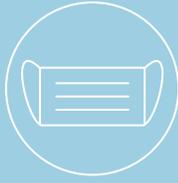
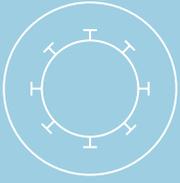


SUDDENLY
VIRTUAL



A Review of Workforce Area Websites in Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania

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FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

RUTGERS

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In June 2020, the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey released [Suddenly Virtual: Workforce Services, Eight Weeks Later](#), a brief that examined the progress frontline staff have made in their quick transition to virtual service delivery and remote teaming. That brief also addressed the ongoing discussions and challenges regarding the potential return to in-person operations. As part of the Heldrich Center’s research to gain a better understanding of local workforce areas’ responses to going suddenly virtual, researchers conducted a review of websites of every workforce area in four states – Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania – to identify what services have been made available to the public through websites and online platforms.

The ultimate goal of this review was to see what kind of information and services were available online to customers of the local One-Stop Career Center system and job seekers more generally. Moreover, the Heldrich Center also wanted to understand how local workforce areas were engaging with job seekers online and how information and services were being communicated to the public. While many newly unemployed individuals remain quarantined in their homes, it is vital that virtual services and workforce-related information offered via websites and online platforms provide clear and specific guidance to assist those new to unemployment and the public workforce system, and those in need of help at this time.

Overall, the Heldrich Center documented that the public workforce system has clearly shown its ability to react, adapt, and pivot during the COVID-19 pandemic thus far. The pandemic has forced many changes in the public workforce system, such as the sudden need to adopt virtual services and create online content and resources. Researchers recognize the magnitude of the challenges the public workforce system and One-Stop Career Center staff have had to face and overcome over the past few months. As such, this review highlights examples of good practices for website content and resources that could be implemented in the coming weeks and months.

Overall Themes

In this review, Heldrich Center researchers examined the websites and social media pages of all 206 local workforce areas in Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. The center understands that virtual services may be offered directly to current customers via contact with their One-Stop Career Center case managers, but researchers also wanted to understand what individuals with no direct ties to the public workforce system could access. Three key themes emerged.

Designated COVID-19 Resources and Pages

In the four states reviewed, a majority of the local area websites in some way acknowledged the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting changes in workforce operations and services, such as physical office closures, and the provision of phone numbers and email addresses to find direct assistance. States and individual local workforce areas created repositories of COVID-19 information, which took many forms, including COVID-19 jobs portals, information hubs, resource pages, COVID-19 playbooks of workplace safety tips, state and federal pandemic unemployment assistance fact sheets and filing instructions, CARES Act provision outlines, health insurance marketplace resources, and more. These pages and information made it clear to job seekers what they could access online and where they could turn for help.

Opportunities to Learn and Connect

Of the 206 workforce areas reviewed, approximately half used their websites to share resources such as online learning portals, links to job postings, virtual workshops, remote job training opportunities, and more. Others created dedicated space for job seeker questions and concerns via

hotlines and virtual office hours with career counselors. These kinds of online resources enabled job seekers to learn new skills, actively search for jobs from the safety of their own homes, and receive one-on-one help during a chaotic and isolating time.

Local areas also turned to social media as a means of connecting with customers where they are, utilizing platforms like Facebook and YouTube to share information and promote virtual events during the pandemic. These resources effectively expanded the reach of some local workforce areas' footprints within their communities.

Existing Content Digitized

A recent Heldrich Center survey found that a majority of local workforce areas indicated that their first priority when going suddenly virtual was to digitize existing materials. For this reason, much of the job search content found online during this early review was in the form of PDFs, PowerPoint slides, informational sheets, and other static content. Looking ahead, local workforce area staff understand that they will need to update this content on a routine basis and post new content in order to continuously engage with job seekers.

In terms of multimedia content, some video tutorials and webinars by One-Stop staff could be found online. While many frontline staff reported hosting live virtual events and webinars for customers, it appears that only a few of these sessions were recorded and posted on local workforce areas' websites and social media pages. This disparity led the Heldrich Center research team to suspect that local areas are investing time and effort in advertising and circulating this type of content and materials through more private channels such as email.

