

Digital Transformation Initiative Learning Community Report & Reflections

Introduction

In 2021, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and the swift digitization of the workforce, along with rapid technological advancements and increased automation affecting the economy, the Workforce Professionals Training Institute (WPTI) launched its **Digital Transformation Initiative (DTI)**.

The goal of WPTI's Digital Transformation Initiative is to educate and guide workforce development organizations and their staff as they adapt their practices and service delivery to meet the changing needs of jobseekers and employers in the rapidly changing digital economy.

A core component of this Initiative is our cohort-based DTI Learning Community, which is focused on helping organizations understand and address:

1) Labor market evolution and the way technology such as automation, AI, and digital tools are changing jobs in every field and even the job acquisition process and how training programs and placement practices must adapt;

2) Digital equity, literacy, and fluency and the need to ensure all workers have a baseline of digital facility to engage confidently with technology to participate in the labor market and their communities; and

3) Digital tools and processes and how to use digital tools, software, and customer relationship management systems to streamline internal workflows, more effectively track participant and program outcomes and improve the quality and flexibility of services to increase capacity and better meet the needs of job seekers. See Appendix A for an overview of the DTI Learning community, including sessions and topics, and Appendix B, for a list of participating organizations.

DTI Learning Community Evaluation Overview

In Fall 2023, as part of WPTI's ongoing digital transformation efforts, as well as to inform the design of upcoming cohorts and a DTI Playbook for the workforce development field, we undertook an evaluation of our first two cohorts. This evaluation is intended to measure the impact of learning community participation for individual practitioners and organizations, assess how participating organizations have moved forward in implementing their DTI road maps,

and determine recommendations and changes needed to best support organizations on this ambitious journey. This evaluation consisted of post-session evaluation surveys during the learning community, participant and organizational surveys post-participation in the learning community, and a series of focus groups with leaders from participating organizations.

Participant Feedback: Post-Session Surveys

At the conclusion of each DTI session, WPTI distributed evaluation surveys, asking questions on fundamental topics. **More than 90 percent of respondents reported agreeing or strongly agreeing with the following statements:**

1. Today's session was helpful to my learning process.
2. I gained new tools and/or materials I can use in my work.
3. I gained new knowledge and/or skills I can use in my work.
4. I plan to use what I learned today in my work.

Participant Feedback: Post-Cohort Takeaway

In Fall 2023, WPTI convened two focus groups consisting of six learning community participants and distributed surveys to all cohort participants. Staff from six organizations (representing 50% of participating organizations) completed surveys.

Focus groups were intended to determine the organizational impact of the DTI learning community, why organizations joined the learning community, and their key takeaways – both learnings and tools. We sought to understand what steps organizations had taken in implementing key road map action items as well as areas for improvement for future cohorts.

Organizations reported seeing a need to digitize their operations, programming, or both. Often, organizations recounted that this need was due to COVID-19, the rapid digitization of the economy, and a shift to remote work and learning. Some organizations had just implemented, or were in the process of implementing, new online learning management systems (LMS), while others were implementing or updating customer relationship management (CRM) systems, such as Salesforce.

With these critical and complex infrastructure updates, organizations saw a need to increase their digital practices and knowledge and learn about new tools and resources to build their capacity and streamline operations.

Multiple focus group participants reported that the program sessions put their digital transformation journeys into context and connected them with other organizations that offered helpful comparisons and analogous situations. With regard to key learnings and takeaways, multiple focus group attendees referenced the practical tools and resources shared during the learning community.

Individuals specifically referenced free tools and platforms like ChatGPT and resources available via Google Drive, like Octoparse and HTML templates. Other attendees mentioned the DTI Learning Community's value regarding project management and how listening to the challenges and journeys of peer organizations was inherently helpful.

Since their DTI Learning Community participation, organizations have already begun implementing changes. One group mentioned how the learning community has been particularly helpful as they have rolled out digital literacy classes as well as an intensive partnership with a tech training provider to offer cybersecurity courses.

Other organizations have begun implementing digital literacy and equity programming to ensure that participants have the skills, technology, and capacity needed to participate and realize the benefits of the digital economy for the first time.

As part of its digital equity efforts, one organization is working closely with its employment services team to identify key tech-related skill sets to ensure that their jobseekers receive the digital skills training needed to succeed in the labor market. Another organization referenced the impact of the DTI Learning Community on its operations, processes, and infrastructure. Since participating, this organization has implemented new tools to assess jobseekers' digital literacy and fluency. It has shifted many internal processes from paper to digital systems - including using QR codes to capture attendance and participation.

Many of the changes listed have been programmatic, with the notable exception of one organization indicating changes in internal processes and data collection. While our long-term goal is to support organizations in improving their digital infrastructure and overall operations, we understand that these changes can be daunting due to cost, time, and the fact that organizations must continue operating successful programs simultaneously.

