited cell service and inadequate broadband access, further isolate job seekers from resources and opportunities.

Leverage Multiple Funding Sources for Broader Reach. To address these challenges, four state government representatives reported that the PA WDS leverages federal WIOA funds and other funding sources like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); the PA Employment, Advancement, and Retention Network program; privately funded initiatives; and corporate-sponsored employment programs to assist individuals in need. These resources are intertwined to expand reach and impact, which often occur through referrals to partner agencies.

Advance Workforce Development with AI and Digital Tools. To keep pace with technological change, the DLI is training PA CareerLink staff to use AI tools in their work. According to one representative, this initiative intends to improve staff and client technological competency. In addition, PA Skill Up, a free, state-funded, online platform, delivers training in software and technical skills (e.g., Microsoft Office, QuickBooks, Adobe Creative Suite, CompTIA), business and professional skills (e.g., project

management, human resources, data management), and workplace readiness and safety (e.g., customer service, health and safety, work readiness, soft skills). Skill Up Utilization data was requested from DLI but was not provided.

Recommendations for Improvement

The recommendations from government representatives centered around three areas: data, operations, and funding.

Improve Data Integration and Outcome Measurement. Two representatives emphasized the need for a robust data-sharing infrastructure among state agencies, LWDBs, and other WDS stakeholders. One representative, who is actively working to foster synergy among these parties, noted that improved data integration would enhance performance accountability, promote systemic efficiencies in service delivery, and reduce duplication of services and allow funds to be reallocated to other priorities.

One official noted that current federal reporting requirements provide some measure of effectiveness, but employment outcomes and success differ for a person who has significant employment barriers versus someone who needs minimal support (e.g., job-search resources). Therefore, consideration should be given to adjusting measures to account for the starting point of each participant.

Reduce Bureaucracy to Strengthen Workforce Services. Improving data sharing and interpretation promotes a clearer contextual understanding of job seekers and industry needs. Therefore, one participant suggested reducing the bureaucracy in the WDS by streamlining fiscal processes to improve relationships with vendors, encourage more providers to participate in the system, and improve responsiveness and flexibility in service delivery.

Expand Outreach and Visibility to Strengthen Workforce Access. Several participants (n = 4) mentioned a need to increase statewide brand awareness for services offered through their programs. This could include developing alternative outreach strategies for veterans, sharing impact stories to complement quantitative data, and installing interactive kiosks in schools and libraries to engage younger audiences in the job market.

Scale Services Through Sustained Federal Investment. One representative emphasized the importance of continued federal investment in state-level programming. While such funding already supports many workforce initiatives, enhanced federal support could further incentivize the state to scale services and reduce the likelihood of individuals being turned away due to funding shortages. Ultimately, funding, services, and infrastructure should be scaled proportionally to meet the needs of Pennsylvania's population.

Local Workforce Development Boards Leaders

Seven workforce development board leaders participated in feedback sessions with

researchers: one was from the state-level Pennsylvania WDB, four were from LWDBs in the target regions, and two were from adjacent areas near Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. Most leaders serve regions that are rural or a mix of rural and urban. Their boards include diverse stakeholders such as large and small employers, unions, chambers of commerce, education providers (e.g., community colleges, adult-education providers), government representatives, economic-development entities, and non-profit partners.

Role in the Workforce Development System

Most leaders (n = 4) described their primary role as connecting candidates with employers to meet local workforce demands. LWBDs invest in training programs that align with high-priority occupations and regional employer needs. A few leaders also noted that they invest in training for potential new hires and existing employees (i.e., incumbent workers) to help them attain and retain specific skillsets, and one LWDB specifically funds incumbent worker training for individuals in the manufacturing and healthcare industries. One leader also highlighted that individual training accounts and on-the-job training are funded through WIOA and set by LWDBs, so employers do not pay the full expense for apprenticeships and other trainings.

Support for Job Seekers. LWDBs also serve job seekers who face barriers to employment such as low income, dislocation from employment, limited work experience, or veteran status. One leader emphasized the importance of providing this population with relevant training and access to professional networks.

Employer Engagement. Boards support employers by helping them create competitive job offerings. For example, at one LWDB, employers learn strategies regarding how to provide quality positions that create long-term employees. Some of these strategies include promoting internal advancement opportunities and requiring employers to pay an entry-level wage that is at least 235% of the poverty line for a single-person household to retain employees and their learned skillsets.

Collaboration and Innovation. LWDB leaders act as conveners and collaborators and remark on the importance of establishing and maintaining partnerships between the parties in the WDS to fully understand the challenges seen at different organizations. When employers, education partners, and industry leaders come together, most leaders (n = 4) reported that sharing challenges often lead to shared solutions, such as developing joint funding opportunities, establishing industry partnerships, and creating events for points of connection in their areas.

For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, one LWDB, through an industry partnership, was able to provide local hospitals with the Personal Protective Equipment they needed to do their job safely. Two other leaders highlighted how collaboration with partners created engagement opportunities through employer open houses, targeted job fairs, and youth-engagement programs where high school students could explore industries like construction and healthcare through employer-hosted dinners.

As it relates to funding these types of programs, one leader highlighted her role in

shaping board funding, which includes writing grants and acting as the fiscal agent for incoming funds (i.e., WIOA, other grants). This strategic role ensures resources are directed to meet community needs effectively.

Make Data-Informed Decisions

Use Labor Market Data Strategically. LWDB leaders rely heavily on data to help them guide strategy and program investments. Four leaders reported they examined information from job postings to help them identify the required skills, certifications, and desired soft skills employees would need to possess. In another example, these leaders used common data sources, like Lightcast and CWIA, to find labor market trends and needs, such as the High Priority Occupations list and wage and new-hire data. These data help state and local WDBs ensure training and education providers remain responsive to evolving workforce needs. One leader mentioned that these data are also used to target interventions for individuals who face employment barriers, such as those recovering from substance use disorder or re-entering society after incarceration.

Measure Program Impact. LWDBs use data to measure program progress and success and to guide investments and to meet funding requirements. For instance, several LWDBs discussed the data they collect, which are used to determine the funding they receive to provide general and intensive services. Collected metrics include tracking employment barriers, wages, 6- and 12-month retention, and training outcomes (e.g., measurable skill gains, credential attainment). For TANF youth programming, LWDBs report on paid work experience and grade progression. For veteran services, LWDBs track the number of participants enrolled in programming and training, and employment outcomes. To understand PA CareerLink engagement, another LWDB captures outputs such as visit counts, workshop attendance, and event frequency. These metrics help boards make informed decisions about resource allocation and program design.

Understand Limitations of Existing Data. While data are essential for understanding program performance, the State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) leader highlighted a key limitation: government data often reflect past trends rather than predict future needs. For example, Bureau of Labor Statistics data used to track occupational trends are typically 2 years old. To address this, the SWDB supplements the aforementioned data sources with real-time labor market tools, like Lightcast, to support more agile decision-making.

