

2026

TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT



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Executive Summary

This Training Needs Assessment (TNA) provides a comprehensive analysis of current and emerging training needs across the workforce development system, including state workforce agencies and partner organizations. Drawing on a national survey, multi-year learner feedback, advisory input, and targeted focus groups, the assessment identifies where staff are experiencing the greatest operational strain and where training can most effectively improve performance, consistency, and service outcomes.

Across data sources, respondents consistently described increasing job complexity driven by rapid policy changes, system modernization, evolving client and employer needs, and persistent resource constraints. While the existing training portfolio is widely viewed as credible and valuable, particularly for foundational learning, staff and supervisors emphasized the need for deeper, more applied training that reflects real-world scenarios, judgment-based decision making, and day-to-day workflows. Burnout, compassion fatigue, and loss of institutional knowledge further underscore the importance of timely, practical, and accessible training solutions.

The findings highlight several priority training needs that cut across program areas, including advanced adjudication and fact-finding, interviewing and communication skills, fraud and identity theft detection, technology and data literacy (including artificial intelligence), cross-program integration, and leadership development. For workforce services (WS), particular emphasis was placed on holistic service delivery, employer engagement, intake and triage, serving individuals with barriers, and plain language policy application. For Unemployment Insurance (UI), respondents stressed advanced adjudication, documentation quality, fraud prevention, and decision-making confidence.

In addition to content gaps, the assessment identified strong preferences regarding training design and delivery. Staff consistently favored short, modular, and scenario-based learning, with live or instructor-led training for complex topics supplemented by recordings, job aids, and on-demand resources. These preferences reflect both learning effectiveness and the operational constraints under which workforce development staff operate.

The findings indicate that the Learning team is well positioned to address identified gaps by enhancing and extending existing training offerings rather than rebuilding curricula from scratch. Strategic investments in advanced content, applied scenarios, cross-program training, and modernized, blended delivery approaches, and technology to support a modality of delivery options will allow the team to meet evolving workforce needs, support staff sustainability, and maximize the value of its current training portfolio.

The authors would like to acknowledge the many individuals in the national workforce development system for their contributions to this effort. While it is impossible to name each individually, the time and effort in responding to our survey is greatly appreciated. In addition to responding to the survey, many state agencies and partner organizations participated in the focus groups we conducted. The candid contributions made by focus group participants allowed us to better understand survey responses and the training needs of this broad, diverse system.

Background and Objectives

A Training Needs Assessment (TNA) is the first step in the Instructional Systems Design (ISD) process. The purpose of the TNA is to identify gaps between current skills, knowledge and required performance to ensure training efforts are strategic, impactful, and aligned with the needs of our learners.

The last TNA was conducted in 2015. Our focus has since expanded from training state workforce agencies (SWAs) in the UI program to developing training that benefits the broader workforce development system, including partner organizations and recipients of federal funding. Therefore, an assessment inclusive of these stakeholders provided each organization or agency an opportunity to articulate their unique challenges in effectively serving job seekers, employers, claimants, and other impacted individuals.

The TNA yielded insights into training opportunities that can help prepare the system to meet changing demands, including adapting to new technologies, responding to policy shifts, and improving service delivery.

Data Collection Efforts

The following methods were used to collect data and information:

- **National Survey** of workforce partner organizations and SWAs – We surveyed staff members to learn about the primary challenges they face to effectively serve clients, job seekers, trainees, claimants, and employers and how training impacts their work.

- **Advisory meeting** – A meeting was convened with internal programs and services staff who have knowledge of training needs to gather feedback about the training topics that would be most useful for workforce development staff.
- **Analysis** of Historic Learning feedback – Everyone who completes a training course is surveyed regarding their learning experiences. These results are evaluated annually to determine if the training meets the skill development needs of learners. The evaluation reports were analyzed to look for trends and opportunities for improvement.
- **Focus groups** with WS and UI system staff – Using the survey results as a starting point for discussion, the focus groups helped us validate the training goals that were identified and focus on the specific roles and learning objectives that will most benefit staff.

National Survey

The national survey was designed to gather broad, system-wide input on the challenges, skill gaps, and training needs facing WS and UI. The survey targeted staff across roles, job levels, and program areas to capture a diverse range of perspectives on operational demands, workforce pressures, and the extent to which existing training supports effective service delivery.

Survey questions focused on identifying primary barriers to performance, gaps in skills and knowledge, the impact of policy and technology changes, preferred training modalities, and priorities for future investments. The findings in this section provide a quantitative and qualitative foundation for understanding where staff experience the greatest strain and where targeted training can most effectively improve consistency, confidence, and outcomes across the workforce development system.

Survey Demographics

The survey engaged stakeholders across the workforce development system from varied backgrounds and with different levels of experience to ensure representation of a broad range of perspectives.

Response Rate

We received a total of 273 responses out of 3,020 invitations sent to UI and WS professionals. This is a response rate of 9% and includes both partial and complete responses.

State and Territory Participation

There was broad participation representing 53 states and territories spanning small, medium, and large states across all regions.

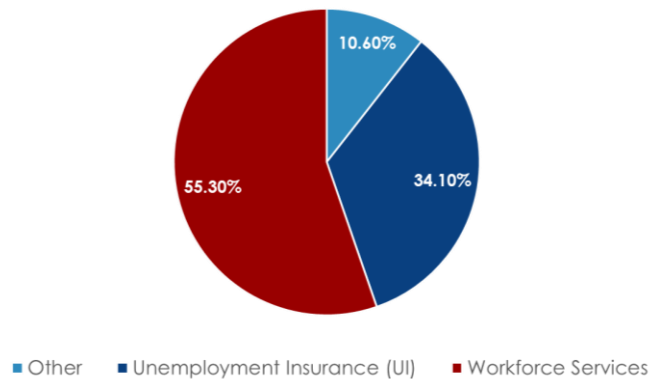
NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS BY STATE OR TERRITORY

State / Territory	Respondents	State / Territory	Respondents
Alabama	1	Montana	3
Alaska	2	Nebraska	1
Arizona	13	Nevada	2
Arkansas	2	New Jersey	10
California	6	New Mexico	4
Colorado	11	New York	3
Connecticut	1	North Carolina	5
Delaware	4	North Dakota	6
Florida	5	Ohio	9
Georgia	1	Oklahoma	5
Guam	2	Oregon	8
Hawaii	3	Pennsylvania	9
Idaho	6	Puerto Rico	2
Illinois	4	South Carolina	3
Indiana	19	South Dakota	1
Iowa	10	Tennessee	5
Kansas	4	Texas	8
Kentucky	9	Utah	1
Louisiana	12	Vermont	2
Maine	5	Virginia	6
Maryland	1	Washington	26
Massachusetts	3	Wisconsin	5
Michigan	4	Wyoming	5
Minnesota	3	Virgin Islands	1
Mississippi	6		
Missouri	6		

Agency and Organization Participation

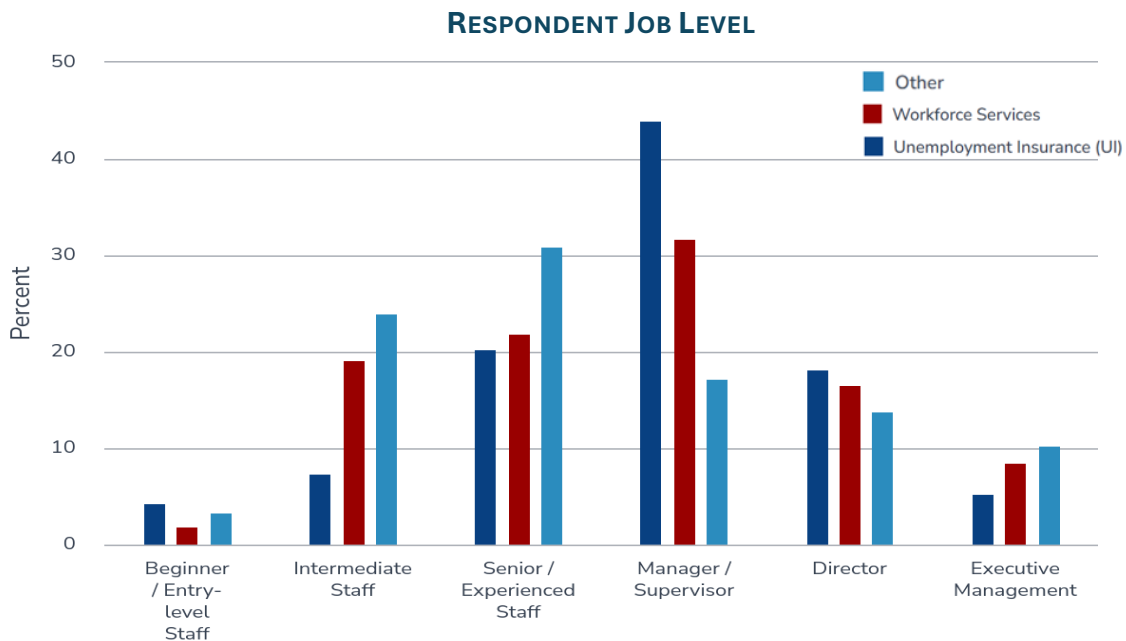
The largest number of respondents (55%) came from WS. Many of the individuals identifying their program as “Other” (34%) came from organizations such as Vocational Rehabilitation and Veteran Services.

RESPONDENT JOB FUNCTION



Job Level Participation

All job categories participated in the survey with the distribution skewed toward mid- to upper-level roles. Having strong participation from managers and supervisors is important because they often shape team development plans and allocate resources.



Strong participation from managers and supervisors suggests:

- High interest in aligning training with organizational goals
- Desire to address leadership and management competencies
- A greater likelihood that they will participate in training programs

- An organizational commitment to professional development

Survey Findings

The findings are organized according to the survey's guiding questions. These questions reflect our goals of identifying training needs for the broader workforce development audience and understanding changes that have occurred throughout the system recently:

- What are the **primary challenges** staff face to effectively serve claimants, job seekers, or employers?
- What **skill and knowledge gaps** require attention? What existing training addresses those gaps?
- How have **advancements in technologies and policy updates** affected how staff handle work processes?
- **What improvements** can we make **to the various existing learning and training programs** to make them more useful and relevant to the workforce development system?
- What are the **current and emerging training needs** of workforce development system staff?

Primary Challenges

The survey responses reveal a complex landscape of challenges faced by workforce development staff, organizations, and clients. Several interconnected themes emerge, each contributing to the overall challenge of delivering effective services.

Resource limitations, complex client needs, evolving skill requirements, and technological barriers are compounded by rapid policy changes and communication challenges.

Staff are expected to deliver personalized, high-quality services in an environment that often lacks the necessary support, training, and tools. The emotional toll of burnout and compassion fatigue is palpable. There is a need for renewed focus on the fundamentals of workforce development, connecting job seekers with employers, and providing meaningful, human-centered support.

MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED CHALLENGES

WS	UI
Resource Constraints & Admin Burden	Staffing & Workload
Complex Client Needs	Skill Gaps
Skill Gaps	System Limitations
Technology & System Issues	Communication Issues
Policy & Communication Complexity	Claimant Barriers
Employer Engagement & Understanding Industry	Fraud Policy Impacts
Burnout & Compassion Fatigue	Training Platform Needs (LMS)

Programs are striving to meet their mission under significant constraints. Respondents see training as a vital tool for addressing workforce challenges, but their focus differs. UI responses are more operational and immediate, while WS responses are broader and more strategic. The overlap in technology, customer service, and operational practices suggests common ground, but the differences highlight unique priorities and perspectives within each group.

Skill and Knowledge Gaps

While many skill gaps were identified, communication and collaboration, technology, leadership, and program integration knowledge gaps were frequently reported across program areas.

Collaboration and communication are recurring gaps across all categories.

- Limited understanding of how different units connect and collaborate affects workflow and coordination
- Difficulty explaining complex processes and managing stressed clients empathetically results in repeated inquiries and escalations
- New hires lack sufficient training, particularly on de-escalation techniques

Technology adoption and data literacy are increasingly important but underdeveloped.

- Lack of technical skills, such as data validation and system utilization, affects timeliness
- Challenges integrating modernized systems with legacy systems can stifle innovation
- Low confidence in using emerging technologies can prevent staff from keeping pace with industry trends

Leadership development and training access are needed at all levels.

- Leadership staff may not have access to training opportunities, which can result in insufficient management skills and support
- Loss of experienced staff after the pandemic has created gaps in institutional knowledge
- Executives may lack direct service knowledge and fail to provide adequate support, culture, or resources for staff

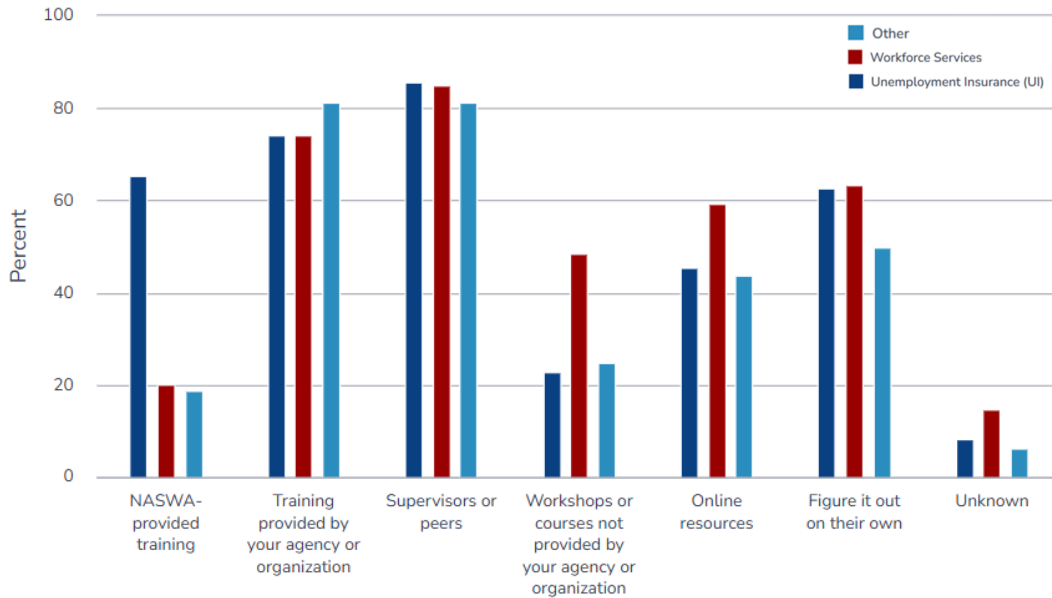
Program integration and cross-program knowledge is essential for holistic service delivery but often lacking.

- Many staff members demonstrate limited understanding of how different units connect and collaborate, in relation to the workforce integration requirements contained in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).
- Widespread gaps exist in understanding how to combine services from different programs to create customized support paths for clients.

Existing Training

Staff use a mix of formal training, peer support, and other sources to build new skills and address knowledge gaps.

CURRENT SOURCES OF TRAINING TO ADDRESS SKILL GAPS

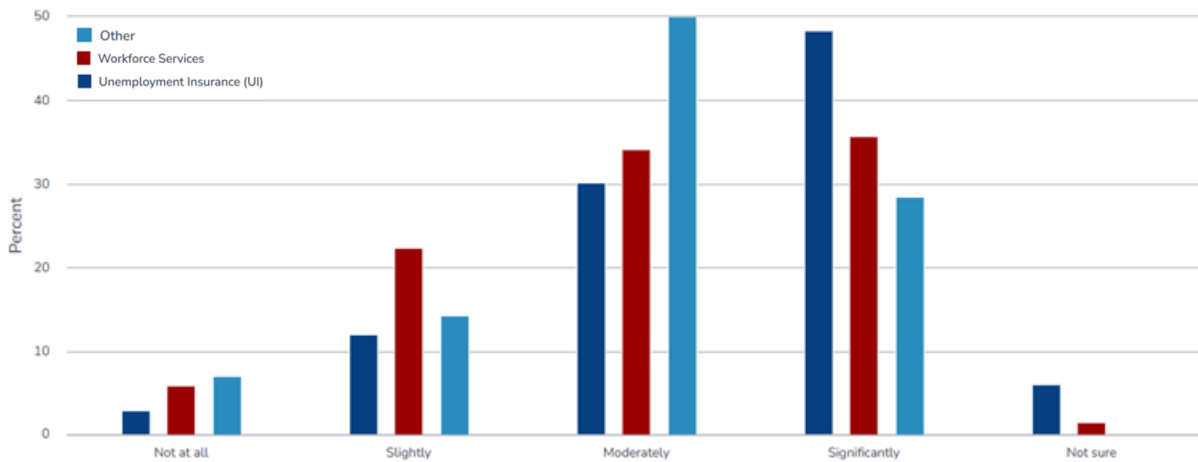


While many staff turn to supervisors or peers for support (24%) or rely on training provided by their agency or organization (21%), nearly one in five respondents (17%) reported needing to figure things out on their own. This finding highlights an opportunity to strengthen staff support through more accessible training, job aids, and reference resources.

Advancements in Technologies

Most survey respondents have seen moderate to significant changes in day-to-day work caused by advancements in technology.

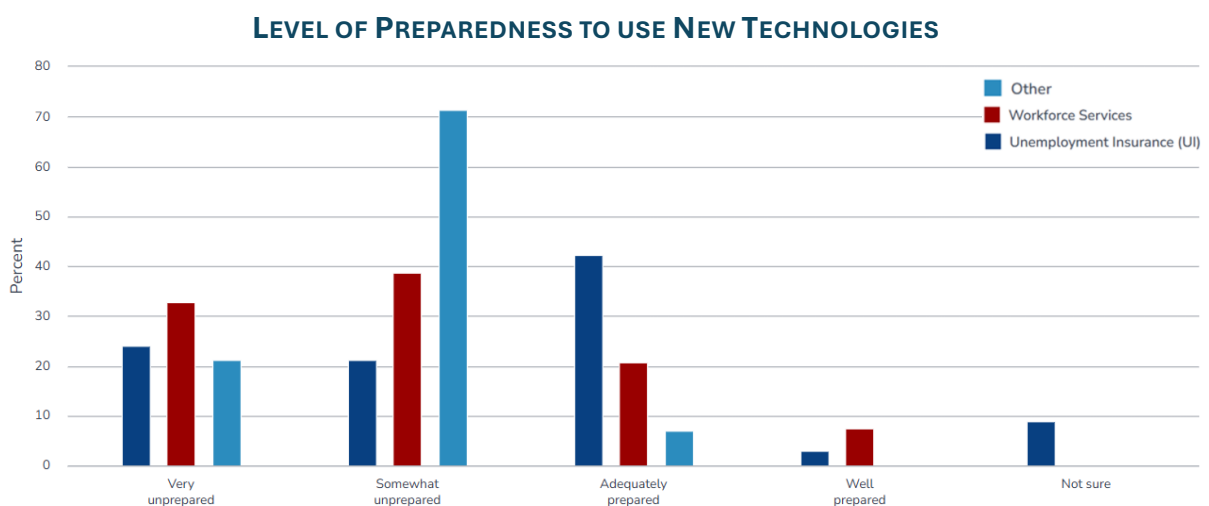
IMPACT OF ADVANCEMENTS IN TECHNOLOGIES



Staff adoption of new technologies varies widely, with some embracing new tools and others resisting or struggling.

Overall, staff feel underprepared to utilize new technologies and are challenged to keep up with the fast pace of change tied to emerging technologies.

Many expressed concerns about how best to maintain service quality and the human element as technology adoption accelerates.

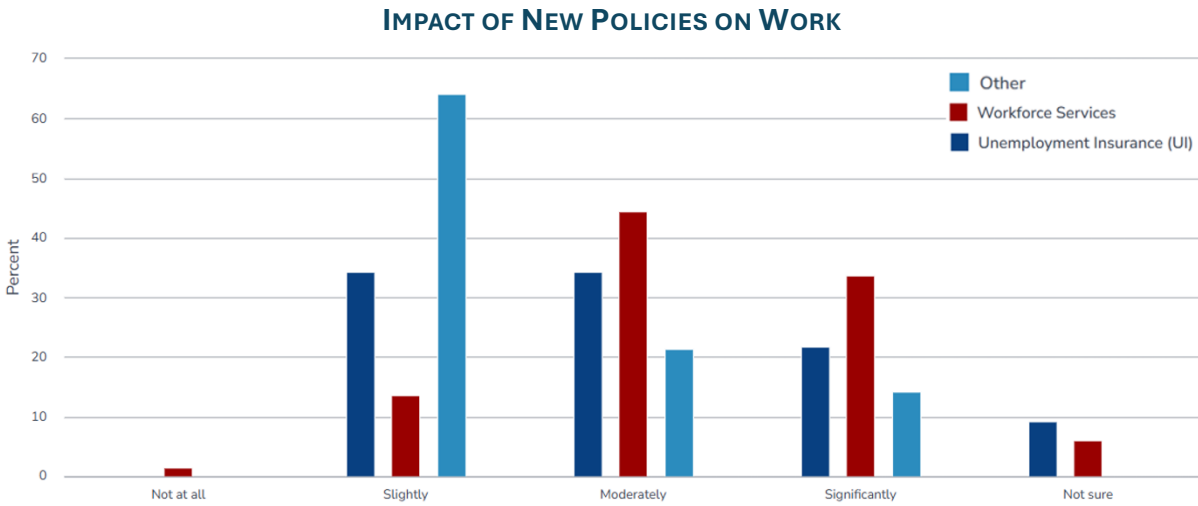


There is an ongoing need for training as systems are updated, and technologies continue to evolve.

