



# Arapahoe/Douglas Works!' (ADW's) Virtual Work Readiness Program (VWRP)

## Summary

The VWRP is a 90-hour course, delivered primarily virtually, that teaches basic technology and remote work skills to customers of ADW American Job Centers (AJCs). Participants in the course all have limited digital literacy. ADW designed the VWRP in collaboration with Arapahoe Community College (ACC) to equip people who were unemployed because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to conduct virtual job search effectively and to gain employment and succeed in virtual work situations. ACC instructors deliver the course, which covers basics of using computers, familiarity with common computer applications, and job search and workplace skills in a virtual environment.

## Funding source



ADW received funding for the initial cohorts of the VWRP from the Arapahoe County government, which the county provided out of funds it received from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. ADW used the CARES Act funding to pay ACC a per-participant fee for the classes, as well as to buy laptops and software for participants. ADW is currently exploring funding options to continue the VWRP once the CARES Act funding is no longer available, such as existing funding sources for trainings and new funding sources for laptops and materials. For example, in recent cohorts, ADW has leveraged funding from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to support the cost of trainings.

## Intervention description



When the COVID-19 pandemic closed down the physical delivery of many services and physical workplaces, ADW recognized that many of its customers—including many of those with low incomes—did not have the digital skills needed to apply for services online or to work remotely. The availability of funding through the CARES Act gave ADW an opportunity to address that lack of digital literacy.

## Services provided



Education; Soft skills training; Work readiness activities (*Job search assistance*)

## Populations served



The VWRP serves people with limited digital literacy, including those with limited skills and experience using computers or computer applications, as well as those less familiar with interacting online in professional contexts. Although there are no income eligibility requirements, ADW sees the program as focused largely on a lower-income population, and has conducted targeted recruitment to Colorado Works (TANF) and Employment First (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training) participants. ADW has also recruited participants from customers of its AJCs, one of which serves many people with low incomes.

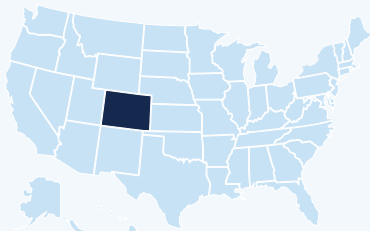
To be eligible for the initial cohorts of the VWRP, participants had to be residents of Arapahoe County and to have either lost a job because of the COVID-19 pandemic or be part of a household whose income was impacted by the pandemic. These are requirements of the CARES Act funding that Arapahoe County administers. More recently, ADW has supported VWRP training for some individuals through other funding sources that do not have the same requirements; however, only some of those sources support the issuance of a laptop.

## What are case studies?

Case studies provide practitioners with information about innovative interventions that states, counties, community-based organizations, or other entities are undertaking to improve employment outcomes for TANF participants and other individuals with low incomes, especially public assistance recipients. **Case studies cover interventions not included elsewhere in the Clearinghouse because they have not yet been rigorously evaluated.**

## Setting

The VWRP serves residents of Arapahoe County, CO. ADW's AJCs are in Centennial, CO, and Aurora, CO. ACC, which delivers the classes, is located in Littleton, CO.



## Year first implemented

2020 (ongoing at the time of data collection)

ADW engaged ACC to develop a training with the goal of improving digital literacy. Within approximately six months, ACC created a basic framework and curriculum for a program, in collaboration with ADW, that aimed to teach not just basic computing skills but also job search skills and soft skills related to working remotely, such as preparing for virtual job interviews or using appropriate backgrounds when doing a videoconference call. ACC drew from materials that their instructors had used previously in other courses, including courses that taught Microsoft Office and other computer skills. To ensure that the course's instruction and Certificate of Course Completion would be in line with employer needs, ADW's business services team reviewed requirements in jobs posted with the AJCs and spoke with the Arapahoe County COVID-19 Business Recovery Taskforce about business needs for workers who could access jobs and work remotely.

ACC delivers the course. The course for initial cohorts consisted of about 90 hours of instruction, delivered 3 days a week from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. over 6 weeks. As discussed below, however, ADW and ACC plan to reduce the number of hours in future iterations of the course, and later cohorts have included weekend options or alternative hours. Classes have about 10 students each.

The course begins with an orientation, during which the instructors give the students a laptop. They then help the students set up their laptops and install Microsoft 365 software, and show them how to get on the Internet and download materials for the course. The VWRP pays for the laptop—which the students can keep after the course is

over—and a one-year subscription to Office 365. It does not directly provide students with Internet access; however, workforce specialists or instructors refer students who need it to community resources that provide low-cost or free Internet services. (ADW has software to install on the laptops for justice-involved people with limitations on Internet use, though as of the time of data collection, they had not had a participant who needed it.) The orientation ensures students have the tools they need for the course and introduces students to working with a computer. Given the need to provide the computer and set it up before the students can participate remotely, the orientation is done in person; however, the rest of the course is virtual.