Workforce Challenges

As with any program or system, the WDS has challenges. These include challenges within the WDS itself and challenges job seekers face as they navigate this system.

System Challenges

Funding Constraints. The most frequently cited challenge identified by the WDB leaders (n = 5) was insufficient funding to support the number of people they serve. Some of these leaders reported that WIOA underfunds general programming, which

makes it difficult to support targeted initiatives such as employer outreach and incumbent worker training. Budget cuts have forced boards to do more with less. One leader experienced a 14% funding reduction, and another leader estimated she would need an additional $1 million to $2 million to meet training demands. In addition, another LWDB had to lay off two staff members and leave six other positions unfilled. The same leader indicated that since the funding source is primarily federal and there is no state allocation for workforce development, three PA CareerLink sites may have to close.

Limitations of Federal Funding. According to one leader, another issue is that federal funds cannot be used for incumbent worker training. To fill this gap, state funding is provided by the Workforce and Economic Development Network of Pennsylvania program, which pays for the training of new and existing employees. However, employers can only use the program for 2 consecutive years. In the third year, many employers opt out of training, due to costs, which, according to one leader, negatively affects employee morale and industry competitiveness.

Marketing and Public Perception. Two leaders highlighted marketing challenges. One leader mentioned that promoting programs to employers is very difficult, so he joined the LWDB to stay informed. Another leader noted that promoting a program can have unintended consequences if data show limited impact, since this can create reputational risk. In this view, marketing can undermine support when data reveal little or no measurable success.

Data Fragmentation. Data challenges were highlighted by two leaders. One leader reported that, due to a DLI restriction, data sharing is not allowed between local boards. Thus, all data are aggregated, which hinders outcome measurement. This sentiment was supported by another LWDB leader, who mentioned a disconnect between education and workforce development exists because education providers are not required to use standardized identifiers (e.g., social security numbers). This situation makes tracking individual progress difficult and may result in reduced and slower modifications and improvements. This fragmentation of data collection was also highlighted by the SWDB leader, who noted the absence of a formal process to analyze, report, or request data for grant purposes.

System Disconnects. Two WDB leaders described fragmentation across the WDS. For instance, one leader noted confusion over roles between WDBs and economic development boards can lead to misalignment. WIOA eligibility requirements (i.e., individuals who have barriers to workforce entry such as formerly incarcerated or low income) limit service reach, which may result in the need for supplemental grants to support broader populations.

Disconnected chains of commands can also interrupt service provision. One LWDB that works across multiple counties highlighted the challenge of resolving service issues due to inconsistent staffing models, which complicates oversight. Some PA CareerLink employees are union staff funded by DLI; some employees are subcontractors funded by the WDB. When a person does not report directly to the WDB it is difficult to address problems with service provision. The same leader noted that DVOPs are state

employees that report to supervisors outside the CareerLink chain of authority, which makes it hard to hold them accountable. One last example is from the education provider side. One leader highlighted that community colleges operate independently and often resist collaboration due to competition concerns and fear of "losing out" if consolidation happens under a more formalized system. This lack of continuity between colleges limits program scalability.

Misunderstanding of Workforce Development. Lack of understanding and misconceptions about workforce development programming and impact are additional hurdles WDBs must address. For instance, politicians and other stakeholders in these government programs often misunderstand the timeline and impact workforce development programs have. In fact, one LWDB leader emphasized that outcomes may take 5–10 years to materialize, particularly considering the level of barriers faced by many individuals served through workforce development programs. Some employers also perceive PA CareerLink as only serving individuals who have employment barriers, and this perception may discourage engagement.

Demographic and Participation Challenges. Finally, leaders cited population decline and reduced labor market participation as ongoing challenges WDBs face at local and state levels.

Job-Seeker Challenges

LWDB leaders shared some of the challenges job-seekers face.

Structural Barriers. Five LWDB leaders identified persistent structural challenges that hinder job seekers from accessing needed employment opportunities: accessible and affordable housing, child care availability and cost, and dependable transportation. A few LWDB leaders reported that these issues are especially pronounced in rural areas where services are spread out, and transportation options are limited. One leader noted that without adequate support systems, no true social safety net for individuals in these communities exists.

Skill Gaps and Employment Readiness. Beyond structural barriers, job seekers often face skill-related challenges. One LWDB leader noted that job seekers need additional support beyond training. This support includes resume writing and job search help. In fact, to support the latter, one leader mentioned that she has noticed more people seeking job search help because, though they can work, these job seekers struggle with understanding how to look for a job. In addition to job searching skills, another skills gap is a lack of interpersonal and professional skills. One LWDB received feedback from multiple employers indicating that employees who enter the workforce or training programs with strong communication, emotional regulation, and critical thinking skills are better prepared to meet the demands of today's workplace and more likely to achieve long-term success; however, employers noted that these skills are difficult to teach.

Multiple Barriers to Employment. In addition to career-focused challenges, job

seekers may face other obstacles. Multiple LWDB leaders (n = 4) highlighted the increasing complexity of challenges faced by job seekers including recovery from substance use disorder, re-entry after incarceration, homelessness, and mental health challenges. These LWDB leaders reported that, over the past few years, there has been an increase in the number of people who experience multiple barriers to employment (e.g., justice involvement, disabilities, veteran status), and these individuals require more comprehensive support.

Veteran-Specific Challenges and Support

One goal of conducting these feedback sessions was to understand the challenges WDBs witnessed as they served veterans and how the WDBs address and support veterans as these veterans navigate the world of civilian work. WDB leaders shared that, while some veteran-support services exist, veterans face notable challenges within the system.

WDB leaders noted that veterans who need mental health services face challenges with accessing mental health support due to limited providers. Housing insecurity also remains a significant barrier. In addition, one LWDB leader noted that many veterans in the region are older than the typical working-age range for available jobs.

Despite these challenges, six LWDB members indicated they provide services that address these challenges and are tailored to veterans. One LWDB described providing a holistic approach to support veterans. This approach includes case management, housing assistance, mental and physical health services, and job training. In another LWDB, veterans receive extensive support, and employers in this area actively seek to hire veterans, though the local veteran population may be too small to meet demand.

Leaders emphasized the need to expand mental health supports and improve efforts to help veterans translate their military experience into civilian job skills. These efforts are supported by DVOPs and LVERs, who are veterans themselves, and other services designed to assist veterans in their career transitions. Strengthening these supports will improve outcomes for veterans and strengthen the overall workforce.

Recommendations for Improvement

WDB leaders identified several critical areas for improvement across funding, operations, and service delivery. Their recommendations reflect systemic needs and innovative local solutions.