Boosting digital literacy and technical proficiency across workforce development staff members could help support change management efforts around modernization and automation.

Policy Updates

In response to the question, “How much have new policies changed your agency or organization's work?” most respondents selected “slightly” or “moderately” suggesting some noticeable but not overwhelming effect. A smaller yet meaningful portion of respondents report a significant impact, highlighting areas where changes or initiatives are felt deeply. Most notably, very few reported no impact at all.



These responses reveal that there is an ongoing need for training to help staff understand and implement new policies

Training Modality Preferences

Although the tried-and-true training modalities were given top ranks in the survey responses, many participants highlighted the need for short, bite-sized training. The desire for quickly digestible content (mini-trainings or micro-learnings) is likely a reflection of today’s information and media consumption trends, reinforced by the limited amount of time allocated for training. Therefore, new training initiatives should emphasize short, focused sessions and interactive formats over lengthy or passive ones. This adjustment will help address some of the major barriers to participation in our training.

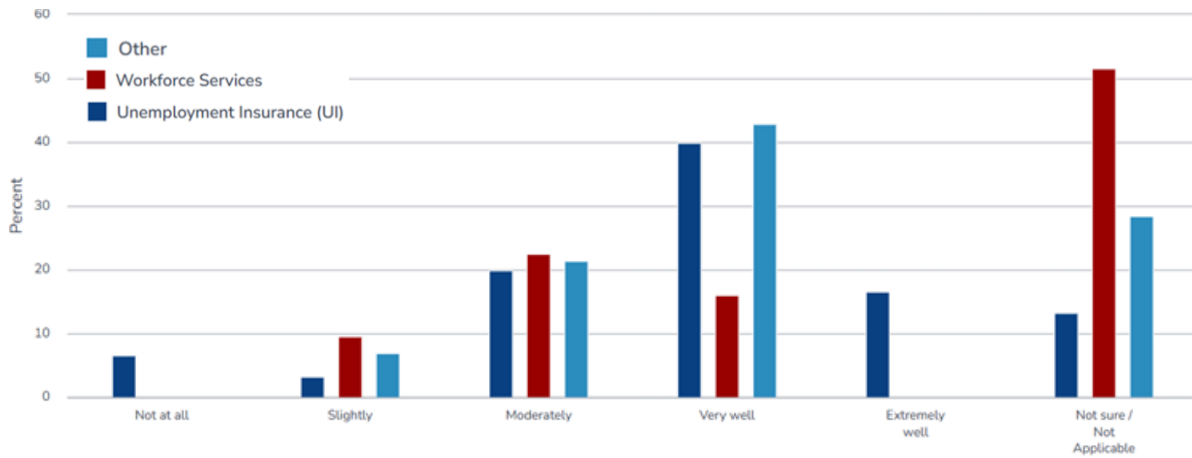
TOP TRAINING DELIVERY METHODS

Unemployment Insurance (UI)	Workforce Services	Other (please specify)
1 Virtual Instructor-led Training (VILT)	1 Virtual Instructor-led Training (VILT)	1 Virtual Instructor-led Training (VILT)
2 Self-paced eLearning	2 Self-paced eLearning	2 In-person workshops
3 On-the-job-training	3 In-person workshops	3 Self-paced eLearning
4 Job aids / guides	4 Job aids / guides	4 Short videos
5 In-person workshops	5 Short videos	5 Job aids / guides
6 Short videos	6 Peer coaching / mentoring	6 Peer coaching / mentoring
7 Peer coaching / mentoring	7 On-the-job-training	7 On-the-job-training
8 Audio / Podcasts	8 Audio / Podcasts	8 Audio / Podcasts

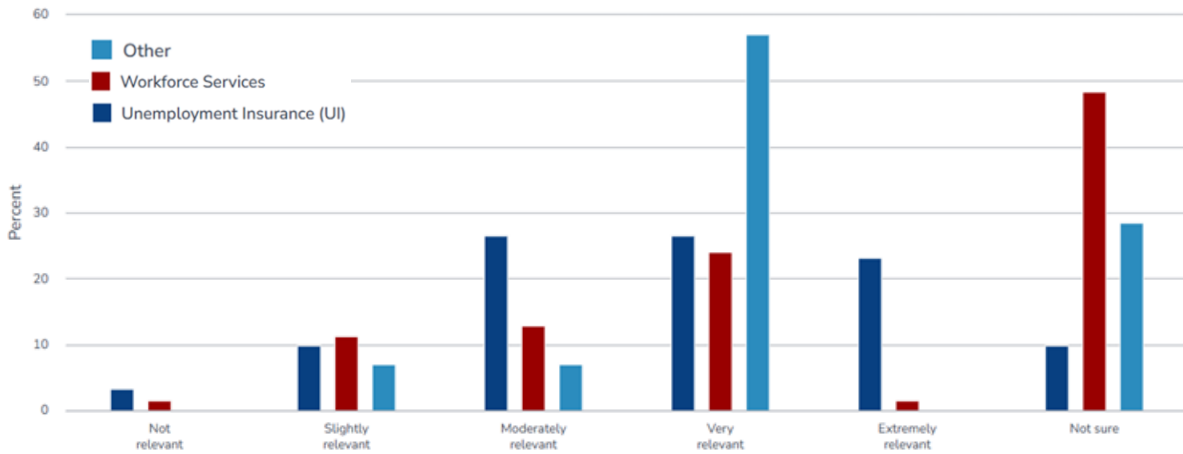
Improvements to Existing Training Programs

Generally, respondents who have participated in the existing training programs find that they meet their needs and provide content that is relevant to their jobs. The main barriers to participation in training are related to time pressures and a lack of awareness of training offerings.

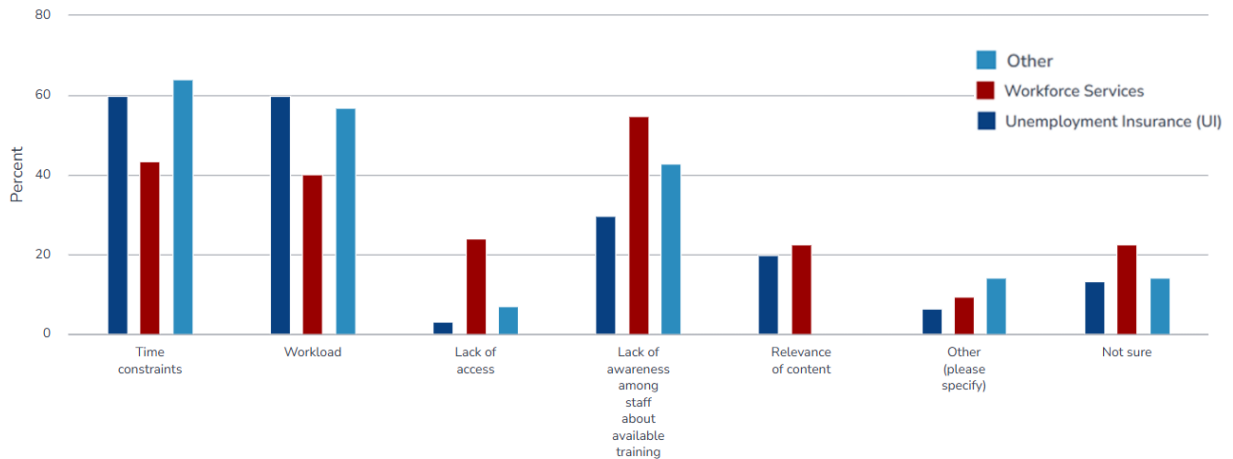
EXTENT TO WHICH TRAINING MEETS NEEDS



RELEVANCE OF TRAINING CONTENT



BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN TRAINING



Learner Audience

The data shows that training demand is concentrated in roles including supervisors, adjudicators, case managers, and customer service representatives. Some roles, such as TPS reviewer, are over-represented in these responses relative to the number of individuals who fulfill this role. This indicates that even individuals outside of this role recognize the importance of training on this topic.

JOB ROLES MOST IN NEED OF TRAINING

■ Unemployment Insurance (UI)
 ■ Workforce Services
 ■ Other (please specify)

Adjudicator – 54.5%	Case Manager – 65.3%	Supervisor/Team Leader – 66.7%
Supervisor/Team Lead – 39.4%	Manager – 51.4%	Customer Service Rep – 53.3%
Claims Examiner – 33.3%	Supervisor/Team Leader – 51.4%	Case Manager – 53.3%
Claims Processor – 33.3%	Career Counselor – 51.4%	Career Counselor – 46.7%
Customer Service Rep – 27.3%	Customer Service Rep – 41.7%	Manager – 33.3%
TPS Reviewer – 27.3%	One Stop Operator – 43.1%	Claims Specialist – 33.3%
Division/Unit Mgr – 24.2%	Veteran's Service Provider – 34.7%	One Stop Operator – 33.3%
Fraud Investigator – 24.2%	Youth Service Provider – 31.9%	Vocational Rehab Provider – 33.3%
Appeals Representative – 21.2%	Director – 30.6%	Workshop Facilitator – 26.7%
Executive Leader – 21.2%	Board Member – 29.2%	Executive Leader – 20.0%

Current and Emerging Training Needs

This was an open-ended question, so the responses varied widely, but artificial intelligence (AI) was the most frequently cited emerging training need across all categories. Beyond simply how to use AI tools, the findings indicate there is interest in helping staff understand ethical implications around the use of AI and how these tools can be integrated with legacy systems.

Conclusion

The survey findings reveal a workforce operating in an increasingly complex environment marked by rapid policy and technology changes, staffing pressures, and evolving customer needs. Across program areas, respondents identified consistent gaps in applied skills particularly in communication, technology use, cross-program integration, and change management alongside a strong preference for short, practical, and accessible training. These themes provide a clear foundation for targeting future training efforts and are reinforced by the additional data sources presented in the sections that follow.

To build on the survey results and provide additional perspective, we gathered additional data by convening an advisory meeting with program experts, reviewed historical learner data, and facilitated focus groups with service providers and leaders to discuss training needs and operational considerations. The results from these additional data sources are summarized in the following narrative.

