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Tools for Navigating Today's Labor Market: A Vital Role for States

Individuals need easily accessible and easy-to-understand information to successfully navigate the constantly changing, sometimes turbulent, U.S. labor market. Internet tools are one way to effectively and efficiently get such information to users and state governments are the proper entities to create such resources. The State of New Jersey, with the assistance of the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, created two Web-based resources that provide students, job seekers, and workers with the information they need to make informed decisions about careers and further education. These two resources illustrate the value of such resources and illustrate some of the key lessons for creating a successful information resource.

Navigating an Ever-Changing Labor Market

The U.S. labor market has undergone sweeping changes in recent decades. Unlike previous generations, today's workers are likely to change jobs and careers, often involuntarily, many times over the course of their working lives. According to the Heldrich Center's *Work Trends* survey of American workers, one in three American workers report that they or a family member were laid off from a full-time job in the past three years. In addition, more than half report that they have been laid off at some point during their career. In addition, half of all workers report that they are "very concerned" about the job security of all workers.

The skill requirements of jobs are constantly changing as employers adjust to innovations in technology and increased global competition. While basic academic skills are still valued in the workplace, many industries now require workers at all levels to have diverse skills in areas such as mathematics and technology, problem solving, and critical thinking.

Individuals must navigate this constantly changing labor market. They are expected to be savvy consumers of information and to manage their own careers. Individuals must also be lifelong learners, constantly upgrading their skills to keep pace with changing skill needs.

Individuals who need up-to-date information about the labor market include:

- Students
- Job Seekers
- Workers
- Parents
- Teachers
- Counselors

To assist these individuals, states should act as “information intermediaries” and should focus their efforts on three primary goals:

1. To provide information on available career options,
2. To deliver information on the skill and education requirements of occupations, and
3. To promote informed choices by individuals seeking training and education.

State governments are best positioned to fill this need. Cities, counties, and local workforce investment boards lack the resources to create such tools. And while the federal government routinely creates a wealth of useful data about the labor market, it does not and cannot create tools that meet local labor market needs. Finally, although the private sector has created some resources — such as online job sites — it cannot be counted on to deliver comprehensive, accurate information.

State governments are best positioned to provide this crucial information. First, states have the financial resources necessary to build these resources. In addition, states have much of the data necessary to create such tools. For example, states collect and compile labor market information, including employment projections, and create eligible training provider lists for use in government-funded training programs. Finally, states have existing mechanisms (such as Internet portals) to reach multitudes of students, job seekers, workers, parents, teachers, and counselors.

Lessons Learned From Two New Jersey Information Resources

The State of New Jersey has embraced the role of information intermediary and created two Web-based information resources. The New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission, the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and the New Jersey Department of Education developed the Web sites with the assistance of the Heldrich Center. The two Web sites are examples of successful resources that help individuals navigate the labor market. These sites also illustrate five key lessons that states should follow as they create such resources.

NJNextStop.org: Educating High School Students About their Career Options

The NJ Next Stop Web site (www.njnextstop.org) informs high school students, career counselors, high school teachers, and parents about key industries and occupations in the state and the skills and education requirements needed to be successful in 73 occupations in 8 key industries. These 8 key industries include: manufacturing, finance, information technology, health care, construction, transportation and logistics, utilities and infrastructure, and tourism and hospitality.

History/Background

In 2002, the State of New Jersey, with the assistance of the Heldrich Center, launched the Ready for the Job initiative to determine the skill and education requirements of key industries in the state. The effort was led and funded by the New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission and the New Jersey Departments of Education and Labor and Workforce Development.

The Heldrich Center, with the support of workforce investment boards and local community colleges, conducted over 30 focus groups and over 80 interviews with employers to identify the skills and educational requirements of selected demand occupations. The occupations account for more than 25% of all jobs in the state.

The NJ Next Stop Web site was launched in October 2003 to put this information in the hands of high school students, counselors, teachers, and parents. The Web site combines this original research with labor market information, including occupational projections and wage information, and provides this information directly to high school students, counselors, teachers, and parents. The Web site, also, incorporates job profiles and advice from a career guidance magazine created by *NJ Biz*, one of the state's leading business publications. The site provides users with information on the skills demanded by today's employers and the education and training workers must undertake to qualify for jobs.

