

Fostering TANF/WIOA Collaboration *Sustainability in Action: The Lehigh Valley Story*

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Co-location of TANF and WIOA staff with intentional office layout facilitates a full-service experience for both the customer and staff and lends itself naturally to collaboration.
- The full pivot to virtual services during the COVID-19 pandemic heightened public awareness of those services, and the movement back to in-person services is increasing. Lehigh Valley anticipates those numbers will move back to and possibly exceed pre-pandemic times through a shift to a hybrid delivery model in CareerLink centers and strategic community hubs.
- The collaborative spirit of the staff has also fostered external partnerships with organizations in the community to include banking partners.



OVERVIEW

Since 2014, states have embarked on coordination between Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs and the workforce system to improve service delivery and reduce duplication. The passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014 served as a catalyst for many state TANF and workforce system leaders to coordinate client services for low-income or vulnerable populations. In 2018 and 2019, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance (OFA), developed a [series of briefs on TANF/WIOA collaboration](#) designed to highlight innovative coordination strategies between TANF and WIOA programs.

In 2022, OFA conducted an update of five collaborative efforts to share best practices around how the collaboration has sustained through time and evolved due to the COVID-19 pandemic to include [Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania](#). This brief highlights updates to the TANF and WIOA Collaboration in Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania.

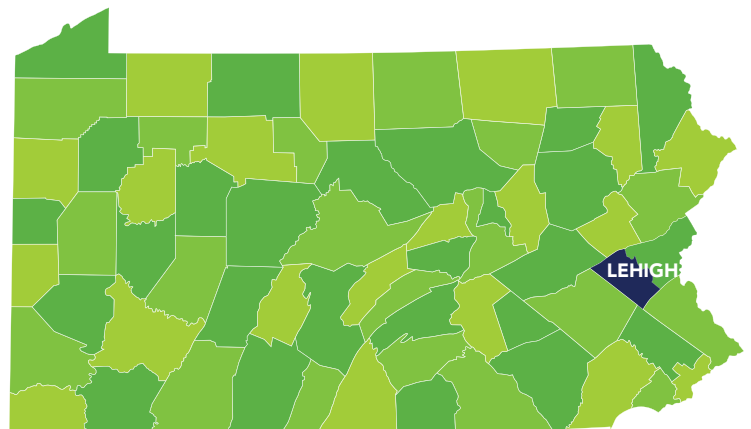


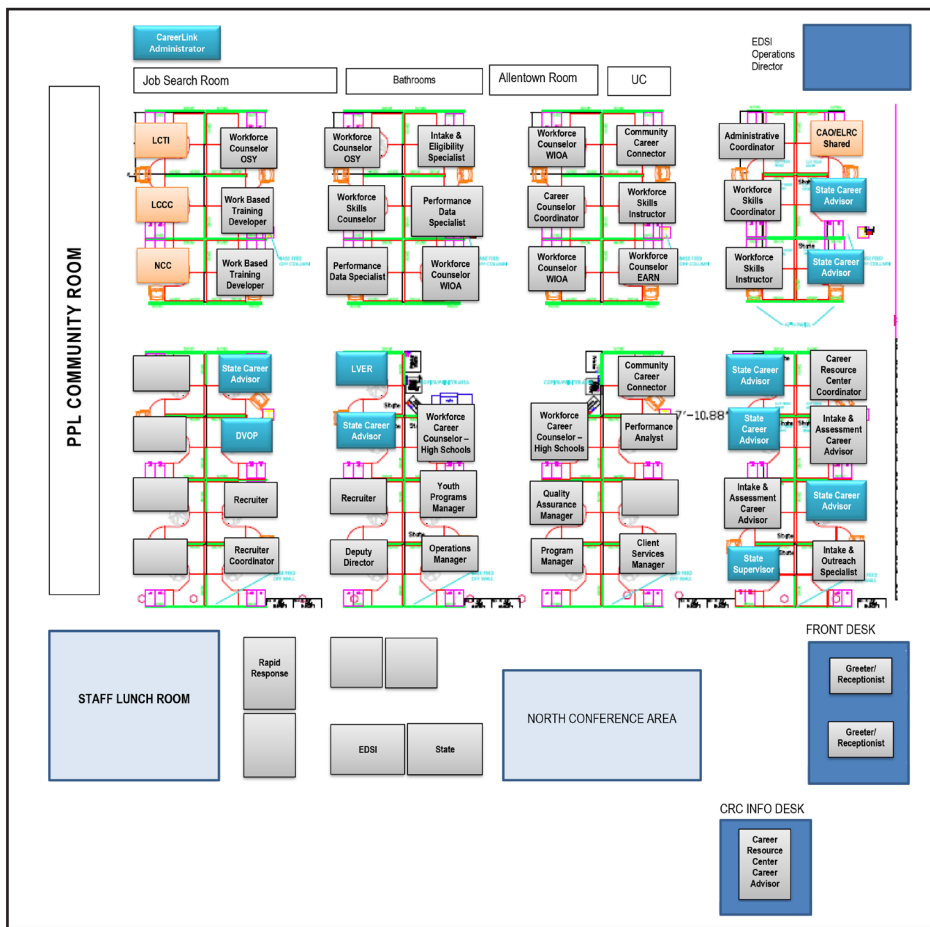
BACKGROUND

Since the enactment of WIOA, the Workforce Board of Lehigh Valley (WBLV) has strategized to continually prepare the workforce to support regional economic growth and economic self-sufficiency to ensure the area has a world-class competitive workforce. This strategy begins with the WIOA key provisions that are aligned with TANF regulations and systems, which create opportunities for economic and career success and focuses on vulnerable populations, including low-income adults, dislocated workers, veterans, youth with limited skills, ex-offenders, and individuals with little or no current work experience and who face many personal and financial barriers. Lehigh Valley has continued to implement a holistic service delivery approach within the workforce system, by reshaping and expanding its workforce partnerships, developing and refining training options, and revisiting supportive services and other policies and practices.

Since 2018, the collaboration between TANF and WIOA has become second nature and operates seamlessly for customers through joint service delivery and information exchange between programs. By streamlining eligibility, customers are immediately aware of the programs that are qualified and can begin receiving services.

New strategies have emerged and will continue to evolve with the TANF/WIOA collaboration, which will continue to lead to the improvement of the education, training, and





The Lehigh Valley office layout is intentional to reflect the functional teams and partner collaboration.

services is increasing. Lehigh Valley does anticipate those numbers will move back to pre-pandemic times through flexible service delivery models throughout our communities.

As with many public service ecosystems across the country, the pandemic made instant communication and collaboration in Lehigh Valley more difficult. For the staff, work from home and the use of online tools proved less convenient; it was more difficult to have questions answered in a timely and efficient way. Staff were used to getting their questions answered through a quick conversation in the hallway

of the office. Despite continual work on cross-training and support of versatility in staff service delivery, there was some backpedaling of staff into various positions of expertise and comfort. However, the team prioritized communication to assure that information was being delivered consistently.

Similarly, peer support and social capital building was missing for the customers. The One-Stop provides a venue for interpersonal connections that are more difficult to forge through online services. Staff found that self-starters succeeded the most in the remote delivery model which presented a problem for those participants who were not as outgoing. During the pandemic, participants were also given Chromebooks and hot spot networks, which was facilitated through each respective program budget as a support service allowable through the approved local WIOA/EARN support service policy.

Continuing to meet regularly was key during the COVID-19 pandemic in keeping staff together and operating as a team. Staff began to understand how important this connection was for them, and that understanding translated to empathy toward their customers who were also experiencing social isolation. Staff began to step into their customers' shoes and began to find strategies to help them connect with their case manager and with one another for support.

support services needed for career pathways that lead to employment. Federal legislation and policy changes over time have allowed opportunities for programs to build on these pathways that provide on and off ramps, credential attainment, work experiences, mentoring, apprenticeships, and wraparound support services to mitigate barriers to employment and increase the employability of all job seekers. Dual enrollment into TANF/WIOA continues to be a win for these two programs, where customers have one caseworker for both programs and a seamless experience of workforce development assistance and supportive services delivery.



COVID-19 MANAGEMENT

The CareerLink system has always been both virtual/self-service and in-person. During the COVID-19 pandemic, CareerLink saw a shift to virtual services that balanced the way services

are delivered more evenly. Despite initial technological learning curves in the pandemic, the One-Stop realigned its welcome center activities where individuals could access information and go through eligibility processes virtually. This made services more accessible for individuals who needed services that were outside regular scheduled hours and those who could not afford current gas prices or had childcare or other barriers to coming into the building. The full pivot to virtual services during the COVID-19 pandemic heightened public awareness of those services, and the movement back to in-person



COLLABORATION SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability of the collaboration for staff comes from being versatile and maintaining humility with the ultimate shared goal of improving the lives of customers. Most staff members understand how job seekers begin their journey in the office for basic services and can “stand in” for another staff member should the need arise, and the physical office structure is set up for this to work well.