Subject Matter Expert Advisory Meeting

An advisory meeting with ten internal subject matter experts who work closely with WS and UI programs was convened to gather additional input on training needs across the workforce development system. The individual participants were selected for their extensive knowledge and insights gained from long-standing, close relationships with state staff, service providers, and stakeholders throughout the system. The meeting was conducted as a structured group discussion and included representatives from multiple program areas, including workforce programs, UI operations and integrity functions, technology, and partner programs such as:

- Equal Employment Opportunity Committee members
- Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) staff
- Workforce development leads (WIOA, apprenticeship)
- Title I-IV program staff (Adult Ed, Wagner-Peyser, Vocational Rehab)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program staff
- Integrity and fraud investigation teams
- UI benefits and tax staff
- State technology and business staff
- Third-party vendors in UI
- Subject matter experts in Interstate Connection Network (ICON) and State Wage Interchange System (SWIS) programs

The discussion focused on validating survey findings and identifying priority areas where training could better support staff effectiveness and consistency. Priority areas include:

- High turnover among staff results in loss of institutional knowledge and a continual need for retraining.
- The timing of mandated training often competes with staff's availability to participate in skills development training.
- Funding gaps for developing and delivering training, especially in EEO and member-led initiatives, often create a lack of state-specific training infrastructure.
- Complexity of systems (e.g., WIOA) makes it difficult for newer staff members to gain a big-picture understanding of the workforce system.
- Inconsistent training resources and lack of centralized access result in limited awareness of existing training resources.

The advisory meeting reinforced the survey findings by confirming that staff across programs are navigating increasing complexity amid policy changes, technology shifts, and resource constraints. The discussion provided additional clarity on priority skill gaps and training needs, helping to contextualize survey results and inform subsequent analysis and recommendations. In addition to reinforcing the survey results, the advisory meeting helped frame areas where deeper insight into training effectiveness was needed, helping to inform a review of multi-year historical learner feedback presented in the following section.

Historical Learner Feedback

Since 2015, we have primarily delivered training through eLearning lessons, in-person training sessions (prior to the pandemic), and instructor-led virtual courses.

The eLearning lessons are used to teach fundamental concepts and provide flexibility for participants to complete at their convenience. The in-person training sessions and instructor-led virtual courses can be more challenging for learners to fit into their busy schedules but provide an opportunity to apply learning through hands-on activities, simulations, group discussions, and case studies.

Upon completion of a curriculum or standalone lesson, participants are asked to complete a learner feedback survey. The following sections provide a cross-year synthesis of the learner feedback drawn from combined open-ended survey data across multiple eLearning certificates, modules, and lessons (FY 2017–2026) largely from the UI community. The themes are highly consistent across programs, learner roles (entry-level through leadership), and states, which increase confidence in these findings.

What Worked Well

Learner feedback demonstrates that the current eLearning curriculum is effectively meeting many foundational training objectives, particularly in areas related to clarity, practical application, and learner engagement.

- Interactive, scenario-based learning
 - Learners consistently value “You Try It” activities, case studies, role play scenarios, and simulations that mirror real UI work.
 - *Example:* Learners noted that “working through real cases” and “interactive scenarios brought it to life.”
- Clear, step-by-step explanations
 - Content that broke complex processes into logical steps (e.g., PEACE Model, fact-finding workflows, audit processes) was frequently praised.

- *Example:* Learners appreciated modules that “walked through each step so nothing felt assumed.”
- Clear structure and progression
 - The certificate-module-lesson framework was viewed as logical and easy to follow, with content building from fundamentals to more advanced concepts.
 - *Example:* Learners appreciated that modules were “broken into digestible chunks” and “built on what came before.”
- Self-paced, flexible structure
 - The ability to pause, revisit sections, and complete training in short segments supported retention and accommodated workload demands.
 - *Example:* Many learners highlighted being able to “learn at my own pace and come back later without losing progress.”
- Depth and clarity of explanations
 - Learners consistently praised detailed explanations, step-by-step walkthroughs, and plain language descriptions of complex UI concepts.
 - *Example:* “Very thorough but still easy to understand.”
- Practical relevance to daily work
 - Learners repeatedly emphasized that examples, exercises, and explanations aligned closely with their real responsibilities.
 - *Example:* Learners described the training as “germane to my job,” and something they could “use immediately.” Feedback noted that scenarios felt “directly applicable, not generic customer service examples.”
- Multiple learning modalities
 - Strong appreciation for a mix of text, visuals, quizzes, audio, transcripts, and downloadable job aids.
 - *Example:* Learners valued having transcripts alongside audio to reinforce understanding and support accessibility needs.
- Resources and job aids
 - Downloadable materials, references, transcripts, and examples were frequently cited as valuable for future on-the-job reference.
 - *Example:* “Resources I could save and use later.”

Prioritized Areas for Improvement

Despite strong overall performance, analysis of learner feedback reveals targeted opportunities to enhance delivery, accessibility, and instructional efficiency, which are prioritized in the following section.

- Increase audio/video; reduce heavy reading
 - Many learners reported cognitive fatigue from long text heavy modules and asked for narration, voice over, or short videos.
 - *Impact:* Affects engagement, accessibility, and completion time.
- Shorten and de-duplicate modules
 - Repetition helped some learners, but many found some modules overly long or repetitive.
 - *Impact:* Risk of disengagement and rushed completion rather than mastery.
- Clarify quiz and exam questions
 - Learners reported ambiguous wording, multiple “arguably correct” answers, and misalignment with individual learners’ state practices.
 - *Impact:* Frustration and reduced confidence in assessments.
- More hands-on practice
 - Learners wanted more complex scenarios, additional case examples, and practice writing determinations or reports.
 - *Impact:* Missed opportunity to deepen skill transfer.
- Improve technical reliability and navigation
 - Common issues included freezing modules, slow loading, audio failures, and progress not saving.
 - *Impact:* Directly disrupts learning and completion.
- Accessibility gaps
 - Requests included screen-reader compatibility, better transcripts, captions, and reduced visual strain.
 - *Impact:* Equity and inclusion concerns for some learners.
- More state-specific context or guidance
 - Learners understand the need for national standards but want clearer notes on where state variation applies.
 - *Impact:* Helps learners translate training into compliant local practice.

Priority Training Needs and Key Training Topics

Analysis of learner responses revealed a clear and consistent demand for more advanced, role relevant training across several critical competency areas. As job responsibilities continue to grow in complexity, learners are seeking deeper instruction, practical application, and advanced pathways that move beyond foundational concepts. Key training topics learners most frequently requested are described below.

Advanced Adjudication, Fact-finding, and UI Operations

Learners expressed strong demand for advanced training in adjudication and core UI operations, including separation and nonseparation issues, fact-finding techniques, documentation of determinations, appeals preparation, and legally sound decision writing. Requests emphasized the need for complex case examples, clearer appeals processes, and practical guidance for hearings and determinations.

Why this matters: These competencies are foundational to job performance and directly affect improper payment rates, decision accuracy, defensibility, and program outcomes. Learners are seeking advanced, scenario-based practice that reflects the complexity of real-world cases rather than introductory content alone.

Advanced Fraud, Identity Theft, and Tax Fraud Detection

There is significant demand for expanded training on fraud and identity theft investigations, including fictitious employers, employer tax fraud, SUTA dumping, interstate fraud schemes, and the use of tools such as the Integrity Data Hub (IDH). Learners want more sophisticated investigative techniques and pattern recognition skills.

Why this matters: Fraud and identity theft are high risk, rapidly evolving areas with direct implications for program integrity and financial stewardship. Advanced training strengthens staff capacity to detect, prevent, and respond to increasingly complex schemes.

Interviewing, Communication, and Customer Interaction Skills

Learners consistently requested training focused on interviewing and communication skills, particularly when working with difficult or angry customers. Topics include probing and questioning techniques, de-escalation strategies, documentation during interviews, effective communication with employers and Third Party Administrators (TPAs), and cross-program collaboration.

Why this matters: Effective communication is critical for accurate fact-finding, successful employer and claimant interactions, and conflict resolution. These skills support both service quality and staff confidence in high stakes or emotionally charged situations.

Data Analysis, Technology, and Technical Skills

Respondents identified a strong need for deeper training in data analysis and technology, including Excel, Power BI, SQL, Python, dashboards, and data interpretation. Learners also expressed interest in identifying trends, anomalies, and patterns to support investigations and decision making.

Why this matters: Data literacy and technical skills are increasingly essential for evidence-based operations, fraud detection, and performance improvement. Strengthening these competencies enables staff to work more efficiently and strategically in data rich environments.

Grants Management and Program Administration

Learner feedback highlighted the need for new or expanded training in grants management, including cost compliance, financial analysis, veteran grants, governance, and management of the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL).

Why this matters: As workforce funding and oversight requirements continue to evolve, staff need stronger financial and administrative skills to ensure compliance, accountability, and effective program delivery.

Policy, Regulatory Updates, and Compliance

Participants requested ongoing training related to federal and state policy updates, regulatory changes, compliance requirements, and state specific laws. Learners emphasized the importance of timely, plain language explanations of new or changing policies.

Why this matters: Continuous policy change directly impacts daily work. Regular, accessible training helps staff remain compliant, confident, and consistent in applying rules and guidance.

Technology, AI Integration, and Cybersecurity

Learners expressed interest in emerging technology topics, including AI enabled fraud detection, cybersecurity, digital privacy, and technology supported training solutions.

Why this matters: As technology reshapes workforce systems, staff need foundational and applied knowledge to use these tools responsibly, securely, and effectively.

Ongoing Refreshers and Advanced Learning Pathways

Across topic areas, learners requested periodic refreshers, advanced courses, and role-specific or career progression pathways (e.g., senior staff, supervisors, investigators).

Why this matters: Reinforcement over time supports retention and application of skills, while advanced pathways promote professional growth and help agencies build internal expertise.

Key Themes from Multi-year Learning Feedback

The multi-year analysis of learner feedback confirms that the organization's existing training portfolio is effectively supporting foundational learning across the workforce development system. Learners consistently value scenario-based, job-relevant instruction; clear, step-by-step explanations; modular, self-paced design; and access to practical resources and job aids they can reference on the job. These strengths reflect a solid instructional design model that promotes engagement, comprehension, and immediate application to daily work.

At the same time, learner feedback reveals targeted opportunities for improvement that align closely with the challenges identified through the survey. Learners are seeking more advanced, role-specific content; increased opportunities for hands-on practice; clearer and more defensible assessments; and modernized delivery approaches that reduce cognitive load while improving accessibility. These findings suggest that the greatest opportunity for impact lies not in rebuilding curricula, but in enhancing and extending existing content particularly through advanced scenarios, improved media balance, and streamlined module design.

Together, the learner feedback findings reinforce the survey results by highlighting where training is working well and where deeper, more applied instruction is needed to support staff confidence, consistency, and performance. To further explore these needs and validate how they play out in real-world contexts, the assessment next turns to focus group discussions with frontline supervisors and leaders. These sessions provide qualitative insight into day-to-day workflows, pain points, and training delivery preferences that cannot be fully captured through surveys or learner feedback alone.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted to gather qualitative insights that further contextualize and expand on the findings from the national survey and learner feedback. These sessions engaged WS and UI staff in structured discussions focused on day-to-day workflows, skill and knowledge gaps, operational challenges, and training delivery preferences. The focus group findings provide detailed, role-specific perspectives that support and refine the priority training needs identified through other data sources.