Scale Innovative Solutions to Address Structural Barriers. Key systemic improvements mentioned by four leaders include providing accessible and affordable child care, reliable transportation, and affordable housing. A few LWDBs are currently considering strategies to address the transportation issue. One LWDB leader reported that, in 2024, they had a "Workforce on Wheels" program. This service provided mobile units that included workstations, spaces to have interviews, and laptops and TVs to help job seekers complete assignments and secure employment. Another LWDB, who serves

rural areas, also realized job seekers in his or her region encountered difficulties accessing a PA CareerLink site, so they used a bus, named the LINK, to bring PA CareerLink services to individuals who could not access the physical sites. Leaders suggested scaling these models statewide and exploring systems used in other states. One LWDB suggested adopting strategies used in other states. For example, Texas subsidizes child care through their workforce development system, and Utah offers integrated employment, housing, and child care services in one location via a block grants.

Expand Support for Populations Facing Complex Employment Barriers. Additional support, such as mental health provision, is needed for targeted populations, including re-entrants from incarceration, individuals with low income who face multiple barriers, and people recovering from substance use disorders. To address these obstacles, LWDBs are offering holistic support systems that include case management and career coaching, job fairs for formerly incarcerated individuals, "reboot" programs for those in recovery, and referrals to services provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. These supports, in addition to increasing the number of mental health providers, should be widespread and accessible to help those who are struggling to find and use resources.

Supplement WIOA to Meet Workforce Demand. Multiple LWDBs (n = 3) called for increased funding and noted that WIOA subsidies are insufficient to meet demand. One suggestion was for boards to pursue supplemental grants to expand programming for and reach to underserved populations.

Advance Accountability Through Better Data and Evaluation. Three leaders highlighted the need to strengthen data infrastructure and program evaluation. One LWDB leader mentioned that evaluation should be incorporated into the design of grants, rather than treated solely as back-end reporting requirement. Two LWDBs specifically mentioned the challenge of collecting and matching education and employment data to track individual outcomes and noted that investigating proposed data-sharing legislation could resolve this issue.

Enhance Education Delivery for Workforce Alignment. Multiple WDB leaders (n = 3) highlighted the need to improve how training and education are delivered. Education and training providers urged for more flexible and responsive training programs. One recommendation was for Pennsylvania independent community colleges to coordinate and collaborate to scale successful programs.

Streamline Operations and Boost Engagement. Four LWDBs highlighted the need for greater operational and systemic efficiency. These leaders expressed a call to increase PA CareerLink brand awareness and improve employer engagement, streamline government processes to reduce bureaucratic delays, address accountability gaps for state employees such as DVOPs, and re-engage job seekers who have left the labor market.

Business Leaders and Employers

In the WDS, employers provide work for job seekers and shape the local and national economies through their services and products. Their businesses or organizations rely on a qualified and skilled talent pool to find the support they need to complete projects, innovate, serve clients, and reach company goals.

To better understand how employers interact with the WDS, Clearinghouse researchers met with nine leaders from large and small employers in diverse industries, including healthcare, banking, manufacturing, business management, and chambers of commerce. Researchers asked these leaders about their use of WDS resources and partnerships, about the challenges they faced in using these resources, and how they support the workforce development of veterans. In addition, the leaders were asked to provide suggestions for improving the system.

Role in the Workforce Development System

Employer engagement with the WDS varied. Some employers (n = 5) noted they are highly engaged. These employers actively participate on boards, utilize programs and resources like PA CareerLink to recruit talent, co-fund apprenticeships, and collaborate with education providers to host job fairs and support training programs. Other employers (n = 2) mentioned their engagement with the WDS and its programming is limited and cited misalignment between WDS offerings and their specialized industry needs. This situation may stem from the WDS facing a lack of understanding of industry-specific requirements or, for some organizations, a preference for in-house training. For some employers, WDS services are viewed as a "last resort." However, many employers use the WDS for training and developing new and current employees.

Most employers (n = 7) emphasized the importance of establishing and using apprenticeships and internships as key strategies for workforce development. Collaborations with community colleges, technical schools, and universities were seen as effective pipelines for future talent. These programs often lead to full-time employment. One employer reported that they offer full-time positions to 80% of their interns, and they experience a 70% acceptance rate. Another employer highlighted the value of apprenticeships in filling machine-working roles, which are critical to their operations. A third employer runs a high school-to-career program that guarantees jobs for students upon graduation, which may help to address projected labor shortages.

Veterans in the Workforce

Several employers mentioned that veterans represent a valuable and often underutilized resource, and these veterans could help to address workforce shortages. Two employers emphasized the unique strengths veterans bring to the workplace and described veterans as ideal candidates because they are loyal, skilled problem-solvers with strong technical prowess.

Employers also noted the availability of federal incentives such as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, which encourages employers to hire veterans by offering tax benefits.

Employers noted using a variety of strategies to recruit veterans, including military career fairs, social media platforms like LinkedIn, and referrals from the VA's Veteran Readiness and Employment program. One employer highlighted the SkillBridge program, which allows active duty Service members to intern with civilian employers while still receiving military pay.

Workforce Challenges

Employers shared workforce challenges they face.

Skills Gaps and Hard-to-Fill Roles. The most common challenge employers (n = 8) cited was finding employees who possessed the necessary technical or specialized skills required for their industries. Difficult-to-fill roles include bakers, engineers (e.g., hotel, electrical, manufacturing), and healthcare professionals (e.g., nurses, medical technician, surgeons).

Employee Retention. Employee retention was also a concern for some employers (n = 3), especially in entry-level or high-stress positions. Contributing factors included competitive wages in less demanding occupations, use of roles (e.g., Emergency Medical Technicians) as a "stepping stone" to other roles, and labor market dynamics. One employer attributed employee retention difficulty to the supply and demand in the labor market in recent years, and some employers left the area due to lack of available workers.

Soft Skills Deficiencies. The last workforce challenge mentioned by employers (n = 6) was finding employees who already have interpersonal and professional skills like timeliness, communication, problem-solving, digital literacy, and receptiveness to feedback. While many employers are willing and able to train individuals in technical skills, they find soft skills harder to teach. Suggestions for addressing these gaps are discussed in the next section.

Recommendations for Improvement

Enhance Outreach to Support Employer Participation. Employers offered three main suggestions to strengthen the WDS. The first recommendation made by employers (n = 3) is to improve communication and marketing regarding the different available programs and services. While larger businesses may have the capacity to seek out the resources, smaller businesses often lack the time or awareness to navigate the WDS system to find employees and training opportunities. Improved marketing and outreach could help bridge this gap and ensure broader access to WDS offerings.

Align Workforce Services with Real-Time Employer Needs. To address misalignment between WDS services and employers' needs, two employers recommended the system become more responsive to real-time business needs and avoid creating programs based on outdated demands. This could involve conducting direct research; engaging employers more frequently; and strengthening the connections between schools, businesses, and job seekers. One employer described

this approach as getting closer to the client.

Simplify Job Requirements and System Access. Two employers raised concerns about a disconnect between what is truly needed by employers and job seekers. For example, one employer mentioned "qualification creep," which occurs when job requirements increase and, therefore, exceed what skills were initially required to perform the role. There was also a call for better integration across WDS programs to create a more cohesive and navigable system, essentially a map that helps job seekers and employers understand how services connect.