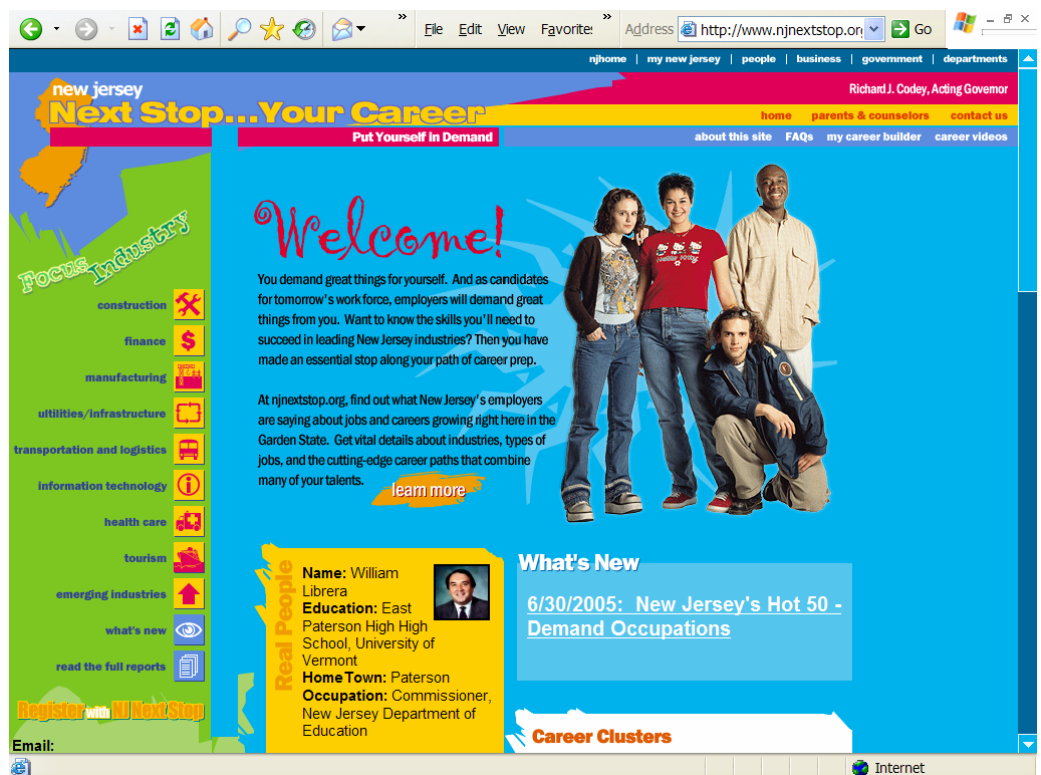
The Web site has been aggressively marketed to high school students and counselors with the distribution of research reports, posters, and mouse pads to high schools, colleges, and libraries in the state. Verizon New Jersey provided financial support for these marketing efforts.

Key Elements of the Web site

The NJ Next Stop Web site illustrates three key lessons that should be a part of any Web-based information resource.

Lesson 1: Design the Web site to meet the needs and preferences of users

NJ Next Stop uses bright colors and graphics to appeal to high school students. The site was designed by a professional Internet software consulting firm and the design was developed based on feedback from high school students. For example, in focus groups and interviews, students expressed a strong interest in the average earnings of the selected occupations. As a result, the Web site includes a “show me the money” function that allows users to search the 73 profiled occupations based on average earnings. In addition, the Web site features a monthly electronic newsletter called *Career Fuel*, which provides new content to registered users of the site.



Lesson 2: Unite a variety of data sources (and rely on existing data)

A lot of useful data already exists about labor markets, and states are the primary producers of such data. This data, however, rarely gets into the hands of citizens. NJ Next Stop combines this existing data (including labor market information from the State of New Jersey and data from the U.S. Department of Labor's O*NET system) with new sources of information (the original data on employer skill needs from the Ready for the Job research and job profiles and advice from the *NJ Biz* career guidance magazine).

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <http://www.njnextstop.org>. The page title is "Occupation: Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses". On the left, there is a "Focus Industry" sidebar with icons for construction, finance, manufacturing, utilities/infrastructure, transportation and logistics, information technology, health care, tourism, and emerging industries. The main content area includes a "Summary" section with the following details:

- Industry: [Health Care](#)
- Career Path: [Patient Care](#)

The summary text describes the nursing shortage in New Jersey and the role of nurses. It states: "You may have heard of the nursing shortage in New Jersey and around the country, which practically ensures job openings for the ambitious nurse-in-training. Nurses form the largest group of health care workers. They provide front-line care and treatment to patients as they assist other health care workers, such as doctors, in the diagnosis and treatment of a patient. The profession has two primary types of nurses--registered nurses (RNs) and licensed practical nurses (LPNs). The work tasks are often similar for these two groups. However LPNs typically work with less acute patients than RNs and are less likely than RNs to engage in supervisory and patient assessment activities."