The focus group participants work in a variety of management and supervisory roles across the UI and WS program areas, including:

- Deputy Secretary (NM)
- Business Solutions Manager (WI)

- UI Call Center Supervisor (NC)
- Frontline Supervisor, Claims Processing Center (MT)
- UI Benefits Technical Services/Training Manager (ID)
- Employment Services Area Manager Region (IN)
- Financial Management Specialist (TX)
- Career and Business Services Manager (SD)
- Director of Workforce Colorado Rural Alliance (CO)
- Chief of Benefits (NC)
- RESEA Compliance Manager (VA)

WS Discussions

Throughout the discussions, there was an emphasis on the need for compassionate service, improved employer engagement, streamlined data processes, cross-program integration, enhanced technical skills, and increased leadership awareness.

Skill and Knowledge Gaps

- **Employer engagement:** Participants repeatedly noted difficulty getting employers to engage with state agencies and the need for staff to speak the employer’s “lingo,” convey value, and execute sales-like outreach.
- **Foundational technical skills:** Staff struggle with “basic” features (e.g., adding filters, hiding columns, etc.), and inconsistent user experience (UX) standards across case-management tools and UI systems hinder efficiency and increase errors.
- **Soft skills for frontline staff:** Frontline staff members need to build skills that keep the human at the center, including strong interviewing skills to surface barriers, compassion for the individuals they serve, and a customer service focus. Staff can get stuck in “paperwork mode” to meet requirements, losing sight of service purposes.
- **Priority of Service:** Entry point staff struggle to translate the veteran’s program’s priority of service from concept to practice and struggle to identify covered persons and make referrals to other programs. There is a wide variation in understanding what priority of service is and how to apply it.
- **AI basics for staff:** Staff do not know how to write prompts, vet the outputs, and have concerns about the quality of AI-generated writing. There is a strong emphasis on the safety of personally identifiable information (PII) when providing support on resumes, cover letters, or other client-specific content.

- **Change management and leadership coaching:** Participants emphasized resistance at all levels and the need for leadership training to coach staff through change.
- **Serving individuals with barriers** (including low digital literacy): Frontline staff need tools and resources to identify needs sooner and not run away from harder cases.
- **Digital literacy coaching for rural/resistant communities:** Staff need strategies to coach customers via smartphones and reduce fear of technology.
- **Case management volume and prioritization:** Staff struggle to manage large caseloads and multiple cases at once.

Pain Points

- **Technology limitations:** System rules (e.g., required fields, barriers created when a customer lacks required documentation), slow service and result in an inability to record services when any item is missing, creating delays and a “catch22,” especially for WIOA Title III (Amendments to the Wagner-Peyser Act).
- **Cross-program knowledge and integration:** Onboarding information is narrow to one area and staff receive limited information about other areas. Feedback routes feel “faceless,” and field staff aren’t sure who to contact or how to get reciprocal feedback on data quality issues. “Every region... operates differently,” making “moving a person through the system” and shared services navigation difficult.
- **Leadership awareness of frontline realities:** Managers who are removed from face-to-face customer interactions make decisions that inadvertently burden American Job Centers (AJCs).
- **Technology rollout without training:** An AI assistant for customers and employers was rolled out without staff training, which led to widespread confusion.
- **Policy communication:** Frontline staff may not understand how policy changes apply to them, which could impact how they deliver services at the local level. Policy changes may not be applied consistently across programs.
- **Claimant engagement with RESEA:** It is difficult to get claimants to attend initial meetings which makes reducing the failure-to-report rate more challenging.
- **Co-enrollment and braiding across programs:** There are workflow challenges related to RESEA and co-enrollments into WS.
- **Cross-program referrals and “soft handoffs”:** Staff must be prepared to address a variety of customer needs and know where to direct them to address that need so they don’t fall through cracks during program transitions.

- **Triage consistency and customer flow:** Customers enter the workforce development system in multiple ways and receive inconsistent information and services. Customers should be triaged in the same way, so they receive consistent information and services regardless of the program in which they entered.
- **AI literacy:** Staff are only authorized to use certain AI tools (e.g., Copilot), while customers can use many tools, which makes customer support difficult since staff are not knowledgeable about them.
- **Employer-side impacts of AI:** Employers are being inundated with AI generated and fake applications, leading to a time-consuming screening burden. Staff do not know how to coach employers in these situations.

UI Discussions

Discussions focused on enhancing digital literacy, building confidence in leveraging AI tools responsibly, opportunities to improve communication skills, customer engagement strategies, challenges adapting to policy changes, and the lack of consistency and clarity across documentation and resources.

Skill and Knowledge Gaps

- **Adjudication:** Participants repeatedly flagged difficulty documenting a concise, claim-specific record and making timely, accurate determinations, especially for separations and two-party issues. There is a desire for targeted adjudication training to help build critical thinking skills.
- **Digital/AI literacy and safe adoption:** Supervisors and staff expressed unfamiliarity and caution about AI tools, a desire for guidance on “what’s safe to use,” and examples of approved state-ready applications (e.g., chatbots, document search, agents).
- **Soft Skills:** Staff need support to avoid UI jargon, navigate language access and interpreter services seamlessly, and make timely decisions without constant supervisor confirmation.

Pain Points

- **Frontline staff feel like “tech support” without the tools:** Universal agents must navigate claimant and employer portals and State Information Data Exchange System (SIDES) but lack structured troubleshooting guides and a readily searchable knowledge base. This causes escalations and frustration at both ends of the call.

- **Lack of consistent, searchable, and up-to-date knowledge resources:** Teams struggle with inconsistent updates (e.g., email notices not reflected in SOPs), non-searchable SharePoint content, and fast-changing system screens, which erodes confidence and slows work. Staff want a single point of truth that's searchable during live calls.

Training Delivery Preferences

The four focus group discussions revealed strong and consistent preferences regarding how training is most effectively delivered for workforce development staff. While participants represented different roles, programs, and states, their perspectives converged around several key principles that should inform future training design and delivery decisions.

Preference for Live, Interactive Training for Complex Work

Across all four focus groups, participants emphasized a strong preference for live, interactive training, particularly for work that requires judgment, interpretation, and decision making. This preference was most pronounced for adjudication, case management, policy application, and customer service scenarios that cannot be adequately addressed through self-paced learning alone.

Participants described live training, whether in person or virtual, as more effective for building confidence, clarifying nuanced concepts, and allowing staff to ask questions, compare interpretations, and learn from real-world examples. Live training was also viewed as especially valuable for roles that rely heavily on critical thinking rather than procedural repetition.

While virtual delivery was generally considered acceptable, participants repeatedly noted that in-person or small group live settings provide higher engagement and deeper learning, particularly when staff are expected to apply judgment consistently across cases.

Need for Blended Delivery Models Due to Operational Constraints

Although live training is preferred, participants across all focus groups acknowledged that operational realities, including staffing shortages, call coverage requirements, geographic dispersion, and budget limitations, often make participation in live sessions difficult.

As a result, participants consistently advocated for blended delivery models, combining live training with recorded or asynchronous options. Recordings were viewed as essential for staff who cannot attend live sessions and as a mechanism for reinforcement and reference after training has concluded.

The preferred approach is live training supplemented by recordings, job aids, or follow-up resources that staff can revisit as needed.

Strong Preference for Short, Modular Training

Participants across WS and UI focus groups expressed frustration with long, dense training sessions and indicated a strong preference for short, modular learning experiences that focus on specific tasks, topics, or decisions.

This preference applied broadly to:

- Staff training
- Policy and procedure updates
- Employer education and outreach

Participants indicated that shorter, targeted modules are easier to schedule, more likely to be completed, and more effective at addressing immediate job needs. This preference was particularly pronounced for employer-facing content, where participants noted that employers are unlikely to engage with lengthy training but may respond positively to brief, focused resources.

High Value Placed on Case-Based and Scenario Driven Learning

One of the most consistent findings across all four focus groups was the strong preference for case-based and scenario driven training. Participants repeatedly emphasized that staff learn best when training reflects real situations they encounter in their work.

This approach was viewed as especially important for:

- Adjudication and fact-finding
- Policy interpretation and application
- Decision making under uncertainty
- Cross-program referrals and coordination

Participants indicated that scenarios and use cases help translate abstract policy language into actionable guidance, reduce uncertainty, and improve consistency across staff and locations. Training that walks staff through realistic scenarios was consistently described as more effective than conceptual or compliance focused instruction alone.

Importance of Plain Language and Job-relevant Framing

Participants across all focus groups emphasized the need for training to be delivered in plain language and clearly tied to day-to-day job responsibilities. Staff and supervisors

noted that training is most effective when it explicitly answers the question: “What does this mean for my job?”

Participants highlighted challenges associated with:

- Overuse of acronyms and program-specific terminology
- “Policy speak” that does not translate easily to frontline work
- Training that lacks clear relevance to specific roles

They consistently requested training materials that are role-specific, free of unnecessary jargon, and framed around concrete actions staff are expected to take.

Scheduling, Advance Notice, and Predictability Matter

Several focus groups, particularly those representing workforce programs, emphasized that logistics significantly influence training participation and effectiveness. Participants noted that advance notice (often six weeks or more) allows supervisors to plan coverage and increases the likelihood that staff can attend live training.

Predictable scheduling and multiple session offerings were viewed as important strategies for balancing training needs with service delivery demands.

Mentorship and Peer Learning as a Complementary Strategy

Participants recognized the value of mentorship and peer learning, particularly for onboarding and complex decision making. However, they consistently cautioned that informal mentorship without structure can lead to inconsistency and the spread of unofficial practices.

Mentorship was viewed as most effective when:

- Aligned with standardized training and documentation
- Supported by clear expectations and oversight
- Used to reinforce, not replace, formal training

Implications for Training Strategy

Collectively, these findings suggest that effective training for WS and UI staff should prioritize:

- Live, interactive delivery for complex and judgment-based work
- Blended learning models that include recordings and job aids
- Short, modular formats aligned to specific tasks or decisions
- Scenario-based instruction grounded in real work contexts

- Plain language, role-specific framing
- Predictable scheduling and sufficient advance notice
- Structured mentorship aligned with formal training and documentation

These preferences reflect not only learning effectiveness, but also the operational constraints under which workforce development staff operate. Incorporating these principles into future training design will increase relevance, uptake, and impact across programs.

The workforce development system's recognized skill gaps, pain points, and training preferences are not unique. The data captured in our surveys and focus groups mirrors learning and development trends across multiple industries.