The rest of the course is divided into two levels. The first level, covering about 30 hours, includes basic introductory content on using a computer, such as the following:

- Computer hardware essentials (for example, using input devices—such as keyboards and mice, printers, and projectors—processing data, and storing data)
- Computer software essentials (for example, types of programs, and installing and updating software)
- Windows basics
- Networking and the Internet (for example, connecting to the Internet, browsers and their features, and network security)
- Organizing information (for example, files and folders, naming documents, storage and cloud storage, and backing up information)
- Creating an online Microsoft account
- Researching on the Internet (for example, search engines and using the Internet and social media safely)
- Outlook and email communication (for example, setting up email accounts and using features of Outlook)

The second level, covering about 60 hours, includes more in-depth instruction on Microsoft Office tools and topics related to engaging in a job search virtually and working from home. Components of the second level are as follows:

- Word and Excel basics
- Essential workplace soft skills (for example, communication, collaboration, and time management)

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- Job searching and working virtually (for example, online applications, uploading resumes, preparing for in-person or virtual interviews, setting up a remote home office and appropriate Zoom background, commonly used meeting software, and using social media as a resource for the workplace)

The instruction is primarily delivered through Zoom and Microsoft Teams. More recent cohorts also have in-person options. The instructors teach a lesson and then allow practice time. During practice time, the instructors divide the class into groups using breakout rooms, which gives an opportunity for them to provide small-group or one-on-one instruction to students who need extra help. More than one instructor might be available during class for this assistance if needed.

ADW handles recruitment and enrollment for the program. Case managers for Colorado Works and Employment First (which are programs that ADW administers for the county) refer participants who they identify as potentially facing barriers with technology. Workforce specialists at the AJCs also recruit customers they believe could benefit from the course, including those who come into the center for services during the pandemic because they do not have the skills to access services online. The case managers or workforce specialists then help interested people complete the eligibility paperwork, complete a virtual assessment to understand the person's needs and technology skills, and arrange an electronic training voucher to pay for the person's participation in the course. Students are placed in one of two tracks based on the assessment. One track does the entire course, while the other does only the second level. These assessments demonstrated to ADW that many people who have access to and experience with some forms of technology, such as smartphones or point-of-sale systems in previous jobs, do not know how to operate a computer and do not have the skills needed to apply for a job or work remotely. Because of this, ADW plans to expand use of the assessment beyond the VWRP.

Other than the laptop and a one-year subscription to Office 365, VWRP does not offer supportive or wraparound services; however, students can receive the services available through ADW's AJCs or through other programs in which they participate. After completing the course,

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students can return to the ADW AJC for support in their job search, and they also have access to ACC's career services. Potentially useful services such as case management are available to students enrolled in other programs that provide them (for example, Colorado Works and Employment First), but not through VWRP itself.

As of the time of data collection, staffing for the VWRP consisted of five main instructors and two curriculum developers, one of whom was also available to teach if needed. The instructors were a mix of existing instructors at ACC and new hires. Most had previously taught courses on Microsoft Office or technology. ACC looked for candidates who would be able to teach not just technical skills but soft skills as well.

ACC charges a \$1,200 fee per participant for the course, which ADW pays for through an electronic voucher. The cost of the course includes the one-year subscription to Office 365 but not the laptops that ADW provides to the students. The cost of those laptops, which ADW purchased with CARES Act funding, was \$750.

Based on lessons learned from the earliest classes, ADW and ACC plan to modify aspects of future VWRP classes in ways they believe will improve program implementation. They found that the length of the classes—90 hours, with classes often lasting from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.—was too much of a commitment during the pandemic for participants with children at home and no child care. Many participants had to log off at 2:00 p.m. because of school schedules. ADW and ACC plan to decrease the overall hours for the course, reduce the classes to six hours per day, and offer a more self-paced option. In addition, they plan to reduce the amount of time spent in person early in the course. Although they cannot eliminate it entirely given the need to provide the laptop, they created documents and YouTube videos to help students with some initial instruction that had previously been done in person, such as learning how to use the keyboard and mouse.

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ADW administrators also noted some factors and decisions that helped them launch the program quickly. ADW and ACC had an existing relationship that enabled them to quickly begin work together on this effort. ADW also developed an approach to regularly communicate rapidly changing information about the program to staff across different programs, which helped update staff responsible for identifying potential participants. They assigned a point person from each of the different teams of staff within ADW (which included the teams working on various programs ADW administers as well as their quality assurance and business services teams) and incorporated them into decision making about the program. In addition, ADW created regular office hours during which their workforce specialists and other staff could ask questions about the program.

The administrators also noted that the CARES Act funding supported the development of the program in ways that other funding sources might not. For example, ADW could provide laptops using CARES Act funding but is currently trying to identify more funding sources that will allow them to continue to do so once they run out of the laptops purchased with CARES Act funds.

## More information



*More information on this program is available at*

<https://www.arapahoe.edu/news/acc-and-arapahousedouglas-works-partner-virtual-work-readiness-program>.

## Research on intervention to date



*This intervention has not been rigorously evaluated for effectiveness.* VWRP is a relatively new program and has not undergone any evaluation yet. Of the 25 students who had enrolled in the course at the time of data collection, all had completed the course and received a course completion certificate.

## Case study information sources

In winter 2021, the Pathways Clearinghouse collected information for this case study from telephone interviews and communication with leaders at ADW and reviewed materials provided by ADW staff. The Pathways Clearinghouse shared a near-finalized draft of the case study with ADW and incorporated revisions for accuracy and completeness. For more information about the methods for selecting and developing the case studies, please see the [Protocol for Pathways Clearinghouse Case Studies on the Pathways Clearinghouse project page](#).

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