

Thursday, January 8, 2026

Office of Workforce Strategy and Development & Vermont Department of Labor: Updates and Priorities

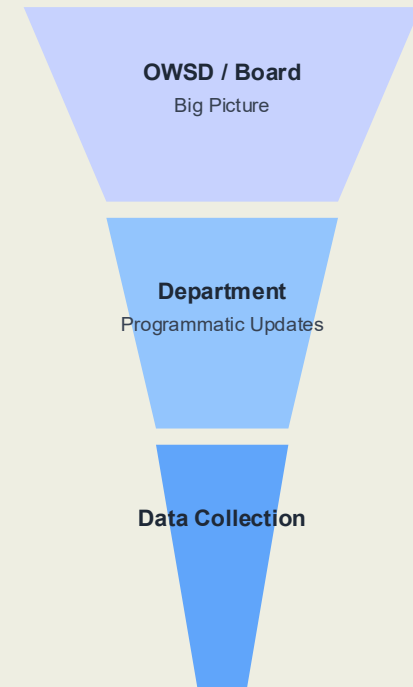
Sabina Haskell, Executive Director, OWSD
Drake Turner, Deputy Director, OWSD

Kendal Smith, Commissioner, VDOL
Jay Ramsey, Workforce Development Director, VDOL

Workforce Partner Testimony Overview

- Office of Workforce Strategy & Development (OWSD)
 - Background/Roles and Responsibilities
 - Board & Office Updates
- Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL)
 - 2026 Objectives
 - Program Updates

Next Up: Data Trust Report



Increasing detail & specificity

Background

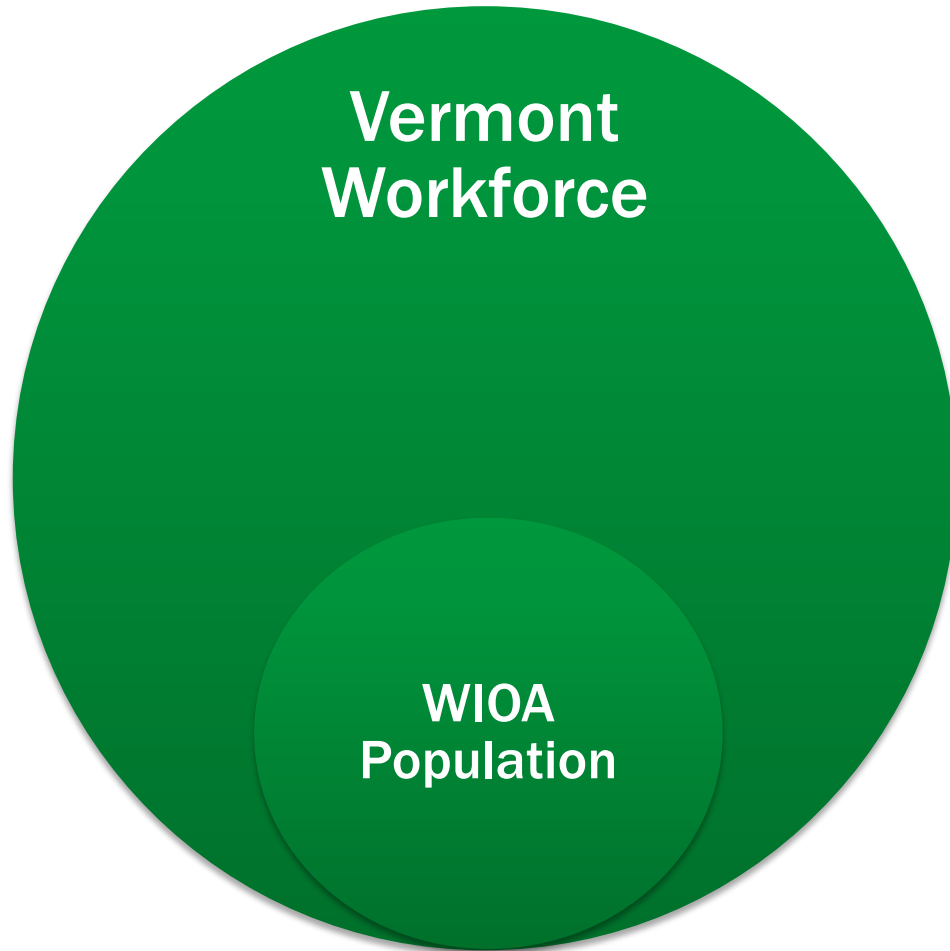
- Act 146 of 2024: created Office of Workforce Strategy and Development, reorganized State Workforce Development Board
- Act 65 of 2025: clarified roles and responsibilities of Office re: workforce education and employment and training