Learning & Development Industry Trends

Traditional, linear, "one-size-fits-all" courses are no longer able to meet the demands of today's workforce. Advancements in technology are reshaping expectations and learners want personalized offerings integrated into their daily work. AI, adaptive learning platforms, and immersive learning technologies are transforming development from an event-based activity into an ongoing experience.

The Learning team is already leveraging AI tools to help increase the speed at which we deliver training and better support flexible work models. AI tools could be further leveraged to address some of the concerns about the length and amount of training available by providing personalized training content recommendations.

Additional technical tools are available to enable us to deliver training in a more personalized manner, in a variety of modalities (examples: text, email, video links) at the point in time of need. Adoption of these tools would allow us to partner more closely with agencies and programs to integrate existing learning tools directly into daily workflows for immediate access to necessary skills and information.

These industry trends align closely with the training needs and delivery preferences identified through this assessment, highlighting opportunities to modernize and strengthen the existing learning portfolio. The recommendations that follow outline targeted actions to address priority gaps and support more effective, responsive training across the workforce development system.

Recommendations

The assessment integrates findings from three primary data sources: a national survey of workforce system staff, multi-year learner feedback, and targeted focus groups with UI and WS leaders and supervisors. Input from the SME advisory group, and learning and development industry trends provide additional valuable insight. Together, these inputs provide a comprehensive view of current workforce challenges, training effectiveness, and emerging needs.

Across all data sources, respondents consistently identified increasing job complexity, rapid policy and technology changes, and resource constraints as key pressures affecting performance. While the existing training portfolio is widely viewed as credible and valuable, particularly for foundational knowledge, staff and supervisors in both UI and WS emphasized the need for deeper, more applied training that reflects real-world scenarios, complex decision making, and day-to-day operational realities.

Priority Gap Areas

The priority gap areas described in this section are derived from a comparative analysis of findings across the national survey, focus groups, and multi-year learner feedback, as documented in the training matrices included in the Appendix. These matrices highlight patterns of alignment across data sources and help distinguish areas where existing training provides strong foundational coverage from areas where additional depth, application, or delivery adjustments are needed. The sections that follow summarize the most consistently identified gaps and provide context for why they represent priorities for future training efforts.

Five priority gap areas emerged most clearly:

- 1. Advanced Adjudication and Fact-finding**

Existing adjudication training provides a solid foundation, but staff require more advanced instruction to handle complex separations, evidence synthesis, timeline construction, and defensible documentation. There is strong demand for advanced adjudication training with realistic, scenario-based practice.

- 2. Advanced Fraud, Identity Theft, and Integrity Investigations**

Respondents identified a growing need for advanced training to address increasingly complex fraud, identity theft, and integrity investigations, including interstate activity and AI-generated or fraudulent documentation. While existing training provides a strong foundation, staff reported gaps in advanced scenario-based

practice, pattern recognition, and applying investigative tools to complex, real-world cases.

3. **Interviewing, Communication, and De-escalation Skills**

Communication challenges were consistently cited across surveys, learner feedback, and focus groups. While related content exists across multiple courses, it is not given full attention. Staff expressed a need for a dedicated, applied curriculum focused on interviewing techniques, de-escalation, plain language communication, and managing difficult claimant and employer interactions.

4. **Technology, Data Literacy, and Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

Respondents reported feeling underprepared to keep pace with system modernization, data demands, and emerging AI tools. Although we currently offer a data analysis certificate, learners want more job-embedded, role-specific applications, as well as clear guidance on safe, ethical AI use for both staff workflows and customer support.

5. **Cross-program Integration and System Navigation**

A recurring theme across all data sources was limited understanding of how programs connect across UI, WS, WIOA partners, RESEA, and related initiatives. Staff described siloed onboarding, inconsistent referrals, and unclear customer flow. This represents a system-level gap that is not fully addressed in existing curricula.

6. **Leadership Development and Change Management**

Leadership training exists but focus group participants emphasized the need for stronger alignment between leadership behaviors and frontline realities. Supervisors and managers need practical tools to coach staff through ongoing policy changes, technology rollouts, and workflow disruptions while maintaining morale, consistency, and service quality.

In addition to content gaps, the assessment identified a format and delivery gap. Staff strongly prefer short, modular, scenario-based training, with live or instructor-led sessions for complex topics, supplemented by recordings, job aids, and on-demand resources. While the existing modular learning management system (LMS) design provides a strong foundation, prioritizing these delivery preferences will increase engagement, completion, and real-world application.

Audience-Specific Training Topics

Due to the distinct needs of each audience, this section describes more detailed training topics and subtopics that address the five priority gap areas, as well as additional identified

needs. The topics are tailored to UI and WS, along with select topics that apply to both groups.

UI

- **Adjudication and Fact-Finding:** More in-depth training on filtering “noise,” asking the right follow up questions (interviewing skills), building timelines, and synthesizing and recording information (good documentation practices).
- **Tax Collection Strategies:** How to incorporate behavioral insights (BI) into tax collection efforts.
- **Identifying Fraudulent Documents from Employers:** What to look for to help identify fraudulent employer schemes, with a particular focus on the growing number of AI-generated employer documents.
- **Tax Audits:** How to align tax auditing processes to TPS criteria to ensure the integrity of the UI tax system and the accuracy of UI tax payments.
- **TPS Training:** Much of the existing TPS training focuses on how to conduct the review of each tax function. There is interest in additional training on how to utilize TPS findings to create a culture of continuous improvement within UI tax functions.
- **Tax Fraud Detection:** How to leverage the Integrity Data Hub (IDH) to help identify employer fraud and fictitious employers.
- **Overpayment Recovery Strategies:** How to incorporate the principles of behavioral science into overpayment recovery efforts.
- **Basic SIDES Triage:** Troubleshooting tips for the most common issues, such as login flows and basic error codes, with clear boundaries for escalation to the Tax Unit or IT.

WS

- **Cross-program Ecosystem Knowledge and Holistic Service Delivery:** Understanding how to combine services from different programs to create customized support paths for clients, particularly between WIOA and apprenticeship programs.
- **Effective Employer Engagement:** This topic encompasses multiple areas, including aligning job seekers’ skills with employer needs, encouraging employers to participate in mentorship training opportunities, translating workforce value propositions into business outcomes, and addressing AI disruption in hiring practices.

- **Efficient Intake Tactics:** There is a training need for how to triage common issues, including missing documents and “blocked service” as well as an opportunity to increase efficiency with paper-to-digital batching tips and information about how to reduce rework.
- **Policy & Regulatory Updates:** There is an ongoing training need to understand and implement new legislation and regulations, particularly those related to paid family medical leave and wage/hour regulations. There is a preference for plain language policy translation that succinctly explains policy impacts for frontline staff.
- **Priority of Service (JVSG) Application:** Staff need practical training on how to identify covered persons, make referrals, and measure application of priority of service.
- **Serving Individuals with Barriers:** Effectively identify, engage, and support individuals facing barriers such as low digital literacy, language access needs, rural connectivity limitations, and complex life circumstances. Includes practical, plain language strategies to reduce friction, build trust, and connect customers to appropriate services while maintaining program requirements and service consistency.

UI and WS Audiences

- **De-escalation Techniques:** We already offer some content on how to handle upset customers, but learners are interested in more in-depth training. By splitting out the content on de-escalation and adding more scenario-based exercises, we could address learners’ desire for smaller, bite-sized training and increased interactivity.
- **Importance of Good Documentation:** General overview of the importance of taking notes and retaining documentation, along with best practices for recording and synthesizing information from multiple sources.
- **Grants Management:** Multiple topics have been requested related to grants management including cost compliance, financial analysis, veteran grants, Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), and governance.
- **Respectful Language Access:** How to offer interpreter services without offense, including scripts for raising the option, plus “listen back” techniques when accents impede comprehension.

- **Data Analysis & Technology:** Use of AI and ethics surrounding it, digital literacy, data analytics, cybersecurity, as well as training on specific software programs including Excel, Power BI, SQL, and Python.
- **Decision Making Confidence:** How to use structured decision-making frameworks to reduce supervisor dependency.
- **Communication & Collaboration:** Avoiding jargon, working cross-functionally, policy writing, business analysis, and effective outreach to employers and TPAs.
- **Leadership coaching:** Practical strategies to lead staff through ongoing change, including new policies, technologies, and workflows, while maintaining service quality and staff confidence. How leadership behaviors, communication, and coaching directly influence adoption, decision making, and morale, with a focus on building resilience, accountability, and consistent practice during periods of uncertainty.
- **Professional Development:** Although there were many specific professional development requests, the most common topics raised included career advancement, project management, and leadership best practices.

The findings indicate that we are well positioned to address identified gaps by enhancing and extending existing certificates for the UI audience, rather than rebuilding curricula from scratch. For WS, the data points to targeted investments that strengthen cross-program integration, employer engagement, and frontline service delivery through practical, scenario-based training focused on intake and triage, serving individuals with barriers, plain language policy translation, and applied technology and AI literacy. Together, targeted investments in advanced content, applied scenarios, cross-program training, and modernized, modular delivery approaches will allow us to meet evolving workforce needs while maximizing the value of its current training portfolio.

Outreach

Increasing direct outreach and word-of-mouth promotion would help improve awareness of existing offerings. Creating state-specific training support and offering evaluations to help modernize existing state-specific training programs would also help boost efforts to encompass the entire workforce development system.

Conclusion

This training needs assessment confirms that workforce development staff are operating in an increasingly complex environment shaped by rising service demands, rapid policy change, system modernization, and heightened expectations from job seekers and employers. While staff remain committed to delivering high quality service, the data clearly shows that many are doing so without sufficient access to advanced, applied training that reflects today's operational realities.

We are well positioned to respond. The findings demonstrate that the existing training portfolio provides a strong foundation; however, the greatest opportunity lies in extending that foundation through deeper, scenario-based learning, modernized delivery approaches, and clearer alignment with real-world workflows. Strategic investment in advanced adjudication, communication and interviewing skills, technology and AI literacy, cross-program integration, and leadership development will directly improve staff confidence, consistency, and performance.

Prioritizing targeted, modular, and blended training supported by live instruction for complex topics and on-demand resources for reinforcement will not only address identified skill gaps, but also reduce burnout, improve retention, and strengthen service outcomes across the workforce development system.

By acting on these recommendations, we can better support the states and partners by providing timely, practical, and future ready learning solutions that enable staff to meet evolving demands with confidence and effectiveness.

The findings and recommendations in this report are intended to inform strategic planning and investment decisions. With leadership alignment and sustained support, we can advance targeted training initiatives that build workforce capacity, improve program outcomes, reduce improper payments and operational strain, and position the system for long-term success.

Appendices

National Survey Results

To review the raw data from the national survey, follow the links below. Data can be reviewed by program area or in a combined format.