Education Providers

Clearinghouse researchers met with five education providers regarding their involvement with the statewide WDS. Four of these providers serve on the four LWDBs of interest and one operates a state-wide workforce training program. Education providers were asked about the following: interactions with the WDS and local employers, support for students facing barriers, approaches to measuring program outcomes, working with veterans, and suggestions for system improvement.

These education providers represent a diverse mix of institutions, including a for-profit online technology-training company, a higher-education apprenticeship program, an adult- and experiential-learning organization, community colleges, and a non-profit organization that offers basic literacy and interpersonal and professional skills training. These providers contribute to workforce development by offering literacy and foundational-skills training programs, industry-specific technical education, degree and certificate programs tailored to understaffed occupations, and personalized learning experiences and apprenticeships that lead to paid employment. Some providers also offer wraparound services, such as housing and transportation, to help students overcome barriers while completing their training.

Role in the Workforce Development System

This section highlights how various organizations contribute to Pennsylvania's WDS, and how each organization addresses different needs across education, training, and employment.

NuPaths. NuPaths, a for-profit company co-founded with Harrisburg University, offers various Information Technology (IT) certifications, training courses, and college credits through the university's extension services. Its mission is to support upskilling and provide career-transition training, especially in IT and Business Technology. As an approved provider on the Eligible Training Provider List, NuPaths receives WIOA funding to provide individual job training.

In addition, NuPaths offers industry-aligned courses designed with employer input, work experience through micro-internships via Parker Dewey, and short-term contract work through staffing agencies. To meet the needs of adult learners, NuPaths courses are offered online through distance-learning platforms. They provide free tutoring and

counseling and have grant-funded support for barriers like housing and transportation.

Penn State Extension. The Penn State Extension representative helps bridge gaps between apprenticeship students and broader education and funding opportunities available through LWDBs. The representative connects individuals to PA CareerLink programs. Extension also operates Ag Works, a federally funded grant that supports agricultural businesses by improving working conditions and creating job opportunities in the agriculture industry.

Council for Adult Experiential Learning. This is a non-profit organization that connects education providers, employers, and government organizations and helps them align training with labor market needs. It provides technical assistance and research support to help institutions identify pathways to quality jobs. Council for Adult Experiential Learning advocates for giving credit for prior learning, supports adult learners in earning credentials, and connects job seekers and regional employers. A key focus is breaking down silos between education and workforce systems, especially for the ALICE population (i.e., Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). One example is the Regional Upskilling Alliance in Pittsburgh, which is a Partner4Work and WIOA-funded pilot that created pathways in banking through teller training.

Delaware Community College. Delaware Community College (DCC) prepares students for employment through three workforce-oriented programs: transfer, Associate of Applied Science, and short-term certificates. DCC relies on employer engagement to ensure course offerings align with job market demands, classroom technology and equipment mirror what is used in the field, and regular feedback on student job readiness is collected and available. DCC is an WIOA Individual Training Account training provider that has trained 120 individuals in the last year. It also provides wraparound student services (e.g., housing assistance, developmental and English language courses) to reduce barriers to education and employment. DCC received a DLI-funded Veteran Employment Program grant, which provided money to bridge the cost of books and computers for veterans.

Beyond Literacy. Beyond Literacy's Fast Track program serves over 2,000 Philadelphians annually and helps them improve English language usage and professional skills to overcome employment barriers. Over 60,000 working-age Pennsylvanians lack high school credentials, so adult literacy is foundational to workforce development. Their pre-apprenticeship program teaches IT basics, such as email setup and Microsoft Office skills. Wrap-around support (e.g., housing assistance, free or low-cost wi-fi), is provided in house and through partner referrals. A partnership with PECO Energy led to test-prep courses for energy sector job-placement exams, and this collaboration helped to increase pass rates from 22% to 88%.

Community College of Allegheny County. Through four campuses, the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC) works with local businesses to align its 130+ integrative programs with regional workforce needs. Programs span electric vehicle technology, robotics, culinary arts, hospitality, cybersecurity, networking, healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and skilled trades. The goal is to graduate

students who will remain in the local area. Many students gain industry experience while enrolled, which improves post-graduation employment outcomes. CCAC's career readiness center offers interview and resume preparation, dress-for-success training, and employer connections. Approximately 500 veterans are enrolled, and CCAC tracks their progress and provides assistance on how to obtain and maintain veteran benefits.

Systemic Challenges

Education providers shared challenges they encounter in the WDS.

Decentralization Limits Systemwide Coordination. The PA WDS is decentralized and comprised of 23 Local Workforce Development Areas. Each area operates with distinct priorities, industries, and programmatic goals. This fragmentation creates significant coordination challenges for education providers who must navigate varying expectations, funding structures, and service-delivery models across regions.

Fragmented Metrics and Delayed Insights in Workforce Tracking. Education providers (n = 4) discussed how tracking employment outcomes for graduates can also be challenging due to limited student response rates to voluntary post-graduation surveys. In addition, federal performance metrics are often aggregated and released with a 1-year delay, which makes real-time evaluation difficult. As noted by two organizations, restrictions on data-sharing agreements between regions further complicates efforts to assess program effectiveness.

Regional Inconsistencies and Digital Access Barriers. Several education providers (n = 4) reported disconnects between programming and services across LWDBs. Differences in how each region works and the resources provided (e.g., PA CareerLink, TANF) can lead to service interruptions that are often attributed to bureaucratic procedures and incompatible systems. One provider noted that PA CareerLink's digital interface is particularly challenging for individuals with limited computer proficiency as this situation can create additional barriers to access.

Funding Gaps and Competition Undermine Program Stability. Funding emerged as a notable challenge among some education providers (n = 2). One provider highlighted inconsistencies in funding across LWDBs, and these variabilities complicate program planning and sustainability. Another provider described how limited grant availability fosters competition, especially among PA CareerLink partner agencies; this situation reduces incentives for collaboration and shared service delivery.

One provider, previously funded as a WIOA Title II (Adult Education and Literacy Services) provider until June 2025, reported that federal funding cuts led to closure of one of their three campuses. However, this individual noted a potential opportunity for renewed support. In 2024, Pennsylvania officially recognized digital literacy as a form of literacy, and this new codification may open the door for future state appropriations to support digital-skills training.

Student Workload. In addition to funding concerns, education providers reported

challenges related to student workload and retention. May students balance school, work, and family responsibilities, which can make participation in internships or training programs difficult. One education provider observed that when students struggle to manage these commitments, their academic performance suffers, and some drop out of the program.

Veteran-Specific Challenges

Education providers also shared insights into the veteran experience within Pennsylvania's WDS. A few providers (n = 3) reported they tracked veteran enrollment, and one noted he also monitors student progress to help veterans remain aligned with their educational goals. However, one provider stated that many veterans choose not to disclose their veteran status; this may be done to preserve their GI Bill benefits for 4-year institutions.

