

PA@Work

*Workforce Development
Strategies for the
COVID-19 Recovery*

May 2021

WORKforce

PA Workforce Development Association
The Voice of Pennsylvania Workforce Development

The Road We've Travelled

Soon after the pandemic hit in March 2020, **nearly 1.2 million Pennsylvanians lost their jobs**. Today, more than a year later, Pennsylvania's employment rate is going up, but our unemployment rate continues to average higher than those of most other states.

Pennsylvania's employers have been hit hard, particularly in the industrial and hospitality sectors. They have faced down temporary, partial, and total shut-downs. They have reimagined operations, pivoting to meet customer demands. Some companies have experienced hiring surges while others closed permanently.

Pennsylvania workers faced their own challenges as a result of the COVID-19 public health crisis, including reduced income, safe and available childcare, access to technology, within public health guidelines and constraints, and decreased connections to their safety, social, and emotional networks.

Pennsylvania's workforce development system has also been impacted by the virus. **When PA CareerLink® centers closed to in-person services, workforce boards and service locations shifted almost overnight to virtual models**. Staff worked hard to maintain connections with customers, continuing to provide them with critical services such as unemployment insurance, food assistance, childcare, technology access, and rent and housing assistance. Workforce boards and their partners mobilized to meet the immediate needs in their communities.

The disparate impacts the pandemic has had on women, youth, and people of color must be accounted for in employment planning and services. To understand how the workforce system can promote diversity, equity, and inclusion is just a beginning; transformative action and systems change that breaks the cycles of disparity can lift up thousands of Pennsylvanians and communities.

The Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association (PWDA) represents the local workforce development system that serves and supports Pennsylvania employers in their talent needs, as well as the youth, workers, job seekers, veterans, and others on their education, training, and employment paths. **Our members have a proven track record and know what it takes to help Pennsylvanians get back to family-sustaining work while also supporting employer's access to skilled talent and resources.**

What will it take to recover?



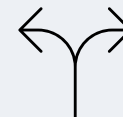
Expertise



Community Focus



Supply & Demand



State Leadership



Innovation

Top 10 Strategies to Get Pennsylvanians Back to Work

1. *Support Pennsylvanians Back to Work*
2. *A Career Pathway to Every Pennsylvania Employer*
3. *Strengthen Industry Partnerships*
4. *Modernize PA CareerLink® Education & Training*
5. *Break out of the Four Walls*
6. *Invest in Skilled Professionals*
7. *Maximize Funds for Training & Supports*
8. *Sustain Investments for Lifelong Learning*
9. *Streamline Access to Pennsylvania's Employment & Training Programs*
10. *#FreeTheDATA*

1. Support Pennsylvanians Back To Work

Job training alone won't do it. Workers need to have the right supports to start *and* complete their training and work experiences. This means we must invest in re-employment, education, and training for impacted Pennsylvanians, and also provide worker supports for childcare, transportation, technology access and other things they need to overcome barriers to getting and keeping family-sustaining jobs. We must also incorporate a skills-based approach into our systems and services.

2. A Career Pathway to Every Pennsylvania Employer

Pennsylvania's recovery must embrace the lattice work of a career because the old linear model is now the exception, not the rule. Pennsylvanians deserve clear pathways to all Pennsylvania jobs that include everything they need to understand, transition to, and experience meaningful economic stability. Rather than expecting people to find critical open information scattered across multiple institutions and platforms, similar to Alabama¹, Pennsylvania should provide an online road map for every career pathway, including education and training requirements and how and where to get them².

Skilled intermediaries such as *business-education partnerships* can also help Pennsylvanians navigate within education and employment, aligning to employer needs with educational offerings to build career-ready talent all the way down to third grade and extending to dislocated workers receiving unemployment and re-employment strategies. New models of work-based learning are needed, including registered apprenticeships, experiential learning, transitional jobs models and more.

3. Strengthen Industry Partnerships

Industry sector partnerships are a tried-and-true tool of workforce development in Pennsylvania. Rooted in Pennsylvania's workforce development system and codified in the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Act, sector partnerships are led by committed and forward-thinking employers in similar and supply-chained sectors, partnered with public and non-profit institutions, seeking to find collective solutions that better link employers to find and keep skilled talent, and leveraging regional resources that meet the industry's demand. **Pennsylvania's Industry Partnership network provides a clear way for employers to establish viable career pathways, to advance workers, and to strengthen a sector's ability to retool and respond to today's economic climate.**

¹ https://alabamaworks.com/wp-content/uploads/Cred_Registry_Overview.pdf

² <https://credentialengine.org/2020/11/16/making-sense-of-credentials-a-state-roadmap-and-action-guide-for-transparency/>

4. Modernize PA CareerLink® Education & Training

Local workforce boards agree that we need to sharpen the education and training resources we offer so we can better support industry demand, shared enrollments, and expanded customer base. However, without federal reauthorization, the system stays reliant on state innovation and funding solutions. **Pennsylvania should evaluate WIOA-eligible training programs and activities, identify and leverage resources available to PA CareerLink® customers, craft labor market information tools that support skills gaps (to avoid oversupply), and maximize customer access and choice.**

5. Break Out of the Four Walls

For the convenience of our customers, the workforce service delivery system was designed to be “one-stop,” mostly notably through the +60 PA CareerLink® centers across the Commonwealth. These centers are intentionally sited along easy access points, including transportation routes, community colleges, libraries, and even hospitals. **However, the pandemic crystallized what we already knew – that increasingly, our services must be delivered beyond the four walls, expanded to be flexible and reach people where they are and specifically targeting access gaps.** We need to build out a range of options, from in-person to online services, as well as hybrids. We must increase outreach and coordination with other employment and training programs.

6. Invest in Skilled Professionals

For Pennsylvania’s workforce system to continue to perform at the highest levels, workforce system staff need additional professional development and assistance. Under-investment in the workforce system has been well documented, and the staff doing the critical day-to-day and life-changing work need more support. While PWDA itself supports the skills and professional development needs of workforce professionals, we cannot do this work alone. Pennsylvania should be looking to the high quality initiatives in California and Michigan as models for how to train and qualify professionals to work in the workforce development system. By providing technical assistance to workforce staff, the system will be strengthened from the ground up, developing new leaders in our industry at every level.

7. Maximize Funds for Training and Supports

Because several key WIOA funding mandates are not enforced, local workforce development boards are forced to redirect money that should be spent on job training, worker support, and employer engaged. **Greater efforts should be made to better “braid” employment and training funds to ensure that Pennsylvania youth, job seekers, workers, and employers get what they deserve.**

8. Sustain Investments for Lifelong Learning

To better sustain investments for lifelong learning, similar to [Massachusetts Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund](#)³, the funds provided in Pennsylvania's Job Training Fund should be automatically redirected from the administration of the unemployment program to provide grants supporting opportunities to existing employees and newly hired workers.

9. Streamline Access to Pennsylvania's Employment and Training Programs

Despite WIOA requirements and a good start, federal efforts to reinforce alignment and integration of state employment and training programs have fallen short. **Pennsylvania needs and deserves a streamlined employment and training system that is easy to access and navigate. Pennsylvania should look to strong models in [Michigan](#)⁴, [Florida](#)⁵, and [Texas](#)⁶ and consolidate various funding streams and reinforce positive outcomes for employers and job seekers.**

10. #FreeTheData

In addition to the data approaches outlined in #4, Pennsylvania must make open and existing data sources accessible to the state's 22 local workforce boards. These public workforce boards, charged with providing critical and time-sensitive services to employers and job seekers, waste a lot of time waiting (up to 24 months) to get customer performance information and reporting on data already in the possession of the Commonwealth. Again, by looking to model programs in states such as [New York](#)⁷ and [California](#)⁸, **Pennsylvania should expand the access of local workforce boards to data already collected**, and in particular data relating to new hires as well the state's high school and post-secondary students so the boards can better provide career education, work experience, and related employment services. Improved access to data will allow the boards to engage in continual improvement, help students prepare for available jobs in the community, and improve the user experience and outcomes of the workforce system.

³<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleIII/Chapter29/Section2RR>

⁴<https://www.michiganvotes.org/2006-SB-1288>

⁵http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0400-0499/0445/0445.html

⁶<https://tawb.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TXModel.pdf>

⁷https://nyassembly.gov/leg/?default_fld=&bn=A07911&term=2013&Summary=Y&Actions=Y&Text=Y&Votes=Y

⁸https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB593

Pennsylvania's public workforce development system is uniquely positioned to contact and provide critical services to the populations and organizations most impacted by COVID-19.

In fact, that is its mission.