State Overviews

In this review of One-Stop Career Center online resources, it was clear that many local areas had efficiently put up critical COVID-19-related guidance and resources for customers. Some areas went so far as to include additional wraparound services and public health information. Other areas had enlisted social media channels such as YouTube and Facebook to promote services and virtual events. Listed below are state-specific summaries for what researchers were able to find online.

Connecticut

The Heldrich Center team reviewed the websites and social media pages for the 21 local workforce areas in Connecticut. While a much smaller workforce development area than other states reviewed, Connecticut and its American Job Centers have offered a range of remote services to accommodate social distancing and stay-at-home declarations. The state has also promoted [Metrix Online Learning](#) via the SkillUp CT Program, where unemployed Connecticut residents are allowed free access to 5,000 online courses. In addition, [CTHires](#) provides job seeker resources to Connecticut residents such as job postings, career services, and information about educational services and workplace training.

New Jersey

The Heldrich Center team reviewed the websites and social media pages for the 30 local workforce areas in New Jersey. The New Jersey Department of Labor has revamped its [Career Connections](#) website, which indicates that all One-Stop Career Centers' physical locations are closed and links to the New Jersey [COVID-19 Jobs and Hiring Portal](#). Moreover, Career Connections directs individuals with unemployment insurance questions to the appropriate websites, which feature the latest news and updates to keep customers aware of any new information regarding their benefits. In the review, two local workforce areas stood out – Greater Raritan (Somerset and Hunterdon Counties) and Monmouth County – for publishing information and tools that job seekers can specifically use during the pandemic. Career counselors in Monmouth County posted a series of YouTube

videos breaking down the job search process into more accessible modules. Greater Raritan is using [SkillUp Greater Raritan](#), offered through Metrix Online Learning, as well as posting free webinars about job search readiness. To read more about their strategies, see the “Noteworthy Practices” section below.

New York

The Heldrich Center team reviewed the websites and social media pages for the 92 local workforce areas in New York. Similar to Pennsylvania, New York's Career Centers have an advanced online presence, with a wide array of COVID-19-related resources for job seekers, as well as virtual services and online training. Dedicated web pages to COVID-19 resources have provided temporary, remote resources to job seekers and businesses in need of assistance. Many of New York's Career Centers have provided clear direction on staff availability and remote services throughout the pandemic, such as links to service inquiry forms and contact information for phone or video conferencing. State-approved educational providers have also been recommended by these offices to assist job seekers. In addition, business and employer resources and services are promoted on many websites.

Pennsylvania

The Heldrich Center team reviewed the websites and social media pages for the 63 local workforce areas in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania's public workforce system has provided a wide range of online resources for job seekers, including dedicated COVID-19 resource web pages, information on virtual service intake, and video workshops on YouTube. In addition, some of Pennsylvania's CareerLink Centers have offered video conferencing appointments through platforms such as Skype, FaceTime, and Zoom. A vast majority of the local CareerLink offices have a Facebook page, where updates are frequently shared about state and federal unemployment insurance information, local job opportunities, and virtual job seeker events. In addition, Facebook has also been used to promote virtual services to newer job seekers and inform existing clients about plans for service delivery moving forward.

Noteworthy Practices

After a comprehensive review of every local workforce area website in Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, a few noteworthy practices were identified by the Heldrich Center that offered job seekers engaging communication and clear information. Overall, many local workforce areas went above and beyond and have gotten creative and more responsive with their online presence for job seekers. Here are a few local workforce areas that stood out in the Heldrich Center's review:

Connecticut

North Central Connecticut Workforce Area (Hartford, East Hartford, New Britain, Manchester, Enfield, and Bristol)

- ▶ Call center available on weekdays to provide information about resources for employers, job seekers, and dislocated workers.
- ▶ Full COVID-19 response plan outlines the status of One-Stop Career Center services and health and safety measures for staff, contractors, and clients.

New Jersey

Greater Raritan Workforce Development Board (Somerset and Hunterdon Counties)

- ▶ Home page is dedicated to COVID-19 resources for job seekers and businesses, and includes information about state and federal pandemic assistance, e-learning opportunities through local providers, and online career services.

Monmouth County One-Stop Career Center

- ▶ YouTube channel provides videos on topics such as creating a job search plan, online networking, and technology use during the COVID-19 pandemic.

New York

CDO Workforce (Chenango, Delaware, and Otsego Counties)

- ▶ Live skills training workshops via Zoom for adults, teens, and employers on topics such as career exploration, job loss and stress, and transferable skills.