To support veteran learners, education providers (n = 3) offer dedicated counselors and coordinators and use veteran-specific funding sources such as the GI Bill and Veterans Employment Program grant to cover costs related to training and education (e.g., books, computers, certifications).

Despite extensive experience, veterans face unique challenges as they transition to civilian employment. For example, one education provider highlighted the skills translation problem and indicated military training documented in the Joint Service Transcript does not easily convert into recognizable civilian job qualifications. Another provider observed that some veterans, enrolled in courses, were less career-focused than anticipated. Possible reasons included family commitments, financial stability through benefits, or a lack of interest in pursuing the offered training as a long-term career path.

Recommendations for Improvement

To better serve veterans and other learners, education providers recommended several system-level improvements.

Increase synergy between employers and education providers. More funding is needed to expand services and foster collaboration between providers and employers. These resources could improve alignment between training programs and workforce needs and enhance data sharing to track outcomes more effectively. One education provider emphasized that community colleges should be the first point of contact for businesses and stakeholders seeking workforce solutions because these colleges are flexible and have experience leading workforce-oriented training programs and utilizing regional reach.

Standardize and streamline processes and increase data sharing. Pennsylvania should also work to standardize procedures and goals across workforce regions. As noted earlier, Pennsylvania's 23 distinct workforce regions operate with varying systems and priorities. Greater standardization would improve operational efficiency and reduce

service fragmentation (n = 1). Administrative barriers must be reduced by streamlining application processes for programs like PA CareerLink and TANF to improve access. In addition, providers (n = 3) indicated that establishing data-sharing agreements among the state, counties, and employers is critical for tracking program effectiveness, especially regarding hiring and wage outcomes. One provider suggested that Pennsylvania should consider hiring an external entity to convene stakeholders, including DLI, PA CareerLink, and other WDS partners, to improve communication and collaboration.

Assist high-need populations. Efforts to support populations that face multiple barriers (e.g., housing insecurity, poverty, limited access to resources) should be continued according to several providers (n = 4). These endeavors could include using WIOA funding to support the ALICE population to pay for free trainings and wraparound services for students such as housing assistance and English as a Second Language (ESL) courses.

Veteran Serving Non-Profit Organizations

To understand the role of veteran-serving non-profit organizations in Pennsylvania's WDS, researchers met with representatives from Pittsburgh Hires Veterans (PHV), the Greater Philadelphia Area Veterans Chamber of Commerce (VCoC), and the Greater Philadelphia Veterans Network (GPVN). These organizations were selected because each of their primary missions is to help veterans gain employment.

Services and Engagement

PVH and VCoC focus on job-placement assistance by offering support with employment goal setting, resume writing, interview preparation, and employer connections. These organizations have less rigid eligibility requirements than government-operated veteran-employment programs; notably PHV assists anyone who served in the U.S. military regardless of length of service or character of discharge.

GPVN works with veterans to help them determine whom they want to be post service. Rather than placing veterans in jobs, GPVN helps them acclimate to civilian business, leadership, and entrepreneurship by teaching veterans to create and implement a plan to meet their goals. Veterans must be actively engaged in their own progress to participate as GPVN is not a job-placement agency.

PVH serves approximately 30 veterans weekly. VCoC previously served 10–15 veterans weekly before becoming dormant in 2021; it is currently being revitalized. GPVN serves 30–40 veterans monthly.

Partnerships and Referrals

PHV and VCoC do not offer in-house skills-training programs but refer veterans to external providers such as the Trade Institute of Pittsburgh, Onward to Opportunity, and the Small Business Administration. If needed, they also connect veterans to housing,

food, and healthcare assistance.

PHV collaborates with organizations like Veterans Leadership Program, Veteran's Place, Wounded Warrior Foundation, and PA CareerLink to host an annual "Hire a Veteran" job fair in Pittsburgh. PHV also participates in monthly PA CareerLink-hosted veteran resource meetings.

VCoC educates employers about a $5,000 local tax credit that is available when they hire veterans in Philadelphia. GPVN provides individualized coaching, virtually or in person, on networking, resume writing, relationship-building, and soft-skills training. "Our Tools, Your Mission" is GPVN's strategy to help veterans identify their career objective and locate employment opportunities through interactions, referrals, and relationships. GVPN also hosts an online, publicly accessible directory to connect veterans with veteran-owned businesses.

PHV and VCoC collaborate with employers, government agencies, area chambers of commerce, and other veteran-serving organizations to identify and partner with businesses interested in hiring veterans, to learn about hiring trends, and to identify veterans' needs. They operate using a similar model in which they help veterans identify their skills and find prospective job opportunities. When a veteran applies for a position, an organization representative contacts the employer to advocate for hiring the veteran. PHV follows up with the veteran at 30 and 60 days after starting work to determine if the job is a good fit. PHV tracks three measures of success: days to gain employment, average full-time wages/salary, and number of veterans placed in employment.

PHV's goal is placement within 90 days and a target salary of $64,000 annually. In the previous year, the average salary of veterans placed was $56,000. PHV struggles to obtain retention statistics. Both organizations rely heavily on word-of-mouth referrals rather than formal marketing.

GPVN adds education providers and civic organizations to the previously mentioned types of collaborators and has a network of over 250 employers. However, GVPN does not collect or track outcomes of veterans whom they assist.

Systemic and Veteran-Specific Challenges

All three organizations mentioned that newly separated veterans frequently face challenges defining their career goals and translating military experience into job qualifications. Furthermore, many veterans lack familiarity with civilian resumes and job descriptions. In addition, veterans may expect higher-level roles and salaries than employers are prepared to offer. Lastly, older veterans may lack digital literacy, while younger veterans may lack civilian work experience.

Recommendations for Improvement

Veteran serving non-profits play a critical role in filling gaps left by government programs, particularly for veterans who do not meet strict eligibility criteria. Several areas of

improvement were identified. Flexible funding would be helpful as government funding often comes with restrictive eligibility and reporting requirements. Investment in building trust and understanding individual needs because many veterans are hesitant to ask for help. Lastly, organizations need to do more work up front to identify veterans' needs and then design programs for veterans to meet those needs. Two participants described how a one-size-fits-all approach does not meet the variety of workforce needs the non-profits encounter in the veteran community.

Skilled Trade Unions

Leaders from the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), two skilled trade unions operating throughout Pennsylvania, provided their feedback to understand how unions fit into the state's WDS. Two representatives serve on multiple LWDBs including Central, Delaware County, and Chester County, and participate in local chambers of commerce. Union representatives were asked about the following: their roles on LWDBs, training programs, challenges they face, how they collaborate with employers and the WDS, working with veterans, and feedback to improve the WDS.

Role in the Workforce Development System

Skilled trade unions contribute to the WDS by providing an organized labor perspective to PA's workforce development ecosystem. They engage with LWDBs, chambers of commerce, local governments, and employers. Moreover, unions operate multi-year, state-approved apprenticeship programs that are free for participants and combine paid work experience with classroom instruction to produce self-grown skilled workers.