Roles & Responsibilities

State Workforce Development Board Strategy and Oversight (Governance)	Office of Workforce Strategy & Development Coordination and Implementation (Execution)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sets statewide workforce priorities and goals• Advises the Governor on workforce policy & strategy• Approves the WIOA State Plan and major system initiatives• Holds the workforce system accountable for results• Engages employers and stakeholders statewide <p><i>Federally required under WIOA; established in statute</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implements Board-approved priorities and statewide workforce strategy• Coordinates agencies, partners, and funding• Aligns programs to shared goals and reduces fragmentation• Manages data, reporting, and system analysis• Identifies gaps, overlaps, and opportunities for improvement <p><i>Established by Legislature to operationalize strategy</i></p>

The **Board** sets direction and provides oversight; the **Office** executes, coordinates, and reports.

State Workforce Development Board



- Board fully reconstituted with new membership
- Balanced representation from business, education, state agencies, higher education, and legislative sectors
- Focus on action and proactivity in addition to fulfilling federal requirements

Meet the Board

Name	Organization
Jay Bellows (Board Chair)	KORE Power
Chris Loso	Loso's Professional Janitorial Services
Rebecca Kapsalis	UVM Health
Betsy Hassan	UVM Medical Center
Derrick Martens	Brothers Building
Bill Cunningham	Tri-Valley Transit
Betsy Bailey	Little Dippers Doodle Children's Center
Rob Terry	Merck Forest and Farmland
Michael Hulbert	HP Cummings
Valerie White Beaudet	Ladder 1 Grill
Mark Dessureau	Dessureau Machines
Scott Giles	VSAC
Jeremy White	Orange East Supervisory Union
Rhoni Basden	Vermont Works for Women
Aron Tomlinson	Hartford Career and Tech Center
Philip Kolling	SerVermont
Tiffany Walker	Vermont State Colleges System
Mike Doneges	Mayor, Rutland City
Jim Sullivan	Bennington Select Board
Rep. Mike Marcotte	State Representative, Coventry
Sen. Alison Clarkson	State Senator, Windsor District
Kendal Smith	Vermont Department of Labor
Zoie Saunders	Vermont Agency of Education
Lindsay Kurrle	Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development
Jenney Samuelson	Vermont Agency of Human Services

Board Goals

1. Increase supply of workers in key sectors:

Develop recruiting targets for the workforce in Vermont's five sectors with the greatest workforce need and develop sector specific strategies to increase the supply of workers, in collaboration with employers, ACCD, and other stakeholders.

3. Support business expansion and relocation:

Support ACCD's business growth and recruitment strategy by aligning workforce development resources with economic development targets. Work in coordination with ACCD, VDOL, and regional partners to identify workforce barriers and solutions for Vermont-based companies poised to expand, and target out-of-state companies with potential for relocation.