- UI responses: https://reporting.alchemer.com/r/419477_68f29f9fb90929.08213941
- WS responses:
https://reporting.alchemer.com/r/419477_68f2a2a7962e07.40666858
- Other responses:
https://reporting.alchemer.com/r/419477_68f2a335be81c4.81962226
- All program areas (combined responses):
https://reporting.alchemer.com/r/419477_689b5f5eb29f20.19459865

Learner Feedback Surveys

The learner feedback dashboards are available by contacting the NASWA evaluation team.

Survey Findings Mapped to Existing Certificates & Modules

This section maps key findings from the national survey, focus groups, and learner feedback to existing certificates and modules. The mapping highlights areas where current training aligns with identified needs and where opportunities exist to strengthen or extend the existing curriculum.

1. What Worked Well: Where We Are Already Strong

Learner-Valued Aspect	Existing Certificates / Modules	Evidence from Learner Feedback
Scenario-based, hands-on learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fact-finding & Adjudication Curriculum (You Try It, scenarios)• Fraud Investigations Certificate (case studies, mock investigations)• Operations Integrity Certificate (real-world workflows)	Learners repeatedly cited case files, role-play, and “You Try It” activities as the most effective learning components.
Clear, step-by-step explanations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fact-finding & Adjudication (PEACE Model, evidence gathering)	Step-by-step breakdowns reduced cognitive load and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BAM Investigator / Supervisor Certificates • Tax Auditing Certificate 	helped newer staff understand complex processes.
Self-paced modular structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Certificates (modular LMS design) 	Learners valued the ability to pause, revisit, and complete modules in short segments.
Practical job relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operations Integrity • Fraud Investigations • Fact-finding & Adjudication 	Strong alignment with day-to-day UI tasks was one of the most consistent positives across years.
Multiple learning modalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact-finding & Adjudication • Fraud Investigations • Program Leadership Certificate 	Learners praised mixed modalities, especially when audio and transcripts were paired.

Conclusion: Our core instructional design model is working especially for foundational learning and applied practice.

2. Areas for Improvement: Where Existing Certificates Can Be Enhanced

Improvement Theme	Affected Certificates / Modules	Implication
Too much reading / insufficient audio & video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact-finding & Adjudication • Operations Integrity • Tax Auditing • PUA Curriculum 	Content is strong, but delivery needs modernization (more narration, short videos, demonstrations).
Modules are long or repetitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact-finding & Adjudication (largest volume of feedback) • Operations Integrity 	Opportunity to streamline, chunk content, and reduce redundancy without losing rigor.
Ambiguous or “trick” assessment questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact-finding & Adjudication 	Learners want clearer wording, better explanations of “why” an answer is correct, and fewer arguable responses.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fraud Investigations • Tax Auditing 	
Technical reliability issues	• All certificates (platform-level issue, not content specific)	Freezing, progress-saving issues, and audio glitches directly disrupt learning experience.
Limited state-specific guidance	• All national curricula	Learners accept national standards but want clearer callouts where state variation applies.

Key Insight: These are format and delivery issues, not content credibility issues meaning improvement is feasible without rearchitecting curricula.

3. Priority Training Needs: Where They Map (and Where Gaps Exist)

A. Advanced Adjudication & Fact-Finding (Highest Priority)

Learner Need	Current Coverage	Gap
Complex separation & nonseparation cases	Fact-Finding & Adjudication (foundational)	Need advanced/Level II adjudication modules
Writing determinations & documentation	Fact-Finding & Adjudication	More end-to-end case walkthroughs
Appeals & hearings preparation	Partial coverage across programs	No standalone Appeals Certificate

Opportunity: Create Advanced Adjudication Certificate or add Level II modules.

B. Fraud & Identity Theft Investigations

Learner Need	Current Coverage	Gap
Identity theft detection	Fraud Investigations Certificate	Need deeper, updated ID theft modules
Employer fraud & fictitious employers	Fraud Investigations / Tax Auditing	Fragmented across certificates

Interstate & complex fraud schemes	Limited	Strong demand for advanced fraud scenarios
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Opportunity: Advanced Fraud track or specialization pathway.

C. Interviewing, Communication & Difficult Interactions

Learner Need	Current Coverage	Gap
Interviewing techniques	Fact-Finding & Adjudication (PEACE Model)	Learners want more role-play, audio examples
Handling difficult claimants/employers	Scattered across modules	No focused communication skills module
De-escalation & professionalism	Minimal	Growing demand

Opportunity: Cross-certificate Interviewing & Communication Skills module.

D. Appeals, Hearings & Determination Writing

Learner Need	Current Coverage	Gap
Appeals process	Light, indirect coverage	Major gap
Hearing preparation	Minimal	Major gap
Legal defensibility	Inferred, not explicit	Needs targeted instruction

Opportunity: New Appeals & Hearings Certificate or module set.

E. Data, Tools & Technical Skills

Learner Need	Current Coverage	Gap
Excel / SQL / data analysis	Advanced Data Analysis Certificates	Learners want job-embedded use cases

Pattern detection & analytics	Limited outside analytics certs	Desire to integrate with Fraud & Adjudication
Dashboards & reporting	Program Leadership / Analytics	Needs role-specific alignment

Opportunity: Integrate analytics mini-modules into operational certificates.

Focus Groups

Four sixty-minute focus groups were conducted using Zoom in early 2026. The discussions were guided by the following questions.

UI Training Needs Focus Group Questions

- Which tasks in your (or your staff's) daily workflow create the most uncertainty or slowdowns, and why?
- What specific situations make you (or staff) feel least prepared or lacking training?
- When helping claimants or employers, where do misunderstandings or repeated questions occur most often?
- Where do you (or your staff) experience the most difficulty navigating systems, tools, or platforms?
- What AI-related tools or technology skills would help you do your job more efficiently or confidently?
- Which cross-program interactions create confusion, and what training would clarify those roles and responsibilities of the different programs?
- What communication or customer-service scenarios are most challenging for you?
- When policies or program requirements change, what would help you (or your staff) understand and apply them better?
- What training formats help you learn best, and why?
- If you could receive training on one topic immediately, what would it be?
- How consistent are the training materials, SOPs, or processes you rely on?
- Which types of guidance would make complex processes easier to complete accurately?

WS Training Needs Focus Group Questions

- Which digital tools or systems do staff avoid using, and why?
- What features of existing systems cause confusion or errors?
- What AI-related tasks do staff wish they could automate or streamline?

- What would make training more accessible, engaging, or impactful for you and your staff?
- What is the best way to deliver training in your state?
- Where do you or your staff go for help in addressing skill gaps?
- What tasks do staff struggle with most frequently in their day-to-day work?
- Which tasks take staff the longest to complete, and why?
- What mistakes or rework occur most often?
- Where do staff feel gaps exist in delivering consistent services?
- What steps in the customer intake or case management process most often cause delays or frustration?

Focus Group Summaries

Summaries of focus group discussions are included below.

Focus Group 1: January 15, 2026

Participant Roles

- Business Solutions Manager / Product Owner (Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development)
- Deputy Secretary (New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions)

Discussion Summary

This focus group explored WS training needs across state agencies, with emphasis on business engagement, onboarding, program integration, and service delivery challenges. Participants highlighted persistent difficulties in engaging employers, particularly around staff confidence, communication skills, and understanding employer value propositions. Employer engagement was described as requiring skills similar to sales and relationship management, which are not consistently developed through existing training.

A major theme was onboarding and cross-training. One state described a multi-week onboarding model that integrates UI and WS staff, improving cross-program understanding, operational flexibility, and retention. Participants emphasized the benefits of shared foundational training to reduce silos and increase system-wide awareness.

Operational challenges included data collection burdens, balancing thorough intake with customer experience, and system limitations that prevent staff from recording services when required data elements are missing. Participants described frustration with inflexible systems that delay service documentation and create reporting challenges.

Additional training needs identified included customer interviewing skills, compassion, critical thinking, dashboard and task management, cross-program communication, leadership decision making, and technical skills related to system navigation. Participants also discussed emerging interest in AI for training, coaching, and data entry support, while noting limited current access and the need for national-level guidance on trends and best practices.

Focus Group 2: January 22, 2026

Participant Roles

- Call Center Supervisor (North Carolina UI)
- UI Frontline Supervisor (Montana)
- UI Benefits Technical Services Manager (Idaho)

Discussion Summary

This focus group concentrated on UI operational workflows, adjudication challenges, technology adoption, and training consistency. Participants described significant strain related to new systems, fraud controls, and information arriving from multiple sources, which complicates fact-finding and adjudication.

Adjudication staff challenges centered on critical thinking, timeline construction, relevance filtering, and decision confidence. Participants emphasized the need for training that strengthens questioning techniques, reduces back and forth fact-finding, and supports consistent decision making.

Call center staff reported growing responsibility for employer technical support without sufficient training, effectively functioning as de facto IT support. This included troubleshooting portal access, SIDES, and employer system errors, often without adequate tools or searchable knowledge bases.

AI was discussed as a promising solution for searchable SOPs, decision support, chatbots, and staff self-service, but participants emphasized the need for clear governance, privacy safeguards, and leadership education. Language barriers, UI jargon, and customer communication challenges were also highlighted.

Participants consistently stressed the importance of up-to-date documentation, searchable resources, mentorship, and consistent training materials. In-person and live training were strongly preferred, particularly for complex topics such as adjudication and critical thinking.

Focus Group 3: March 10, 2026

Participant Roles

- State Workforce Program Manager (Indiana)
- Workforce Finance/Operations Staff (Texas)
- Title III Wagner-Peyser Program Administrator (South Dakota)

Discussion Summary

This focus group examined case management complexity, cross-program coordination, technology adoption, and training effectiveness. Participants consistently identified case management as a high-need area, particularly managing large caseloads while balancing compliance requirements with meaningful service delivery.

A recurring theme was siloed program knowledge, with staff often lacking awareness of partner programs, referral pathways, and shared responsibilities. Participants expressed strong interest in cross-program training that clarifies roles, services, and customer flow across Wagner-Peyser, WIOA, RESEA, and related programs.

Technology challenges included fragmented systems, inconsistent AI rollouts without training, and lack of guidance on acceptable use. Participants emphasized the importance of leadership buy-in and change management training to support adoption of new tools.

Participants described effective policy communication strategies such as structured memo processes, leadership briefings, and shorter statewide updates rather than lengthy meetings. Training was seen as most effective when role-specific, immediately applicable, repeated over time, and supported by follow-up resources.

Priority training topics identified included change management, serving individuals with barriers, customer triage, cross-program referrals, and leadership skills. Participants stressed that training should help staff understand both customer barriers and system-created barriers.