In 2024, building trades accounted for 37% (n=572) of approved apprenticeships in the Commonwealth and 68% (n=13,617) of enrolled apprentices. The Pennsylvania Apprenticeship and Training Council reported veterans made up 7% of enrolled apprentices in 2024.

Apprenticeship and Training

Union apprenticeship programs offer privately funded employer-aligned training that leads to employment with competitive family-sustaining wages, health insurance, and retirement benefits. Electrician, Heavy Equipment Operator, and Heavy Equipment Mechanic apprenticeship programs were discussed during the feedback sessions. Each apprentice is paid during the apprenticeship training period, and wages increase each year as skills increase.

The Electrician apprenticeship program lasts 5 years and employs 100 participants (20 per year). Apprentice Electricians work on site 40 hours a week under supervision and attend classroom instruction 6 to 8 hours each week. The Heavy Equipment Operator and Mechanic programs last 4 years each and include 6 weeks of classroom instruction and supervised job-site work.

Unions incorporate regular reports from job-site staff, such as monthly foreman feedback on electricians or general input from contractor staff on heavy equipment operators, to adjust the training curriculum to meet current industry demands. Unions measure apprenticeship program success using retention rates, graduation rates, employment longevity, and the size of the out-of-work list. In addition, surveys and exit interviews are conducted with senior apprentices to gain their perspective on the training courses.

Continuing education is promoted through free advanced courses for journeymen. For example, the Electrical Union offers training in electric vehicle chargers, fire alarm systems, high voltage work, and foreman training. The Operating Engineer's Union offers regular recertification training and training on new equipment. A portion of union membership dues is used to pay for the apprenticeship programs and the continuing-education offerings.

Unions interact with LWDBs and PA CareerLink offices to assist unemployed members and recruit new apprentices. Members utilize PA CareerLink for unemployment compensation when out of work, however, union members do not need to report looking for work because being on a union's referral list satisfies the unemployment compensation requirement for actively seeking work. PA CareerLink staff connect interested job seekers with union apprenticeship programs to explore the training opportunities the unions offer.

Programs for Veterans

The unions recognize valuable qualities veterans possess, such as understanding rank structure, discipline, and having a strong work ethic, and have formal programs to recruit veterans and support them after they have become union members. Over 15 skilled trade unions, including the IUOE and the IBEW partner with Helmets to Hardhats, a national non-profit, to recruit military veterans into their professions. Helmets to Hardhats connects veterans who are interested in learning about union careers with union representatives and assists employers and training centers with finding employees who are veterans.

Additional veteran-focused programs include the Veteran's Electrical Entrance Program and Veterans in Piping. These pre-apprenticeship programs offer 6 weeks of free introductory training and tools to transitioning military members interested in pursuing a trade after separation. Participants are granted automatic entry into a local union apprenticeship program immediately upon graduation. Union veteran's committees assist members in leveraging GI Bill resources for supplies and housing allowance during training to supplement the initial low wages apprentices earn.

Recommendations for Improvement

More comprehensive pre-apprenticeship programs. Union representatives recommended the state develop more comprehensive pre-apprenticeship programs that include interpersonal and professional skills development, driver's license acquisition, and drug-testing readiness. These additions would better prepare candidates, especially

veterans and underserved populations, for successful entry into apprenticeship programs and, ultimately, long-term employment.

Recommendations

Summary of Feedback Session Recommendations
This summary presents the most commonly shared recommendations provided by feedback session participants during the operational analysis. Not every suggestion from each participant is included rather the analysis focuses on the following themes that emerged from the feedback sessions.

1. Expand and Diversify Funding Streams
- Increase federal funding.
- Increase investment in wraparound services, especially child care and transportation.

2. Strengthen System Coordination and Collaboration
- Promote educational institutions and training partners as primary workforce partners.

3. Improve Data Infrastructure and Evaluation
- Develop standardized data-sharing agreements across state agencies, counties, education institutions, and employers.
- Consider including metrics that account for participant starting points related to degrees of barriers to employment.
- Embed evaluation into grant design to ensure continuous improvement and accountability.

4. Increase Awareness and Accessibility
- Scale innovations, such as interactive kiosks in libraries and schools, to promote workforce services and training opportunities.
- Launch a statewide PA CareerLink brand awareness campaign.
- Develop alternative outreach strategies for veterans, including peer-to-peer referrals and community-based engagement.

5. Address Structural and Regional Barriers
- Scale successful local models that address barrier reduction by using strategies like "Workforce on Wheels" and "The Link" to improve access in rural areas.
- Explore and pilot integrated service-delivery models from other states (e.g., Texas, Utah) that combine employment, housing, and child care support.
- Invest in infrastructure improvements (e.g., broadband, transportation) in underserved regions to reduce geographic inequities.

6. Support Special Populations
- Use WIOA and TANF funds to support the ALICE population with free training, ESL courses, and housing assistance.
- Create more pre-apprenticeship programs that include interpersonal and

professional skills development, driver's license acquisition, and drug-testing readiness.

- Expand mental health services and trauma-informed care for job seekers, especially veterans, re-entrants, and individuals recovering from substance use disorder.

7. Align Programs with Real-Time Labor Market Needs
- Increase employer engagement in program design to ensure training reflects current industry demands.
- Reduce qualification creep by reassessing job requirements and promoting skills-based hiring.
- Encourage education providers to offer flexible, modular training programs that respond quickly to emerging workforce trends.

Integrated Insights from Initial Report and Operational Workforce Analysis

The recommendations presented below reflect the sustained insights gathered through two phases of our effort to examine the PA workforce system: (1)_the *March 2025 Examination of Pennsylvania's Workforce Development System* which provided an in-depth analysis of policies and protocols of PA's workforce development system, federal funding, state-level programs, and veteran-specific employment initiatives.; and (2) the current operational analysis (i.e., feedback sessions) conducted between June and September 2025. They are grounded in direct information gathered from individuals who work within and alongside the system and are intended to address persistent challenges while building on promising innovations identified across both reports.

1. Expand and Diversify Funding Streams
- The U.S. Congress should reauthorize, increase, and modernize WIOA funding to better meet current workforce needs and challenges.
- Pennsylvania should dedicate funds for community colleges and technical schools to create program pipelines based on local employer needs.
- Pennsylvania should increase investment in wraparound services that reduce barriers to program and workforce participation, especially child care and transportation.

2. Align Education and Training to Workforce Needs
- The State Workforce Development Board should implement a state-wide, annual needs assessment of employers.
- The DLI and complementary state workforce agencies (e.g., Department of Education, Department of Human Services) should prioritize training programs that are tied to interpersonal and professional skills based on data from employers about their needs.
- The DLI and workforce agencies should collaborate with employers and education providers to embed robust evaluation plans into new and/or existing programs to ensure effectiveness.

3. Embed Data into Workforce Development
- The DLI, workforce agencies should establish a working group to examine and reassess common metrics to be used in DLI and workforce programs.
- The DLI and workforce program administrators should embed data and/or evaluation requirements in program design and delivery to ensure accountability and continuous quality improvement.

4. Strengthen Workforce Development Infrastructure
- The DLI should conduct a comprehensive review of workforce programs to assess alignment and identify gaps in service coordination including (1) mapping existing programs, services, and funding streams to highlight overlaps, inefficiencies, and areas of improved integration; (2) developing a standardized referral process; (3) establishing shared performance metrics across programs; and (4) implementing cross-agency training to ensure a unified approach to workforce development.
- DLI, the PA Department of Education, and regional workforce boards should establish a working group with the aim of improving data sharing across core workforce programs by addressing legal barriers and funding integration efforts.
- DLI, the PA Department of Education, and regional workforce boards should establish core programs and components that are consistent across their offerings while also allowing for some locally responsive components to be added.
- DLI, in collaboration with Pennsylvania state agencies and education institutions, should develop a common participant identifier to streamline data collection and improve tracking of workforce outcomes.

Conclusion

This operational analysis underscores both the strengths and limitations of Pennsylvania's Workforce Development System (WDS). While the system is broadly collaborative, engaging government agencies, local boards, employers, unions, and education providers, persistent challenges limit its overall effectiveness. Chief among these are funding constraints, fragmented data systems, and structural barriers such as limited access to transportation and child care. In addition, individual characteristics of job seekers, including skill mismatches in interpersonal, professional, and digital competencies, continue to hinder employment outcomes.

The vast majority of Pennsylvania's workforce programs are federally funded through the six core WIOA programs (i.e., Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser, Adult Basic Education, and Vocational Rehabilitation). These programs operate under highly prescriptive guidelines, which constrain flexibility and innovation. At the same time, the Commonwealth's WIOA Combined State Plan intentionally delegates operational and financial decision-making to Local Workforce Development Boards. This approach is designed to empower local entities to tailor services to regional needs; however, it also introduces variability in service provision, eligibility criteria, and reporting practices, which contributes to system inefficiencies and coordination challenges.

By expanding funding streams, strengthening data infrastructure, and scaling successful local models, Pennsylvania can build a more equitable and responsive workforce system. Robust collaboration among stakeholders and strategic investment in wraparound services and technology will be essential to meet the evolving needs of job seekers and employers across the Commonwealth.

Philanthropic organizations also have a critical role to play in this transformation. Their flexible funding and mission-driven approach enable them to be innovative, take risks, and pilot new programs, fill emerging service gaps, especially in areas where public funding is limited or slow to adapt. Moreover, they are uniquely able to catalyze cross-sector collaboration. By supporting creative solutions and piloting promising models, philanthropies can help accelerate system transformation.

Moving forward, a unified vision, grounded in data, driven by community engagement, and supported by both public and private investment, can transform PA's WDS into a more impactful system.

Appendix A: Operational Analysis Questions

This appendix includes draft questions for feedback sessions. Length of the feedback session varied depending on stakeholder type.

PA Department of Labor & Industry
      a. Officials overseeing the Office of Workforce Development/administering WIOA
      b. Staff responsible for tracking state workforce metrics and goals (Center for Workforce Information & Analysis [CWIA])

Questions
1. What are your primary job responsibilities related to workforce development?
2. What support do you need to be more effective in your job that you are not currently getting?
3. What are the key workforce challenges facing Pennsylvania right now, particularly in terms of skills gaps or industry shortages?
4. What data or other information do you use to identify trends and challenges?
5. How is the state leveraging policies like WIOA or services like PA CareerLink to address these challenges?
6. What are the common barriers to individuals securing employment?
      a. Are these barriers common in veterans or different?
7. What does success in the workforce development space look like?
8. How do you determine whether a DLI initiative has been effective (How do you measure the success of workforce development programs)?
9. What data do you collect and at what frequency?
10. Are there specific metrics you prioritize?
11. Do you offer programs and services specifically for veterans?
12. How often do you have contact with CareerLink representatives?
13. How often do you have contact with DVOPS/LVERS?
14. (CWIA) What trends are you seeing in Pennsylvania's labor market that should inform workforce development efforts?
15. (CWIA) What data limitations exist, and how could they be addressed to improve workforce planning?
16. (CWIA) Have any of your analyses resulted in changes to the economic conditions of regions, or are the analyses primarily for reporting purposes?
17. Is there anything that we have not discussed so far that you think would be important for us to know?
18. Who else should we speak with about workforce development (e.g., job-seekers current and former, employer partners current and former, colleagues current and former, other support organizations current and former)?

Local Workforce Development Boards
      a. Directors
      b. Presidents/VPs of Operations
      c. Staff
      d. Note. Perhaps focus on LWDBs that align with economic development

committee assignments

Questions
1. What are the main contributions of the LWDBs to your local economic system?
2. What are the three primary goals and objectives of your workforce development board?
3. How do you identify key workforce needs and challenges in your region?
   a. How often do you assess needs, and if a new need is identified, how quickly can you pivot?
   b. How do you stay informed about changes in the labor market and emerging industry trends?
   c. What are the most significant barriers to employment/delivering services that you encounter in your region?
4. Are any particular populations or communities requiring more targeted support in your region? How so?
   a. What programs and services do you offer to address these targeted support needs?
   b. Do you offer programs and services specifically for veterans?
5. How do you collaborate with local employers, educational institutions, and community organizations? Other LWDBs?
   a. Specifically, can you list 1-2 organizations in each of the areas?
6. What strategies do you use to engage and support local job seekers and local employers?
7. What are your sources of funding? How do you use funding from federal, state, and local sources?
8. What data do you collect (specific metrics) to measure success, and at what frequency?
9. Can you share one example of an impactful program? What made the program effective?
10. What future initiatives or projects do you see on the horizon?
11. Is there anything that we have not discussed so far that you think would be important for us to know?
12. Who else should we speak with about workforce development (e.g., job-seekers current and former, employer partners current and former, colleagues current and former, other support organizations current and former)?

CareerLink
   a. Directors
   b. Staff (DVOPs and LVERs) If asking these questions of DVOPs or LVERs, focus their answers on the veteran population.

Questions
1. What are the primary services and programs offered by Pennsylvania CareerLink?
   a. Do you offer programs and services specifically for veterans?
2. How do you assist job seekers in finding employment opportunities?
3. What types of training and education programs do you provide or facilitate?