Furthermore, focus group attendees mentioned challenges in implementing some of the key learnings from the program due to transitions within their organizations, more time needed to build staff and leadership alignment around the digital transformation process, and competing organizational priorities.

WPTI also inquired about areas for improvement in the DTI Learning Community.

Attendees offered helpful suggestions, including:

Reference Guide Development: Creating a concise reference guide, checklists, and session summaries.

Participant Decision-Making: Clarifying staff eligibility for the learning community, focusing on those capable of driving organizational change and familiar with technology.

Post-Program Check-ins: Hosting regular check-ins post-cohort completion for participants and alumni to discuss progress, challenges, and improvement strategies.

DTI Alumni Engagement: Enhancing alumni involvement and fostering community connections between current participants and past cohorts.

Participant Feedback: Survey Findings

In addition to the focus groups, WPTI administered a survey of DTI participants. While our rate of response was somewhat limited, we were able to glean some helpful information:

100% of respondents reported that they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their DTI Learning Community experience.

80% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they gained new skills or discovered new tools that have improved their work.

Next Steps and Recommendations

As we launch future DTI Learning Community cohorts, **WPTI's efforts are focused on key areas identified by learning community participants.**

- **Development of DTI Playbook:** We will develop a *DTI Playbook*, which will serve as a reference guide and offer tools and resources, as well as practical exercises for cohort members to apply learnings from each session.
- **Alumni Resources & Community:** We will assess how to develop program alumni connections and program alumni into sessions to offer practical advice and perspective.
- **Include Post-Program Check-ins:** Following completion of the program, we will determine how to provide opportunities for check-ins to support peer learning, and troubleshooting and accountability with implementation of organizational Digital Transformation Roadmaps.

Recommendations for Workforce Professionals and the Field

The data and information gathered from our implementation and participant surveys and focus groups provide rich information and learnings for workforce development practitioners, organizations, and funders who are interested in digital transformation.

1. Defining and Clarifying Digital Transformation

There is a clear need for digital definitions as well as a framework for what digital transformation means for workforce development programs.

Standard definitions will enable organizations to understand why they should or shouldn't undertake a digital transformation effort and allow for more effective measurement of impact and effectiveness of digital transformation efforts. At the same time, we must ensure that digital transformation is not "one size fits all" and that digital solutions meet the needs, capacities, resources, and circumstances of individual organizations. As a result, **we must establish baseline levels of digital fluency and infrastructure among workforce providers** and define the "least intensive" technological interventions needed to meet their goals and objectives. This may also require additional digital literacy and fluency training for many organizations.

2. Organizational Assessment and Commitment to Digital Transformation

Digital transformation efforts are often costly and lengthy processes that require significant organizational commitment, as well as the support and commitment of funders. As we learned during focus groups, staff want greater clarity about who from their organizations should participate in the sessions. Furthermore, one organization dropped out from Cohort 1 due to staff capacity issues, and several groups in Cohort 2 did not complete their road maps.

For organizations that did begin implementation of road map action items, most of the action items focused on service delivery, such as new digital skills assessment tools and training curricula, rather than using technology to facilitate more efficient operations or data collection.

These findings highlight the need for more upfront assessment and organizational commitment from leadership and the board before a digital transformation effort is undertaken.

An in-depth pre-assessment will help organizations identify the problems they are trying to solve and whether technology and digital tools are appropriate solutions.

3. Greater Funder Investment in Digital Transformation and Ongoing Technology Infrastructure

Given the evolving nature of technology, digital transformation and the ongoing maintenance of an updated, well-functioning technology infrastructure is a costly endeavor for most organizations. With most workforce development organizations reliant on government contracts and private philanthropic support, which often does not cover the true costs to deliver services and adequately pay staff, technology and digital transformation and digital transformation are usually seen as “nice to haves” - as opposed to “must-haves.”

These organizations need funders who will invest significant resources, above and beyond their programmatic support, for organizations to assess their readiness to undertake a digital transformation process, provide professional development for staff, and cover the ongoing technology maintenance and upgrade costs of software.

Appendix A

A1. DTI Learning Community Overview

The DTI Learning Community sessions provide a framework for participants to assess their organization's capacity and possible solutions to fit their unique program needs and design. During each cohort, practitioners focus on critical topics in workforce development and how digital transformation can impact and enhance these programmatic areas, including jobseeker outreach, recruitment and intake, jobseeker training and placement, employer engagement, data collection, and analysis. At the end of the cohort, each organization develops a **Digital Transformation Road Map** that identifies specific areas of their workforce programming that can be streamlined or enhanced through affordable digital tools (suggested by WPTI, based on research and testing) and creates an actionable implementation strategy. Recognizing that workforce programs have limited staff capacity and resources, the focus of the road maps is on easily actionable steps and low-cost or free digital tools.

A description of each session is on the following page.