Below the summary, it lists requirements: "Nurses must have a strong knowledge of medicine, mathematics, and biology. They must also be very service-oriented and sensitive to patients' needs. The nursing profession also requires team-building skills, observation skills and problem-solving skills."

Further down, it notes: "Both RNs and LPNs must pass a licensing exam. However, education levels may vary. RNs must have either an associate's or bachelor's degree in nursing. LPNs must have a high school diploma or G.E.D. LPN programs are offered mainly at vocational schools, though some individuals pursue the degree through community colleges."

On the right side, there is an "At A Glance" section with the following data:

Mean Annual Wages	\$40,940
Est. Number Employed 2002	18,400
Proj. Number Employed 2012	22,600
Percent Change 2002-2012	22.9%
Annual Openings	820

Below this is the "Required Degree" section, which states: "Required completion of an LPN program. Most LPN programs are offered at vocational schools, though some community colleges also offer LPN programs."

The "Other Jobs in the Career Path" section lists:

- [Certified Nursing Aides](#)
- [Home Health Aides](#)
- [Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses](#)
- [Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers](#)
- [Pharmacists](#)
- [Physical Therapists](#)
- [Registered Nurses](#)

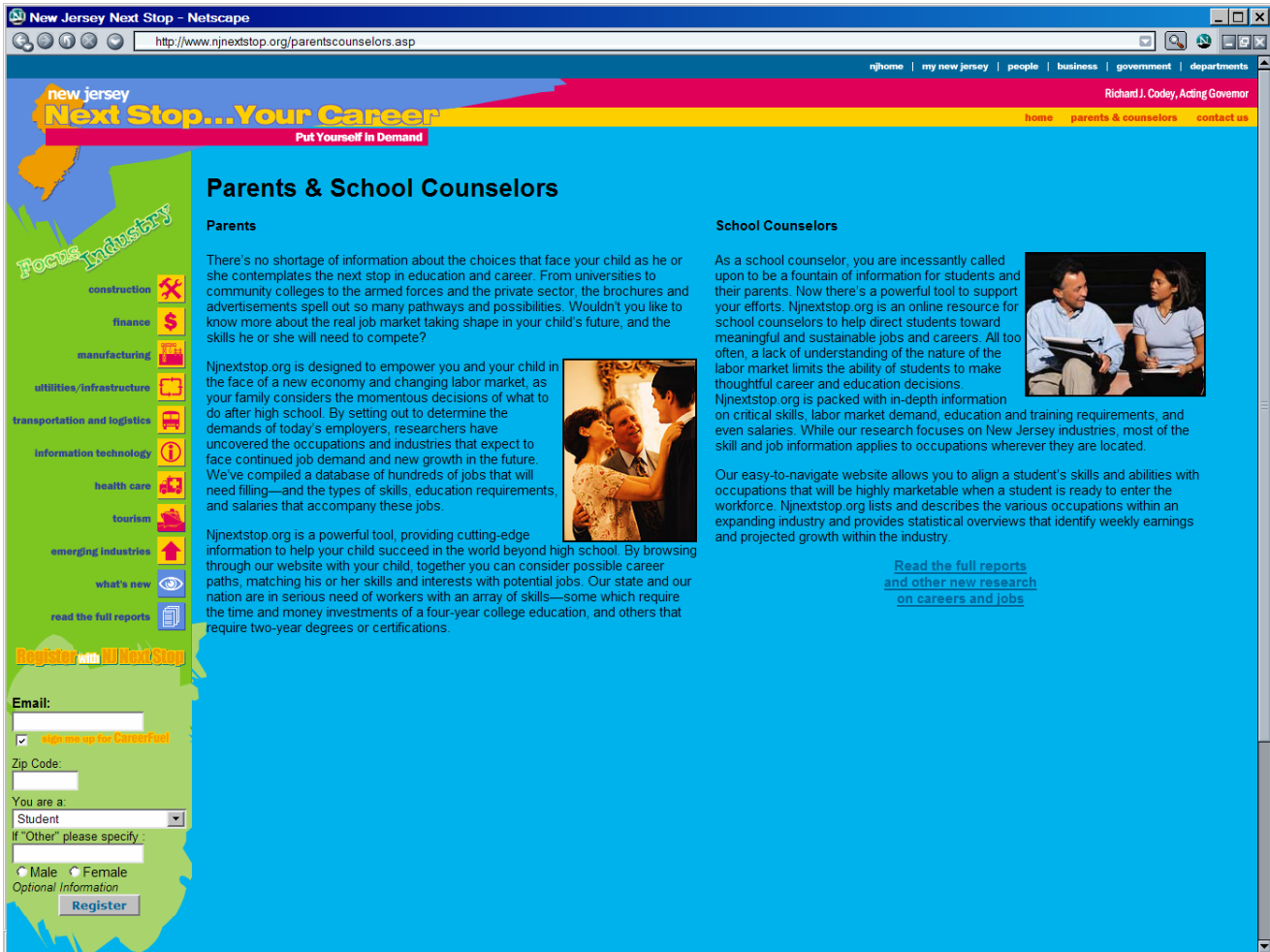
The "Related Career Paths" section lists:

- [Patient Care](#)

At the bottom left, there is a registration form with fields for "Email:", "Zip Code:", and "You are a:". There is also a checkbox for "sign me up for CareerFuel".

Lesson 3: Assist counselors, teachers, and parents to help students make career and education decisions

Counselors, teachers, and parents play an important role in helping students to make decisions about careers and further education. While geared primarily to students, the NJ Next Stop Web site includes content that is directed to counselors, teachers, and parents. The Web site has also been marketed to counselors and teachers through presentations and demonstrations at conferences and meetings.



Impact of the Web site

NJNextStop.org has become a valuable resource and is widely used in the state's high schools. Over the past year, more than 63,000 people visited the site and more than 20,000 copies of reports — dealing with the key industries profiled in Ready for the Job, including health care, tourism, finance, and information technology — were downloaded. The site was recently profiled on New Jersey Network's public broadcasting television series, *NJ Works*.

NJ Training Systems: Informing Individuals of their Training Options

The NJ Training Systems Web site (*www.njtrainingsystems.org*) helps job seekers and students identify the training and education programs that meet their needs. The Web site provides wide-ranging information on 4,300 training programs offered by 900 training providers (approximately two-thirds of all providers in the state).

History/Background

New Jersey launched the Web site in July 2000 to both fulfill the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) and to provide a vital source of information to New Jersey residents. The Workforce Investment Act requires states to: (1) create and maintain a list of training providers qualified to provide training to customers of the WIA program (eligible training provider list) and (2) make information on training providers (including their track record in assisting individuals to obtain jobs) available to WIA customers to enable customer choice. The NJ Training Systems site allows the state to meet both of these requirements.

However, New Jersey has adopted a broader vision for the Web site. The state used the financial resources of WIA to build and maintain a site that is a resource for all state residents. Additionally, the state used the requirements of WIA to help build consensus among key stakeholders (including training providers) of the need for such a site.

Key Elements of the Web site

The NJ Training Systems Web site illustrates two key lessons that should be a part of any Web-based information resource.

Lesson 4: Provide tools that can help users to sort through information

The Internet is well suited to help individuals to sort through large amounts of information to find only the information they want and need. The NJ Training Systems Web site contains a tremendous amount of information on a large number of training programs and training providers, including descriptive information about programs and providers and data on the employment outcomes of students. This data is calculated by the Heldrich Center using Unemployment Insurance wage record data and includes completion rates, employment rates, and average wages earned by former students. To ensure that this wealth of information does not overwhelm users, the Web site includes user-friendly search engines and tools that allow individuals to directly compare training programs.

http://www.njtrainingsystems.org/Search/ProgramSearchByMap.aspx

workforce new jersey's guide to training & education programs

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Search by occupation or training type | **Search by map or zip** | Advanced search

Search Map Or Zip

To start your search please select a county, multiple counties, another state, or any combination of these, OR a zip code. You can not select a zip code in combination with any other choice.

Select one or more NJ Counties:

All Counties

Atlantic (17) Middlesex (11)

Bergen (3) Monmouth (13)

Burlington (15) Morris (5)

Camden (16) Ocean (14)

Cape May (21) Passaic (2)

Cumberland (20) Salem (19)

Essex (6) Somerset (9)

Gloucester (18) Sussex (1)

Hudson (7) Union (10)

Hunterdon (8) Warren (4)

Mercer (12)

Select one or more other states:

All Other States Portions of New York

Portions of Delaware Portions of Pennsylvania

Or

Enter your Zip Code: Search within Select One miles of this zip code.