Focus Group 4: March 12, 2026

Participant Roles

- Local Workforce Area Director (Colorado)
- UI Compliance / Service Delivery Manager (Virginia)
- Chief of Benefits (North Carolina UI)
- Veterans Program Operator (Washington State)
- Workforce Program Administrator (Montana)

Discussion Summary

This session focused on workflow breakdowns, technology and AI, policy implementation, and cross-program collaboration across UI and workforce systems. Participants described workflow slowdowns related to claimant engagement, referral processes, co-enrollment, and priority of service particularly for veterans. Inconsistent understanding of eligibility and referral requirements among entry-point staff was cited as a major barrier to effective service delivery.

Technology challenges were a dominant theme. Participants discussed uneven access to AI tools, staff uncertainty about acceptable use, and gaps between what staff are permitted to use versus what customers can access. Rural connectivity issues, digital literacy barriers among customers, and staff discomfort with AI were repeatedly noted. Several participants emphasized the need for training that helps staff coach customers in basic digital and AI-assisted tasks, often via mobile devices.

The group also highlighted an emerging business-facing AI gap, noting that workforce agencies are increasingly unprepared to advise employers on AI-driven hiring challenges, resume screening, and fraudulent applications.

Regarding policy changes, participants emphasized the need for plain language guidance, one-page summaries, case studies, and examples that translate federal guidance into day-to-day practice. Delays between federal policy releases and implementation guidance were cited as causing confusion and inconsistent application.

Preferred training formats included in-person and virtual instructor-led training, supplemented by recordings, short videos, and job aids. Participants stressed the importance of advance notice, multiple delivery options, and consistency across locations and programs.

Learning and Development Industry Trends Resources

For more information on industry trends, see the following sources:

- [Corporate Learning Network: The New Era of Corporate Learning & Development](#)
- [Association for Talent Development: The Future of Government Training Programs - Embracing Technology and Tailored Learning](#)

Training Needs Matrices

The following matrices were used to inform evidence-based training recommendations.

Training Needs Matrix Across Survey, Focus Groups, and Learner Feedback

This matrix synthesizes findings from the national survey, focus groups, and multi-year learner feedback to identify areas of alignment and divergence across data sources. It provides a consolidated view of priority training needs and supports evidence-based analysis used to inform the report’s recommendations.

Training Need Area	Survey Findings	Learner Feedback	Focus Groups
Adjudication & Fact-finding (Advanced)	Identified as a core skill gap, especially around documentation, decision making, and handling complex cases; respondents requested deeper adjudication training beyond fundamentals.	Strong demand for advanced adjudication, separation/nonseparation issues, documenting determinations, and more complex case practice. Learners requested Level II / advanced pathways.	Repeated emphasis on difficulty building timelines, filtering relevant facts, documenting decisions, and making confident determinations; strong preference for scenario-based, live training.
Communication, Interviewing & De-escalation Skills	Communication and collaboration gaps cited across program areas; difficulty explaining complex processes and managing stressed clients noted as frequent challenges.	Learners requested more interviewing skills, de-escalation, handling difficult personalities, and clearer documentation during interviews.	Frontline staff highlighted challenges with claimant/employer interactions, avoiding jargon, managing irate customers, and maintaining compassion while meeting requirements.
Fraud & Identity Theft Detection	Fraud policy impacts and system limitations were frequently cited, particularly in UI responses.	High demand for fraud, identity theft, fictitious employers, SUTA dumping, and advanced/interstate fraud scenarios.	Focus group participants discussed growing fraud complexity, AI-generated documents, and the need for

			stronger investigative and analytical skills.
Technology, Data Literacy & AI	Respondents reported being underprepared for new technologies; low confidence in data validation, system use, and emerging technologies (AI).	Learners requested Excel, SQL, Power BI, dashboards, and applied data analysis tied to job tasks; interest in ethical and safe AI use was strong.	Staff expressed uncertainty about approved AI use, prompt writing, PII protection, and coaching customers and employers on AI-related issues.
Leadership Development & Change Management	Leadership training gaps noted at multiple levels; lack of management skills and loss of institutional knowledge highlighted.	Learners requested leadership pathways, supervisor-level training, refreshers, and advanced certificates.	Focus groups emphasized leadership awareness of frontline realities, resistance to change, and the need for coaching staff through policy and technology shifts.
Cross-program Integration & System Navigation	Limited understanding of how programs connect (WIOA integration) identified as a widespread gap; impacts workflow and service coordination.	Learners requested program cross-training, collaboration skills, and clearer explanations of how programs work together.	Staff described siloed onboarding, unclear referral pathways, inconsistent triage, and challenges with co-enrollment and “soft handoffs.”
Employer Engagement & Business Services	WS respondents frequently cited challenges engaging employers and understanding industry needs.	Learner feedback requested training on employer communication, outreach, mentoring, and business analysis skills.	Focus groups described employer engagement as “sales-like,” with staff needing skills to convey value propositions and

			address AI-driven hiring challenges.
Policy Interpretation & Application (Plain Language)	Ongoing need identified to understand and implement new policies; respondents noted confusion and inconsistent application.	Learners requested clearer policy explanations, state-specific guidance, and better alignment between quizzes and real practice.	Focus groups emphasized plain language policy summaries, examples, case studies, and quicker translation of federal guidance into practice.
Serving Individuals with Barriers	Complex client needs and compassion fatigue identified as major challenges across survey responses.	Learner feedback included requests for training on serving diverse populations and managing difficult interactions.	Focus groups highlighted low digital literacy, rural connectivity, language access, and the need to identify and address barriers earlier.
Training Design & Delivery Preferences	Strong preference for short, bite-sized training, interactive formats, and flexibility due to workload constraints.	Learners valued scenario-based learning and self-paced modules; requested shorter, less text-heavy content and improved navigation.	Focus groups strongly preferred live, interactive training for complex work, supported by recordings, job aids, and modular design.

Training Needs Gap Analysis Matrix

This gap analysis matrix builds on the consolidated findings by mapping identified training needs to existing training offerings. It highlights where current coverage is strong and where gaps exist, providing a clear basis for identifying priority areas for enhancement or development.

Training Need Area	Evidence of Need (Survey, Learner Feedback, Focus Groups)	Current Coverage (High-Level)	Identified Gap	Training Opportunity / Implication
Advanced Adjudication & Fact-finding	Survey respondents identified adjudication, documentation, and decision making as priority skill gaps. Learner feedback and focus groups consistently cited difficulty with complex separations, evidence weighing, timelines, and writing defensible determinations.	Foundational Fact-finding & Adjudication curriculum covers core concepts and models (e.g., PEACE).	Existing training does not sufficiently address advanced or complex cases, end-to-end adjudication workflows, or decision confidence.	Develop Level II / Advanced Adjudication modules with complex scenarios, full case walkthroughs, and live practice sessions.
Interviewing, Communication & De-escalation	Survey data highlighted communication and collaboration gaps. Learners requested interviewing, de-escalation, and handling difficult interactions. Focus groups emphasized claimant/employer stress, jargon avoidance, and documentation during interviews.	Communication concepts appear across several courses but are fragmented.	No dedicated, in-depth communication or interviewing curriculum with scenario-based practice.	Create a standalone Interviewing & Communication Skills curriculum with role-play, audio examples, and de-escalation scenarios.
Fraud & Identity Theft Detection	UI survey respondents cited fraud impacts and system	Fraud Investigations and Tax Auditing	Coverage is uneven and fragmented for	Expand into advanced fraud tracks with

	limitations. Learners requested more advanced fraud and identity theft training. Focus groups highlighted AI-generated documents and complex fraud schemes.	certificates address fundamentals.	advanced, interstate, and emerging fraud (including AI enabled fraud).	updated scenarios, AI-related fraud indicators, and cross-program case studies.
Technology, Data Literacy & AI	Survey respondents reported being underprepared for new technologies. Learners requested Excel, SQL, Power BI, and analytics. Focus groups expressed uncertainty about AI use, governance, and coaching customers/employers.	Advanced Data Analysis certificates exist; AI content is limited and unevenly integrated.	Lack of job-embedded, role-specific technology and AI training, especially tied to daily workflows.	Introduce applied tech and AI micro modules embedded within operational training (UI, WS, Integrity).
Leadership Development & Change Management	Survey findings noted leadership skill gaps and loss of institutional knowledge. Learners requested supervisor pathways. Focus groups stressed leadership awareness of frontline realities and change resistance.	Program Leadership content exists but is not consistently tied to operational change.	Leadership training is not sufficiently connected to real workflow, policy, and technology change scenarios.	Develop leadership coaching for change modules focused on coaching staff, decision making, and adoption of new systems.
Cross-program Integration &	Survey respondents cited limited understanding of how	Some integration concepts	No shared, system-level foundation	Create cross-program ecosystem

System Navigation	programs connect (WIOA integration). Learners requested program cross-training. Focus groups described siloed onboarding, referrals, and inconsistent triage.	appear in isolated courses; no unified approach.	explaining roles, referrals, and customer flow across programs.	training for UI and WS, including referral scenarios and customer journey mapping.
Employer Engagement & Business Services	WS survey respondents cited employer engagement challenges. Learners requested outreach and business analysis skills. Focus groups described employer engagement as sales-like and increasingly impacted by AI hiring practices.	Employer engagement content exists but is limited and inconsistently applied.	Training does not fully address relationship-building, value propositions, or AI-driven hiring disruptions.	Develop Employer Engagement & Business Communication training with practical scripts, scenarios, and AI-related guidance.
Policy Interpretation & Plain language Application	Survey responses indicated ongoing confusion around policy changes. Learners requested clearer assessments and state-specific context. Focus groups emphasized plain language summaries and case-based guidance.	Policy content is embedded in courses but often text-heavy and abstract.	Insufficient plain language translation of policy into daily practice.	Add policy translation job aids, one page summaries, and scenario-based policy application modules.

<p>Serving Individuals with Barriers</p>	<p>Surveys highlighted complex client needs and compassion fatigue. Learners requested support for difficult populations. Focus groups emphasized digital literacy, rural access, language barriers, and early identification of needs.</p>	<p>Coverage exists across programs but is inconsistent.</p>	<p>Training lacks practical tools and scripts for identifying and responding to barriers early.</p>	<p>Develop Serving Individuals with Barriers curriculum with real-world cases, decision trees, and digital coaching strategies.</p>
<p>Training Design & Delivery (Format Gap)</p>	<p>Survey respondents preferred short, bite-sized training. Learners requested less text heavy content. Focus groups strongly preferred live, interactive training for complex work with recordings for reinforcement.</p>	<p>Existing courses use modular LMS design but vary in length and media use.</p>	<p>Mismatch between preferred delivery methods and some existing course designs.</p>	<p>Redesign priority curricula using short, modular, scenario-based, blended delivery models.</p>