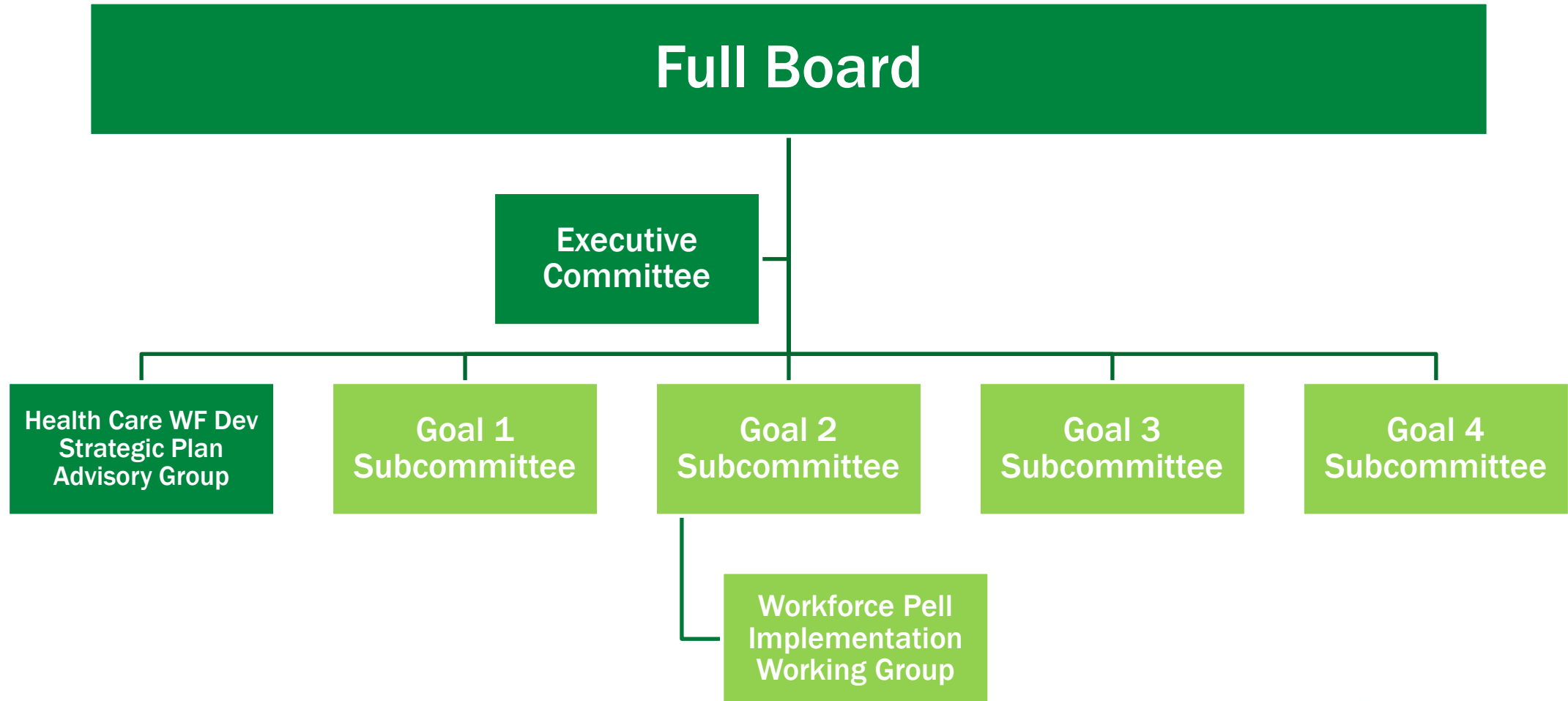
2. Support adults to re-engage and advance in the Vermont workforce:

Support adult Vermonters – including those seeking to grow their skills, change careers, and/or rejoin the workforce – in attaining meaningful employment by expanding access to coordinated, clearly defined, and stackable education and training pathways that lead to credentials of value and align with Vermont's current and emerging workforce needs.

4. Increase postsecondary graduate retention:

By 2027, increase the number of college and university graduates who remain in Vermont to work and live after graduation.

Board Structure



Office of Workforce Strategy and Development (OWSD): Year One Progress

- Stood up office and hired core staff, built foundation for future success
- Relaunched State Workforce Development Board
- Built relationships with key partners at state agencies, training providers, employers, and community partner organizations
- Fulfilled federal and state statutory responsibilities

Opportunities and Challenges

- Federal WIOA requirements (state plan modification, One-Stop American Job Center, etc.)
- Workforce Pell
- Housing
- CTE/Adult Education
- Service to Career Pathways
- Data integration and alignment

What We're Hearing and Learning

- Vermont has strong workforce programs, but fragmentation and silos limit impact
- Data and outcomes must drive decisions, but we don't need to measure everything
- Long-term success requires sustained collaboration
- This work demands urgency, while taking the care needed to build trust and alignment that will endure

What's Next: Year Two Priorities

- **Deepen Board work** through establishment of committees, identification of metrics/KPIs relative to goals, and progress
- Develop and advance a **clear workforce expansion strategy**, driven by the Board
- **Navigate federal requirements** (including Workforce Pell implementation)
- **Improve alignment** of funding and programs
- **Update and redesign OWSD website** to serve as clearinghouse for job seekers, state and external workforce partners, and employers
- **Strengthen employer and partner engagement**

Questions?