Optional Search Criteria

*Note by adding optional search criteria you may get more accurate search results

Enter a Keyword or Provider Name: search for

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A product of Workforce New Jersey and the State Employment & Training Commission in collaboration with the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University. Website Design By [Electric Vine Interactive](#)

http://www.njtrainingsystems.org/Search/Results.aspx?SearchType=Occupation+or+Training&SearchSubmit=1&cboOccupation=738&cboClusterID=&ZipCode=08901&cboZipCode=308

workforce new jersey's guide to training & education programs

newjersey trainingsystems

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Search Recap

Search Type: Occupation or Training

Occupation: Nursing Aides, Orderlies, and Attendants

Zip Code 08901 within the radius of 30 miles.

Number of Results: 61

Your search found the following providers and programs Go to results page:

Results For Training Programs Search

Your search found the following programs. To obtain additional information, click on the program name.

[Customize View](#) [Back to Default View](#)

Program Name	Average Program Rating(1-6): N/A (0)	Total Cost of Program	Training Location	Calendar Length
220hour Combined CHHA and CNA Crossroads Career Institute, Inc. Edison, Middlesex	Add Your Comments	\$4,000.00	1 Ethel Road Suite 101A Edison NJ 08817	4-11 weeks
CERTIFIED MEDICATION AIDE Somerset County Technical Institute Bridgewater, Somerset	Add Your Comments	\$633.00	North Bridge and Vogt Drive Bridgewater NJ 08807	4-11 weeks
CERTIFIED NURSING ASSISTANT Comtec Institute East-Orange, Essex	Add Your Comments	\$3,500.00	44 Glenwood Avenue 2nd Floor East-Orange NJ 07017	4-11 weeks
CNA (Certified Nursing Aide) Computer Professional Learning Center, Inc. - Jersey City Jersey City, Hudson	Add Your Comments	\$1,500.00	905 Bergen Avenue, 2nd Floor Jersey City NJ 07306	4-11 weeks
CNA (Certified Nursing Aide) Xincon Technology School Edison, Middlesex	Add Your Comments	\$2,300.00	One Ethel Rd., Suite 108A Edison NJ 08817	4-11 weeks
CNA with Basic Computers Computer Professional Learning Center, Inc. - Jersey City Jersey City, Hudson	Add Your Comments	\$5,050.00	905 Bergen Avenue, 2nd Floor Jersey City NJ 07306	3-5 months
Cert Nursing Asst. Skills practice prof Crossroads Career Institute, Inc. Edison, Middlesex	Add Your Comments	\$2,500.00	1 Ethel Road Suite 101A Edison NJ 08817	4-11 weeks
Certified Home Health Aide LTC Career Training, Inc. - Asbury Park Asbury Park, Monmouth	Add Your Comments	\$821.00	600 Main Street Asbury Park NJ 07712	4-11 weeks
Certified Medication Aide Best Care Training Institute Inc. East Orange, Essex	Add Your Comments	\$645.00	68 South Harrison St 2nd Fl. East Orange NJ 07017	4-11 weeks
Certified Medication Aide	Add Your Comments	\$550.00	600 Main Street	2-3 weeks

Lesson 5: Adopt a broader vision of consumer information

Many states have done the minimum necessary to meet the WIA requirements regarding the development of eligible training provider lists and consumer report cards. New Jersey, instead, identified an information need and then used WIA resources to meet that need. The state designed a Web site that would be useful to all individuals making training decisions, not just those served by WIA. New Jersey required all state and federal workforce development programs in the state (not just WIA programs) to use the site as their sole eligible training provider list. This decision expanded the number of users of the site, which in turn gave training providers added incentive to participate by providing needed data and information.

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the 'newjersey trainingsystems' website. The page title is 'workforce new jersey's guide to training & education programs'. The main content area is titled 'Results' and displays information for a specific program:

- Program Name: 3D Computer Graphics and Animation
- Related Programs: Arts, Audio-Video Technology and Communications
- Provider Name: Mercer County Community College
- Average Program Rating: N/A (0)

Below this information is a table showing results for '6 months after training'.

	Program Name (click for details)	Related Programs (click for details)	Training Provider (click for details)
Employment Rate (i)	63%	74%	73%
Average Quarterly Wage (i)	\$10,879.12	\$12,691.32	\$8,913.55
Estimated Yearly Wage (i)	\$43,516.47	\$50,765.28	\$35,654.20

Additional text on the page includes: 'Click here to display the number of students (i)', 'For a full description of the methodology used to calculate these results [click here](#). Results reflect data as of 12/31/04', and a footer with contact information and copyright notice: '2000-2005 Electric Vine, Inc. All Rights Reserved.'

Impact of the Web site

The NJ Training Systems Web site's effectiveness is evident. Over the past year, more than 50,000 people have used the site. Additionally, the site is used widely by all One-Stop Career Centers in the state.

www.heldrich.rutgers.edu

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