



SEIZING OPPORTUNITY IN CRISIS: A MULTI-PRONGED APPROACH TO UPSKILLING

As the pandemic pummeled Pennsylvania's state employment rate, leaders quickly realized that silver linings were buried deep in the economic chaos and uncertainty. In collaboration with Metrix Learning, Pennsylvania executed a multi-pronged approach to address the lapses in equity, digital literacy, and employment with a malleable upskilling platform that continues to shape the progress of the Pennsylvania workforce and economy today.



We had kind of a double-edged sword if you will, where we had to make sure our staff were trained and prepared. We've taken several steps to bridge the digital divide with our staff, but also in preparation for them to help upskill the community."

Stephanie Perry,
Digital Equity and Workforce Specialist

DIGITAL UPSKILLING BREAKTHROUGH TRANSFORMS WORKFORCE

Pennsylvania was reported to be one of the lowest nationally ranked states in the area of digital skills according to an [Accenture Report and Career Advisor Survey](#). Digital literacy issues were present well ahead of the COVID-19 crisis. The recurrent spikes in unemployment revealed a widespread need for an easily accessible remedy that would boost marketability for jobseekers within the emerging virtual and hybrid job markets. Metrix Learning and its subsequent SkillUP PA virtual education platform proved to be a robust and adaptable resource across the Commonwealth with the support of the National Dislocated Worker Grant. The \$2.6M funding from the Department of Labor provided constituents access to a **cost-free tool** laden with over 7,000 skill development courses customized to the needs of jobseekers and labor market gaps.

Additionally, during a time where job opportunities were scarce, the pandemic downtime was an ample opportunity to upskill **tens of thousands of jobseekers** while cultivating new career perspectives that aligned with projected labor market needs.

A double-edged solution to advance digital literacy

The sudden shift to virtual environments proved challenging for scores of Pennsylvania workers losing jobs amid the pandemic; additionally, workforce development board employees faced unforeseen refitting obstacles in adjusting to the remote work environment. The forced digital transformation revealed vulnerabilities in telecommuting skill sets with internal staff, of which were remedied with a tailored curriculum from the SkillUP PA platform. Metrix Learning engineered a user-friendly interface in SkillUP PA that allowed for digitally novice staff to confidently expand and refine their skills to adequately support customers at scale to meet the demands of unemployed workers in need.

Professional Development Day was the resulting pilot project for the staff development team composed of Metrix Learning, leaders of the Bureau of Workforce Development Administration, and the Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations.

Challenges in the Commonwealth

- Digital Divide
- Employee Retention
- Low Access to Soft Skills Education



"It's important to note that we've not just retained staff but began hiring more," Perry said. "The staff can see that leadership is investing in them with an education tool that's accessible 24/7 to support their role and even learn skills beyond their scope of work, of which many do take advantage of."

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This internal staff program was designed to implement customized skill development based on the individual occupations of each agency. Now a permanent program, Professional Development Day allows for agency employees to dedicate one day each month to complete assigned course clusters on SkillUp PA relevant to their job duties. Included in these training initiatives are digital equity, diversity, and inclusion to reinforce efforts in bridging the digital divide.

The investment in Professional Development Day has strengthened the internal backbone of digital literacy. Additionally, employee attrition rates within these groups have declined since the implementation of this program despite the upward trend of retention issues among employers countrywide.

Since its debut, SkillUp PA has maintained a steady flow of progressive internal and external workforce outcomes trickling into the economic impact of Pennsylvania:

Registrations: 31,000+

Courses accessed: 25,500+

Courses completed: 13,000+

Training hours: 7,000+

WDB Portals launched: 22 ← Goal met!

After the Commonwealth's initial August 2021 launch of SkillUp with only five workforce development boards, the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry received an additional \$3M federal award to build on the success of the program. Since its debut, SkillUp PA evolved into a virtual workforce ecosystem with devoted case management and alignment to digital equity and High Priority Occupations. The same grant aims to support a targeted outreach campaign for the Career Workforce Development System with Metrix Learning. The goal is to optimize tracking for the skills and credentials attained through the SkillUp portal, allowing for an improved workflow in case management and service delivery.

The collaboration between the Pennsylvania Department of Labor, Workforce Development Board, the Commonwealth, and Metrix Learning has established an ironclad philosophy to workforce development.



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