Department of Labor AGENDA

- **2025 in Review**
 - Key updates on programs & initiatives
 - Ongoing projects & partnerships
 - Federal Updates
- **2026 Legislative Priorities**
 - Supporting Housing & Education Transformation (CTE, Adult Ed/CTE, Afterschool & Summer)
- **Unemployment Insurance System Modernization**

At a Glance: Ongoing Department Work

– Job Seeker & Employer Service Transformation

- Communication & Outreach (Newsletters)
- State-Wide Events
- Sector Focused “sprints”
- Fingerprint Supported Background Checks
- Partnerships
 - Corrections, Economic Services, GROW Grantees

– Training Programs

- Registered Apprenticeship
- Service-to-career-pathways
- Adult CTE

- Modernization Projects

- Unemployment Insurance Modernization Project
- Job Center Public Computer Upgrades

- Federal Programs

- Rural Health Transformation
- HUD Continuum of Care
- WIOA state plan

At a Glance: Upcoming Department Work

— Job Seeker & Employer Service Transformation

- Service-to-career-pathways
- Virtual and In-person Career Development Workshop Updates
- Adult CTE grants
- Apprenticeship expansion
- Sector Focus
 - Construction
 - Healthcare
 - Public Sector/Municipalities

— Modernization Projects

- State Job Board Replacement

- Federal Funding and Programmatic Changes

- WIOA State Plan Modification
- Support Work Requirements for SNAP/TANF/Medicaid (HR1)
- HUD Continuum of Care
- Support Rural Health Transformation Project
- Connecting Employers with Federal Funding for Apprenticeship
- Workforce Pell (+adultCTE connect)

Workforce Program Updates:

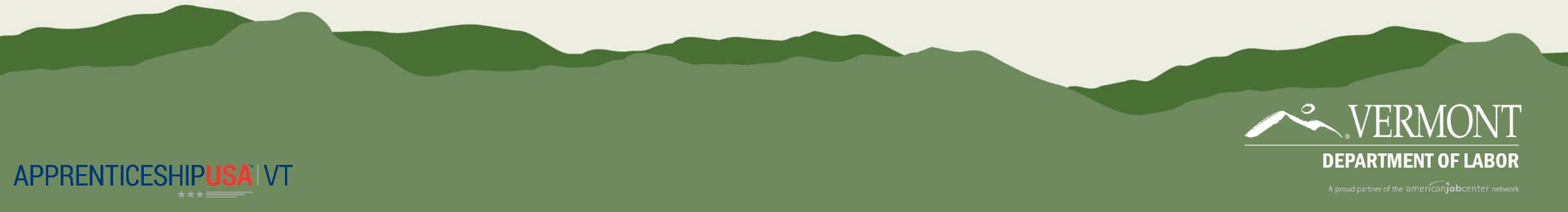
Workforce Expansion Project

- [Northeast Kingdom Chamber of Commerce](#) (Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans Counties)
- Population focus:
 - Youth ages 16-24
 - People who are justice-involved
 - Career changers
- Sector focus:
 - Manufacturing
 - Healthcare
- [Addison County Economic Development Corporation](#) (Addison County)
- Population focus:
 - Youth ages 16-24
 - Disabled people/people with disabilities
 - Adults without a high school diploma
- Sector focus:
 - Manufacturing
 - Healthcare

Workforce Program Updates:

Registered Apprenticeship

- Partnership growth & pathway development
- Pre-Apprenticeship growth & expansion
- Increased outreach & awareness
 - Newsletters, apprenticeship fairs, searchable online list
- Program stats snapshot:
 - 29 active apprenticeship occupations
 - 106 active apprentice training programs
 - 1,686 active apprentices
- 701 new apprentices registered this year
- 197 apprentice completions this year
- Key trends:
 - Younger apprentices overall
 - Program availability expanded
 - Participation growth lagged demand
 - Stronger CTE → apprenticeship pathways
- Highlight: Registered Teacher Apprenticeship



Workforce Program Updates:

Sector Work

- **Sector sprints**
 - Successful Part-Time Job Fair Series, December 2025
 - Manufacturing sprint – February 2026, job fair, social media, microsite
- **Service-to-Career Pathways**
 - Partnership with SerVermont, Efficiency Vermont, McClure Foundation
- **5-Year Rural Health Transformation Program (\$30m/year for health care workforce):**
 - Expansion of Licensed Nursing Assistant (LNA) Training Programs
 - Workforce Development Tuition Assistance Program
 - Investment in Vermont's "Critical Occupations" No-Cost Tuition Program
 - Establishment of the Maple Mountain Consortium Family Medicine Residency Program
 - Expansion of Pharmacists' Scope to Include Test-to-Treat Scenarios
 - Vermont Conditional Financial Assistance Program
 - Health Care Professions Residency Program



*VDOL Service to Career Pathways Summit,
September 2025*

Ongoing Projects:

Fingerprint Supported Background Checks

- Vermont's background check system creates major workforce, compliance and funding risks across multiple sectors – a persistent problem for many years
- Multi-Agency Workgroup with active participation from ADS, DPS, DCF, AOE, and OPR – ongoing since June 2025
- PDBG Application - December award of \$1M available for this work from now through the end of CY2026
- Proposed solution: replace manual workflows with a unified digital system, creating greater access to fingerprinting, faster processing (5-10 days rather than 3 months), overall cost-savings and risk reduction

Ongoing Projects:

HR1 Work Requirements

- Community engagement/work requirements effective January 2027 for recipients of Medicaid, SNAP and TANF
- HR1 implementation group well under way collaborating with AHS to assist in compliance, ensure eligibility, and prevent disqualification for funding
- VDOL's LMI Division will provide Wage and Unemployment Insurance Data through secure exchanges
- Working through details on files, fields, and frequency
- Exploring connections between AHS and VDOL to assist job seekers

Ongoing Projects:

Additional Partnerships

- VAMHAR Recovery Friendly Workplaces
- PRIME Partnership
- Employer badges:
 - Veteran-friendly
 - Disability-friendly
 - Apprenticeship-friendly
- Philanthropy
- GROW Grantees
- Department of Corrections
- Department of Economic Services
- Department of Economic Development
- Health Care Workforce Director, AHS
- Agency of Education
- Climate Action Office & Vermont Outdoor Business Alliance

Federal Workforce Updates

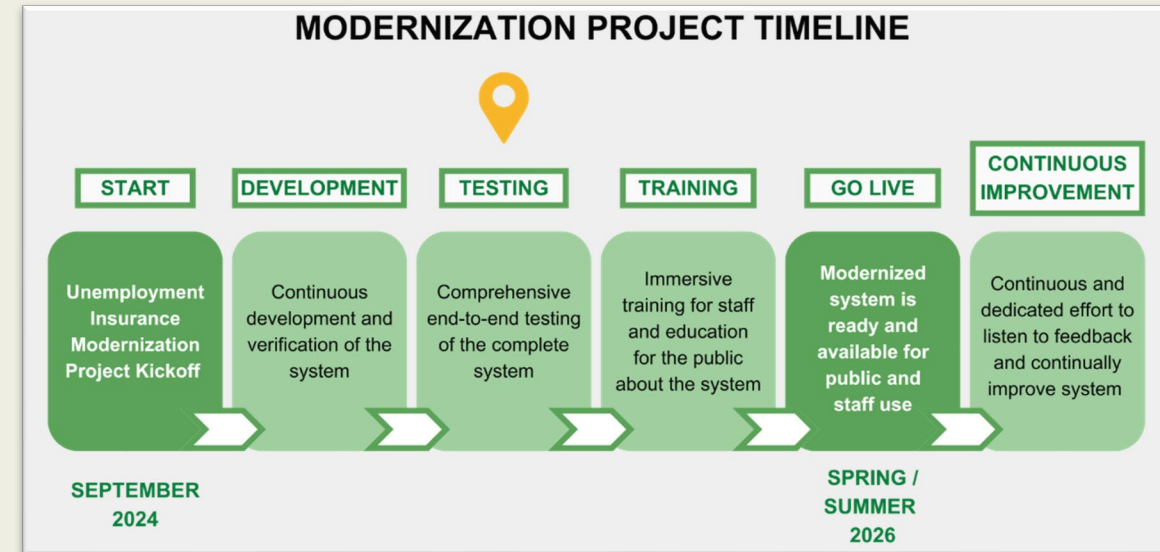
- USDOL and USDOE Partnership and Administration Changes
- "America's Talent Strategy" / Preparing Americans for High-Paying Skilled Trade Jobs of the Future Executive Order
- "MASA" block grant proposed – 10% used for apprenticeship
- Apprenticeship funds available directly to employers
- Encouraging WIOA waivers

2026 Legislative Objectives

- Support in Legislative Conversations on Housing
- Support in Legislative Conversations on Education Transformation – specifically CTE governance, Adult CTE/Adult Ed, and afterschool & summer programming
- Registered Apprenticeship Statute Technical Corrections

Unemployment Insurance Modernization Update

- Top priority for VDOL – creating simplified, efficient online services for employers and claimants
- Project remains on schedule
- Development - 90% completed
- Business Testing - 60% completed
- Converted Data Testing - 45% completed
- Training – starts now and ramps up in January
- Ongoing communication and collaboration with claimants, employers, TPAs and other key partners
- Usability study under way (NASWA)
- Project info: [UI Modernization](#)



Questions?

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