Dutchess County One-Stop

- ▶ One-on-one résumé assistance and mock interviews with workforce staff are available by appointment for new and existing clients via Zoom.
- ▶ Wide social media use: Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter account pages.

NYC Workforce1 Career Center System

- ▶ Free, remote services have been available to job seekers prior to the COVID-19 pandemic through the Virtual NYC Workforce1 Career Center System.
- ▶ Individuals can request these services online and be connected to a workforce professional via web or phone for one-on-one professional job search assistance and counseling.

Pennsylvania

Northwest Pennsylvania Job Connect (Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Venango, and Warren Counties)

- ▶ Website provides pandemic relief information for employers and job seekers and provides contact information via Skype and FaceTime.
- ▶ Mobile one-on-one service has been in place for some time in the six-county region.

SCPAWorks (Capitol Region, Adams, Cumberland, Franklin, Juniata, Lebanon, Perry, and York Counties)

- ▶ Contact information for each CareerLink location is provided for those seeking local job seeker services.
- ▶ Workforce Resource Line assists with both employer and job seeker needs (remote CareerLink services).

Lehigh Valley CareerLink

- ▶ Wide range of online resources available, including YouTube workshop videos and remote counseling services from staff via office phone or email.
- ▶ YouTube channel offers workshops in both English and Spanish, including tutorials about job search materials and technology tools (e.g., Zoom).

Potential for Learning and Collaboration

While a majority of the 206 local workforce areas reviewed quickly put up information and created pages on their websites dedicated to COVID-19 resources, some local areas are still in the process of developing their online presence. Through this work, the Heldrich Center hopes to encourage idea sharing and collaboration amongst local areas as many continue to adapt to a new normal and adjust operations to be effective in a virtual space. After having gone through months of chaos and confusion, local workforce area operators believe there is an opportunity to take a moment to reassess and learn from their peers to guide a path forward.

Based on the Heldrich Center survey and conversations with local area One-Stop Career Center professionals, the majority feel that the need for virtual services is here to stay. While some local One-Stop operations are moving back to their physical offices, many now agree that customer-facing virtual service delivery will become the new normal. Many local workforce areas are reporting that services will continue to be available virtually, delivered via a mix of in-person and telecommuting staff. Through staff's immense efforts and the implementation of noteworthy practices, such as those outlined in this brief, online virtual offerings can be devised to be as informative, seamless, and effective as in-person communication and service delivery.

Conclusion

Overall, many local workforce areas quickly mobilized during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic to provide a robust online presence for customers and job seekers in search of information and resources via the Internet. These initiatives have largely been driven by frontline staff trying to build their virtual services plane while also flying it. Based on staff insights and feedback, these adaptations have largely been for the better and, they believe, should be embraced as lasting adaptations to public workforce service delivery.

As the need for and delivery of virtual operations continues, local workforce areas that are still in the process of creating an online presence can learn from their peers in other states. The need for virtual services will likely continue for the foreseeable future, regardless of whether workforce staff return to their physical offices or continue remote work (or a combination of both). Many local One-Stop operators that participated in conversations with the Heldrich Center agree that both staff and customer concern for safety will necessitate some form of virtual service delivery as the new standard.

Posting virtual offerings on One-Stop Career Center websites and social media platforms can, according to local operators, reap many benefits for staff and customers. For example,

offering clear and specific online guidance can help to reduce the amount of telephone calls and emails staff have to field, thereby freeing up their time to better invest in staff-intensive services. Similarly, comprehensive One-Stop online pages can help prevent the potential rush of customers coming in person with questions when physical facilities reopen. Moreover, online resources also help to serve a large population of job seekers who may never come into the One-Stop for services. Because of the sheer volume of pandemic unemployment, there are many job seekers conducting their skill development and job search from home that have no current attachment to the public workforce system. Therefore, providing public-facing virtual offerings can benefit this population of job seekers, as well as established customers of the One-Stop system.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically transformed service delivery in the workforce field. During these trying times, local staff have risen to every challenge and shown the agility and resilience of their respective organizations. As customer and staff safety is a paramount concern, creating and maintaining virtual offerings will be critical in meeting customers where they are in the weeks and months ahead.

Acknowledgments

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About the Heldrich Center

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

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

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

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