4. In an average week, how many unique customers engage your office?
5. Of those unique individuals, how many times, on average, do customers return for follow-up services?
6. Are there specific groups (e.g., veterans, youth, individuals with disabilities) that you focus on? What unique challenges do they face?
7. How do you measure the success of your programs and services? What data do you collect, and at what frequency?
8. What are job seekers' most common challenges, and how do you help them address them?
9. How do you stay informed about changes in the labor market?
10. What partnerships do you have with local employers, educational institutions, and community organizations? How do you collaborate?
11. What marketing, recruitment, and/or retention strategies do you use to engage customers?
12. What implementation guides or protocols does your staff follow when interacting with customers, such as job seekers, employers, and community partners)?
13. What kind of training does your staff receive to ensure the effective implementation of workforce development programs?
14. How do you connect individuals with training programs and pipelines that align with their career goals?
15. What barriers do participants most commonly face in completing your programs or securing jobs?
16. Can you share examples of successful workforce initiatives that your organization or others have implemented in Pennsylvania? What made them effective?
17. Is there anything that we have not discussed so far that you think would be important for us to know?
18. Who else should we speak with about workforce development (e.g., job-seekers current and former, employer partners current and former, colleagues current and former, other support organizations current and former)?

Employers and Industry Partners
a. HR – Large employers and small business owners (UPMC, Wabtec, Hershey)
b. Chamber of Commerce Representatives
c. Pennsylvania's Industry Partnership Program
d. Note. Identify employers and industry partners through LWDBs and CIWA public use dataset.

Questions
1. What workforce needs and challenges does your organization/industry currently face (e.g., hiring, retention, skills readiness, qualified candidates)?
2. How do you collaborate with local workforce boards, CareerLink, or other training providers to address these needs?
3. What types of training and development programs do you participate in or support?
4. How do you engage with job seekers through workforce development programs?
   a. Do you specifically recruit veterans? Why or why not?
5. What skills or certifications are most important for your industry and how do you

communicate these to workforce development partners?
6. What role do apprenticeships, internships, and on-the-job training play in your workforce strategy?
7. How do you support the continuous learning and development of your current employees?
8. How well do workforce development programs align with the needs of your business/industry?
9. What benefits have you seen from participating in workforce development programs?
10. What feedback do you have for workforce development organizations to improve their services?
11. Is there anything that we have not discussed so far that you think would be important for us to know?
12. Who else should we speak with about workforce development (e.g., job-seekers current and former, employer partners current and former, colleagues current and former, other support organizations current and former)?

Educational Partners
a. PA-TIP (PHEAA)
b. Workforce program directors at community colleges or technical schools (e.g., Pennsylvania Highlands Community College, Harrisburg Area Community College)
c. Adult education providers (GED, ESL)
d. Apprenticeship program sponsors (e.g., union leaders)

Questions
1. What do you see as your role in the workforce development system?
2. What programs and courses do you offer that are specifically designed to meet local workforce needs?
   a. Do you track the number of veterans enrolled in your programs?
3. How do you collaborate with local employers and industry partners to ensure your curriculum aligns with current job market demands?
4. How do you stay informed about emerging trends and skills needed in the job market?
5. How do you collaborate with employers to provide internships, apprenticeships, or job placements?
6. What type of work-based learning opportunities, such as internships or apprenticeships, do you offer?
7. How do you incorporate feedback from employers into your program development and improvement processes?
8. What partnerships do you have with local workforce development boards and/or CareerLink?
9. How do you support students in overcoming barriers to education and employment?
10. What role does technology play in your educational programs and how do you ensure students are proficient in relevant technologies?
11. What initiatives do you have in place to promote lifelong learning and continuous skill development?

12. How do you determine the success of your educational programs? What data do you collect and at what frequency?
13. How do you track the employment outcomes of your graduates?
14. Is there anything that we have not discussed so far that you think would be important for us to know?
15. Who else should we speak with about workforce development (e.g., job-seekers current and former, employer partners current and former, colleagues current and former, other support organizations current and former)?

Policymakers, Decision-makers, and Advocates
    a. State legislators on committees related to labor, economic development, or workforce
    b. Shapiro administration contacts
    c. Nonprofit think tanks or advocacy groups (e.g., Keystone Research Center, PA Workforce Development Association)

Questions
1. What are the primary goals and objectives of the state's workforce development policies?
2. What are your constituents' most pressing workforce challenges, and how are you addressing them?
    a. What challenges are you seeing the in the state's veteran population related to employment?
3. How do you ensure that workforce development policies align with the needs of local economies and industries?
4. What role do you see for local workforce development boards in implementing state policies?
5. How do you measure the effectiveness of workforce development policies and programs? What does success in the workforce development space look like?
6. What workforce development policies or programs do you believe are having the greatest impact in Pennsylvania? How do you know? What data and metrics do you rely on to inform policy decisions?
7. How do you engage with stakeholders, such as employers, educational institutions, and community organizations, in the policy-making process?
8. What are the biggest challenges you face in developing and implementing workforce development policies?
9. What role does technology play in your workforce development strategies?
10. How do you support continuous improvement and innovation in workforce development programs?
11. What funding sources are available for workforce development initiatives, and how are they allocated? Are there opportunities to improve the state's funding or resource allocation for workforce initiatives?
12. How do you ensure accountability and transparency in the use of workforce development funds?
13. Are there any recent legislative changes that have significantly influenced workforce development efforts?
14. What future initiatives or policy changes are you considering to improve the

workforce development system?

15. Is there anything that we have not discussed so far that you think would be important for us to know?

16. Who else should we speak with about workforce development (e.g., job-seekers current and former, employer partners current and former, colleagues current and former, other support organizations current and former

Appendix B: Outreach Email

This appendix contains the language of the outreach email to individuals and organizations to request their participation in a feedback session.

Dear [x],

I hope this message finds you well. My name is [name], and I am [title/role] from the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State. We are currently working on a collaborative project with The Heinz Endowments to better understand and improve Pennsylvania's workforce development system for all residents, including its veterans. As someone with significant expertise and experience in the space, your insights would be invaluable to this effort.

Over the course of this year, we will be conducting feedback sessions with key stakeholders like you across all levels of the Commonwealth's workforce development system to explore how workforce development programs, policies, and partnerships are functioning in practice. Our goal is to identify challenges, share successes, and uncover opportunities for greater impact in meeting the workforce needs of individuals, employers, and communities across the state.

We hope that you will see this as an opportunity to ensure your voice is part of a larger conversation driving meaningful change for Pennsylvania's workforce. The feedback session format would be a [45-minute – 60-minute] virtual or in-person conversation based on your preference. We can work around your schedule to find a convenient time if you wish to participate. Furthermore, your responses will be kept confidential and used only to inform our understanding.

At the conclusion of this effort, we will compile the insights and themes gathered from all participants into a cumulative summary. The summary will highlight shared challenges, innovative ideas, and actionable opportunities. You will receive a copy of this summary as a thank-you for your participation and to provide visibility into the collective feedback from your peers across the state.

If you are willing to participate, please let us know by replying to this email. In addition to your participation, we also welcome any recommendations of other individuals or organizations we should engage in this effort. If you know of colleagues or partners whose insights would contribute to this conversation, please feel free to share their names and contact information or forward this invitation to them directly.

Thank you in advance for considering this request. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or to learn more about this effort.

[Signature]