For example, recruiters and job developers have similar transferable skill sets, such as using their skills to provide instruction to job seekers on how to interview and complete and submit electronic job applications. Conversely, career advisors and eligibility staff are more specialized. Career advisors provide individualized one-on-one support and direction to the job seeker and document participation, while eligibility staff for each of the anchor programs know the eligibility guidelines for the program they serve: WIOA Youth, WIOA Adult, and TANF, for example. Lehigh has also developed staff roles that are jointly funded; for example, the Lead Instructor for Workforce Skills Development is a position that is funded by a blend of TANF, WIOA, and additional youth funding.

Functional teams in Lehigh Valley continue to be the way the work with customers is accomplished. Lehigh Valley has functional teams, such as career advisor teams, that come together for frequent meetings. In these meetings, cross-training occurs where other specialties come in as needed to ensure there are seamless services and supports to the job seeker. In addition to scheduled meetings and ad hoc communication, the team coordinates not only with intentional schedule sharing, but also develops a monthly calendar of events — ranging from public workshops, targeted groupings (such as formerly justice involved), and community partner workshops.



COLLABORATIVE IMPACT

Merging the two programs of TANF and WIOA makes the process for eligibility easier, as they are both discussed as one entity, and information is seamlessly exchanged between the programs — in one case, the culture was referred to as a “familial environment.” Caseworkers and other partners benefit from this collaboration, because joint eligibility between TANF and WIOA allows people to know more immediately who qualifies. Caseworkers can more successfully navigate, collaborate, and communicate with clients, especially through joint client workshops. The team also has developed customer surveys to better understand the customer experience and adapt programs accordingly. Customer surveys are distributed through the use of SurveyMonkey and analyzed on a monthly basis. Surveys are used to identify strengths and weaknesses in the PA CareerLink® Lehigh Valley system, and as a result, strategies are created to address any service gaps that arise from the surveys.

The collaborative nature of the team has fostered additional relationships with the community. Lehigh Valley CareerLink is always considering the addition of more partners, service providers, and educators in its site. A coalition on transportation has held a workshop to discuss a program where customers can access free bicycles.

A local bank, Fulton Bank, provides workshops on financial literacy. A representative from Fulton Bank who regularly teaches workshops noted that staff from CareerLink not only refer customers to the workshops, but also actively participate in the workshops themselves — while providing “engagement from the inside.” This actively shows participants and community partners themselves, the commitment of the team to promote customer success.



SPECIAL FOCUS

FOSTERING INNOVATION

Lehigh Valley’s team constantly looks for opportunities to innovate to support customers. The team maintains a collective problem-solving approach with an open communication culture across all levels of staff. All voices are validated. Examples of their approaches include:

- Due to the pandemic, technology and connectivity needs surfaced, which were met with the provision of Chromebooks and hot spot networks. These devices were given to participants to keep, as opposed to renting them, funded by WIOA and DHS.
- Lehigh Valley implemented Incumbent Worker Training (IWT), where employers onboard and train workers towards additional career pathways.
- Lehigh Valley welcomes visitors to PA CareerLink® through a virtual Welcome Center. The Center offers information on a variety of basic services for all job seekers, as well as pathways to more intensive services.
- The Lehigh Planning Commission conducts an equity analysis (publicly available at <https://lvpc.org/data/v.html#equity>). The data received through the equity analysis helps the team understand the demographics of Lehigh and Northampton Counties. The data helps the team track the barriers of the customers being served in the Lehigh Valley workforce system. With this information, the team tailors services to meet the needs of the customers.

TANF SNAPSHOT



Management Information System Name:

Comprehensive Workforce Development System
Client Information System

TANF Workforce Programming is called:
Employment Advancement Retention Network (EARN)

AVERAGE NUMBER OF RECIPIENTS PER MONTH FY2021



64,727

Adults and Children



14,568

Adults



50,159

Children



STATE DEPARTMENT
Pennsylvania Department of Human Services

\$587* Max Monthly Earnings for Single Parent/2 Kids



\$403** Max Monthly TANF Cash Benefit Benefit for Single Parent/2 Kids

\$499,531,524 Federal TANF Expenditures FY 2020

*But varies within the state, this is the amount that applies to the majority of the state.
**Depends on geographic location. Philadelphia County is \$403.

WIOA SNAPSHOT



Management Information System:

Commonwealth Workforce Development System (CWDS)

American Job Center is called:
PA CareerLink

Governor Appointed Board Overseeing WIOA:
Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO)

EMPLOYMENT SERVICE (WAGNER-PEYSER) FEDERAL APPROPRIATION



\$25,780,925

Program Year (PY) 2022



WIOA ADULT FEDERAL APPROPRIATION

\$35,455,175

Program Year (PY) 2022



WIOA YOUTH FEDERAL APPROPRIATION

\$38,433,440

Program Year (PY) 2022



WIOA DISLOCATED WORKER FEDERAL APPROPRIATION

\$42,934,413

Program Year (PY) 2022



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