Appendix A: A2. DTI Learning Community Session Descriptions

Session	Guest Speaker
Session 1 The Big Picture: Workforce Development in the Digital Age	<i>Impact of Automation and Technology on the NYC Labor Market</i> Center for an Urban Future <i>Digital Skills Gap & Digital Equity in the American Workforce</i> National Skills Coalition <i>Shifting to Digital Operations Amidst a Pandemic</i> Detroit at Work
Session 2 Making a Plan: Potential and Pitfalls of Digital Transformation	<i>Digital Transformation : What Does it Mean? What Does it Take?</i> Roundtable Technology
Session 3 Realigning Org Culture: Shifting Staff to a Digital Mindset	<i>Digital Change Management for Nonprofits</i> Roundtable Technology <i>Lessons in Digital Change Management from the Corporate World:</i> Deloitte Digital
Session 4 Changing the Tires at 60mph: Processes, Systems, Programs	<i>Change in Action: The Grant Associates Experience in Detroit and Elsewhere</i> Grant Associates
Session 5 Technology Focus: Data Systems to Drive Performance	<i>Panel Discussion: The Realities of Collecting and Using Data in Workforce Development Organizations</i> Consortium for Skilled Workers, Henry Street Settlement, and Stacy Woodruff, nonprofit data consultant
Session 6 Technology Focus: Recruitment, Intake, and Engagement Technology	<i>Streamlining Recruitment and Intake with Technology</i> Per Scholas <i>Engagement and Service Delivery via iPhone: The Teen Workforce Initiative App</i> St. Joseph the Worker, Phoenix, AZ
Session 7 Technology Focus: Work Readiness Preparation	<i>The Jobversity Platform for Preparing Immigrants and Refugees for the American Job Market</i> Upwardly Global
Session 8 Technology Focus: Employer Engagement	<i>Reimagining Business Solutions through Technology</i> Per Scholas NYC
Capstone/Roadmap Presentation	

Appendix B

B1. Participating Organizations

For each cohort, WPTI recruits 5-6 workforce development organizations through a competitive application process. Each organization is expected to have at least 2-3 staff members, with at least one at a director level or higher. Incorporating director- or executive-level staff increases the likelihood that planning work done during the sessions is implemented into actual practice. Before the start of each cohort, organizations complete an inventory of digital technology platforms and tools currently used, opportunities for expanding services using technology, areas of operation that are time- and labor-intensive, and previous challenges faced when integrating new technologies into staff workflows.

The following page includes a complete list of the organizations, their location, target populations served, and titles of staff who participated in the learning community.

Appendix B: B2. Participating Organizations

Organization	Location	Populations Served	Participating Staff
Commonpoint Queens	Queens	Low-income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistant Vice President, Adult Workforce • Sr. Director of Strategy and Workforce Partnerships • Sr. Director of Adult Workforce Programs • Intake Outreach Coordinator
Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow	Brooklyn	Young Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Program Officer • Chief Strategy Officer
STRIVE	East Harlem, Citywide	BIPOC, Low-income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sr. Manager, National Coaching Practice • Executive VP of Programs and Impact • National Manager, Membership Services & Capacity Building • Strategic Operations Coordinator
Staten Island Jewish Community Center*	Staten Island		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Operating Officer
Phipps Neighborhoods	South Bronx	Young Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Strategy and Partnerships Officer • Deputy Executive Director • Director of Digital Access • Sr. Director of Data and Evaluation • STEM Club Coordinator • Training and Quality Assurance Manager • Case Manager
The Fortune Society	Harlem	Justice-involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Technology Officer • Director of Systems and Training • Assistant Director of Training • Full-Time Instructor (2)

*JCC of Staten Island withdrew from Cohort 1 due to staff capacity. This served as an important reminder that digital transformation requires significant bandwidth that smaller programs may not be able to spare.

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Organization	Location	Populations Served	Participating Staff
Consortium for Workers Education	Citywide	Low-income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistant Director of Training • Full-Time Instructor (2)
Emma's Torch	Brooklyn	Refugees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program Director • Program Associate • Community Engagement Manager
New York Center for Interpersonal Development	Staten Island	Low-Income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of Workforce Initiative • Job Developer • Internship Coordinator
The Osborne Association	Bronx, Upper Manhattan	Justice-involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer Specialist Coordinator • Employer Specialist (2)
ROC United	Citywide	Restaurant Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinator
St. Nicks Alliance	Brooklyn	Low-income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Director • Tech Internship and Employment Coordinator • Case Manager

Acknowledgments

The Digital Transformation Initiative (DTI) Learning Community Evaluation is a publication of the Workforce Professionals Training Institute (WPTI). This report was researched and written by Justin Collins, Director of Field Building and Engagement, and Andrea Vaghy, Chief Program Officer. WPTI wishes to express gratitude to the funders who have supported our Digital Transformation Initiative, including the Altman Foundation, Booth Ferris Foundation, Ira W. De Camp Foundation, JP Morgan Chase, Sorenson Impact Foundation, NYC Workforce Funders Collaborative, Sorenson Impact Foundation, Solon E. Summerfield Foundation, Truist Bank, and the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation.