



**STATE OF DELAWARE
GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW (GEAR)**

**2024 GEAR BOARD ANNUAL REPORT TO GOVERNOR CARNEY
REQUIRED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER NUMBER FOUR**

**RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNOR
FROM THE GEAR BOARD**

November 1, 2024



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STATE OF DELAWARE GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Order #4, signed by Governor John Carney on February 16, 2017, established the Government Efficiency and Accountability Review (GEAR) to develop recommendations for increasing efficiency and effectiveness across State government, improve the strategic planning process, improve the use of metrics in resource allocation decisions, and develop continuous improvement practices. Historically, administrations in Delaware have conducted one-time, short-lived efficiency reviews of State government to identify ways to save money and make government work better. These prior committees and commissions conducted top-down “blue ribbon” reviews, which have had mixed results. In general, while some recommendations have stuck, other recommendations have been short-term responses to pending budget crises with very limited longer-term impacts, and some recommendations have been recurring large-scale consolidation ideas that have typically gone nowhere. Put simply, these top-down reports tended to result in limited progress and largely have gathered dust on a shelf.

The Carney Administration took a different approach – working to create a bottom-up, permanent and ongoing vehicle to assist State agencies in driving continuous improvement projects through the work of the GEAR Board. GEAR Board meetings are posted to the State’s online public meeting calendar. Public participation and comments are encouraged. The Board has met 43 times since its formation. The Board has established multiple critical focus areas, identified team leadership and members, completed written charters identifying process and program optimization opportunities, and initiated and completed numerous projects with measurable outcomes to take advantage of these opportunities.

The Executive Order directs the GEAR Board to issue a report to the Governor no later than December 1 of each year. The 2024 GEAR Annual Report contains recommendations for consideration in the Governor’s Recommended Budget and policy priorities for Fiscal Year 2026 and serves as the last report of the Carney Administration.

A key facet of GEAR’s efficacy in the future will rely on the structure of the Board, GEAR Program Management Team, and overall operating model. To date, GEAR has primarily operated from a supportive stance within State government - suggesting best practices, offering training and coaching, and setting recommended goals and outcomes. A revised framework could range from today’s supportive model to a more directive framework or something in between. Other changes could include updating the mission, vision, goals and objectives in the GEAR charter to be consistent with the incoming Governor’s strategies; defining and standardizing terminology; selecting key performance indicators to measure progress and compare outcomes; expanding training; updating GEAR Board member composition; and incorporating general responsibilities and goals of the Enterprise Services Delivery Team, GEAR Field Team, and Public Private Partnership (P3) Taskforce. It will be beneficial for the next Administration to give consideration as to the most effective operating model that aligns a body like GEAR with their objectives to further enhance the use of industry accepted best practices, achieve measurable outcomes, and ultimately grow the State’s culture of continuous improvement.

What follows is an Executive Summary of key accomplishments, progress on major initiatives, and recommendations requiring support from the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches.

I. GEAR Program Management Team

Strengthen Quantifiable Outcomes – GEAR’s teams are leveraging industry best practices to develop the skills of its membership as the number of projects and trained GEAR Field Team participants increase. GEAR estimates that a rough order of magnitude savings to the State across 88 percent of the 147 projects in the portfolio will be \$96-101 million over the life of projects underway.

Evolve the State’s Culture of Continuous Improvement – GEAR’s mission is to improve the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of government services, build a sustainable culture of continuous improvement statewide, and bend the arc of government spending growth downward. Consistent with this mission, GEAR has continued its work on implementing change management messaging aligned with the evolving culture of continuous improvement in State government. These efforts are being developed through ongoing conversations with GEAR Board members, State leadership, private sector partners, and the Governor’s Office. The objective of the conversations is to also provide recommendations to better inform a revised GEAR Executive Order for the forthcoming administration in 2025 that builds upon the successes of GEAR to date. The recommendations and feedback provided to date are outlined in further detail in this report. With an eye toward the future, structured analysis with GEAR’s stakeholders has been occurring over the past year. It is recommended that the focus of GEAR in the future be strengthened by targeting the following key goals:

1. Determine the GEAR operating model and reauthorize the GEAR Executive Order.
2. Achieve \$300M in cost savings through business process optimization over the next 4 years to be reinvested.
3. Expand training opportunities for existing GEAR Field Team members, State personnel during onboarding, and State leaders.
4. Implement the full-scale Ready in Six initiative.
5. Establish pilot projects in Lean management with a focus on aligning State budgeting and operational practices.

These goals can leverage and be applied to various strategic projects to maximize the value of State service delivery and align with building a Lean government culture. With a new administration it will be important to establish an ongoing vision for continuous improvement in State government. Previously, the GEAR Program Management Team worked with the Governor, Chief Justice, other key leaders who are members of the GEAR Board, and State employees practicing their continuous improvement skills to provide a video series (gear.delaware.gov/gear-stories) highlighting the impact of GEAR to date. To establish a strong sense of support and sponsorship around a revamped GEAR Executive Order it will be just as essential to highlight the new Administration’s support for building a culture of continuous improvement with a series of clear and concise communications about the business need for ongoing change to make government work better.

Drive Continuous Improvement Training and Development – Based on recommendations made in the 2018 GEAR Annual Report, the First State Quality Improvement Fund (FSQIF) was reinstated in Fiscal Year 2020 as a line item in the Department of Human Resources (DHR) budget and funded at \$150,000 per year. FSQIF funds have been used for 2 cohorts of the Continuous Improvement Practitioner (CIP) training program per year since then. A total of 118 practitioners have graduated with an additional cohort of 20 presently in training. In Fiscal Year 2023, the FSQIF was amended by Senate Bill 90 to modernize the language in the Delaware Code to reflect current industry accepted terminology from the continuous improvement field and affirm the partnership between GEAR and DHR in administering the training programs developed under this law. In Fiscal Year 2024, with the support of the Governor and General Assembly, the FSQIF was appropriated an additional \$200,000 (a total of \$350,000) to continue funding 2 annual cohorts of CIP training and implement new training programs. This additional funding has resulted in 2 pilot training programs that are currently being evaluated to enhance the skills of the GEAR Field Team, 1) Process and Project Leadership (PPL) training to focus on leadership skill development, and 2) Operational Excellence (OpEx) training to focus on advanced skill development in Lean six sigma, business analysis, project management, and agile methods.

Grow the GEAR Field Team (GFT) – Established in 2020, the GFT is a community comprised of CIP training program graduates who are applying their skills throughout State government. With approximately 110 active members representing 23 State organizations that include the Judicial Branch, the team is delivering value through the execution of approximately 90 projects that leverage the skills and tools of continuous improvement. As the GFT’s efforts have evolved, an additional focus area of business process management (BPM) has emerged with a sub-team having been in place since early 2024. The business process management sub-team is focused on sharing best practices in the use of BPM tools and techniques and is currently establishing a playbook to enhance the ability of State employees to effectively implement process mapping, identify waste, and streamline business processes. In addition, the GEAR Program Management Team supports the use of the GEAR Project Management Playbook as a reference for trainees and graduates of the Continuous Improvement Practitioner (CIP) training program. The Project Management Playbook is designed to provide current project management standards and tools to current and future project managers within the State.

Solidify a Strategic Path for the Enterprise Services Delivery (ESD) Team – Representing most of the State’s major financial, human resource and information technology functions, ESD delivers value through the implementation of approximately 50 cross-agency enterprise-wide projects and programs. In 2022, the framework for evaluating the strategic impact of enterprise level projects was revamped with a focus on the impact of change saturation, return on investment, and risk management across agencies. In 2023 and 2024, the ESD team also rechartered its efforts to better align agencies, projects, and service delivery toward a more unified State of Delaware enterprise perspective. The vision of ESD is to foster a culture of collaboration and success by ensuring inter-organization communication on enterprise-wide finance, human resource, and information technology projects and adequate resource allocation to sustain these projects over time.

Improve Career Pathways for Employee Recruitment and Retention – Consistent with Executive Order #4, which specifies that GEAR shall “identify changes in the State personnel system that would foster a culture of continuous improvement and improve the recruitment, development and retention of State employees”, GEAR worked with DHR to identify job classifications that would increase the ability of State agencies to drive and sustain continuous improvement over time. The GEAR Program Management Team implemented 4 proposed classification series, each with a career ladder, for project managers (5 roles), business process analysts (5 roles), change management specialists (3 roles), and Lean continuous improvement specialists (5 roles). In total, these 18 new roles became available to State agencies in August 2024 in support of the Fiscal Year 2026 budget cycle.

Finalize the First Phase of the Ready in Six Initiative – In 2020, the GEAR Public/Private Partnership (P3) taskforce expanded its focus to include recommendations made by the Delaware Business Roundtable to accelerate business-related permitting processes at the State, county, and local government levels. In coordination with GEAR P3 leadership and the Office of the Governor, a survey was developed by the GEAR Program Management Team in 2022 and disseminated to over 1,500 industry focused partners to target specific areas for improvement in permitting processes. A project charter was developed to address specific process bottlenecks identified by the survey. The project was then implemented starting with the first of 2 phases - focusing on conducting Lean business analysis and process improvement surrounding 1 key process each within the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) and Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT). Currently, the DNREC Subaqueous Permitting Prototype project for boat docking facilities is underway with active GEAR Program Management Team support, while DelDOT’s prototype focuses on regulatory review associated with utility relocation work to achieve efficiencies in the short term. Once the first phase pilot initiatives are completed near the end of Calendar Year 2024, State leadership will determine if a larger phase 2 initiative will be launched spanning State, county, and municipal governments.

Support the Delaware Artificial Intelligence (AI) Commission - In 2024, House Bill 333 was passed establishing the Delaware Artificial Intelligence Commission, which includes the Executive Director of GEAR as a member. This new Commission is tasked with making recommendations on AI utilization safely and securely within the State. An initial outcome for this newly formed Commission is to provide an inventory of all Generative AI usage within Delaware's executive, legislative, and judicial branch organizations and identify high risk areas for the implementation of Generative AI. The GEAR Executive Director’s involvement shall provide direct input on the use of this technology for business process optimization and automation over time.

Amend the Delaware Governmental Accountability Act (GAA) – As outlined in Executive Order #4, GEAR’s scope of work includes revisions to the GAA, noted as follows, “changes to the Delaware Governmental Accountability Act will better drive strategic planning, help develop meaningful performance metrics, foster more effective monitoring of performance and allocation of scarce resources as part of the budget process, and promote continuous improvement programs throughout State government.” Though prior GEAR bills amending the GAA have not succeeded in passing through the legislature, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget and the Controller General suggested that they may work together, with the Co-chairs of the Joint Finance Committee, to implement improved budgeting practices guided by the elements outlined in the GEAR bills that sought to amend the GAA.

Enable Enterprise Solutions for Project and Process Management – In 2022, there were 2 recommendations put forth by the GEAR Program Management Team to expand enterprise software solutions for project management and business process analysis. First, in consultation with DTI, Planview Projectplace software was selected as the software solution to transition over 130 GEAR projects into an online, cloud-based portfolio. Second, an industry leading business process management software tool called ARIS was introduced as a GEAR standard in July 2019. To date, ARIS is being used to accomplish objectives by multiple organizations as GEAR Field Team (GFT)

members better define current state processes, measure performance, identify and eliminate waste, and implement optimized future state solutions. In FY 2025, the Department of Finance was appropriated \$52,000 for ARIS and Planview Projectplace licenses.

Benchmark Continuous Improvement Activities Against Other States - Several of GEAR’s continuous improvement activities for the State of Delaware were included in Results for America’s 2023 Invest in What Works State Standard of Excellence, a nationally recognized state benchmarking program. The 2023 Invest in What Works State Standard of Excellence demonstrates that states are increasingly using data and evidence to produce better, more equitable results for their residents. In 2023, Delaware was noted as having 5 “promising examples” of state standards of excellence under the focus areas of evaluation leadership, evaluation policy and learning, data policy and practices, and performance management. GEAR has submitted the State’s progress for inclusion in the 2024 Invest in What Works State Standard of Excellence and is awaiting results from Results for America. GEAR leadership will continue to collaborate with other government partners through Results for America who are pursuing data driven and evidence based best practices.

II. Enterprise Services Delivery Team (ESD)

Plan for Replacement of Enterprise-Wide Computer Applications - The State’s enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems – the Financial Management & Accounting; Payroll, Human Resources, Benefits & Time Administration; and Pension Administration systems - will reach end-of-life in the coming years. Significant upgrades or modifications for these systems have not occurred in more than 5 years and will not occur again in their current state. This leaves the current solutions outdated, falling short of meeting the State’s financial reporting requirements, and offers minimal enhancements for a mobile workforce. In addition, due to numerous customizations, support for the current systems requires a specialized workforce. To ensure the continuity of State operations, the ERP Modernization Project, which encompasses all State ERP systems, was initiated in June 2022. To date, the State has appropriated \$62.5 million toward this major initiative with \$25 million in both the Fiscal Year 2023 and Fiscal Year 2024 bond bills and an additional \$12.5 million in the Fiscal Year 2025 bond bill.

Implement Integrated Revenue Administration System (IRAS) – The Delaware Department of Finance, Division of Revenue (DOR) had been using a tax processing system that is more than 30 years old, mainframe based and consists of over 100 client server applications. The IRAS implementation is fully modernizing DOR’s processing systems to create a web-based, real-time, and integrated user experience that automates processing capabilities, optimizes the efficiency and effectiveness of DOR staff, and strengthens security and internal controls. IRAS improves DOR’s ability to mitigate fraud and will increase revenue with new audit programs and better technology to assist with the collection of delinquent taxes. The project is being implemented in 3 releases, each release addressing a specific tax or set of taxes. The first, second, and part of the third release have gone live, with the last part of the third release to go live in late 2025.

Streamline Financial Services Workloads, Payment Flows, and Training – State organizations are responsible for preparing financial transactions and their associated documents in a timely manner, in proper sequence, and in accordance with established procedures in the State’s Budget and Accounting Policy Manual (BAM). The after-the-fact waiver request application process was streamlined to reduce the numbers of these requests that needed the approval of the Director of the Office of Management and Budget and the Secretary of Finance. Their workload has been reduced as much as 76 percent, however, in recent years the numbers of requests for cabinet secretary approval have been creeping upwards. Though increasing, the numbers of requests are still well below those prior to streamlining the approval process.

The combined total annual spending for the State’s credit card program (PCard) and the Single-Use Account program for vendor payments Calendar Year 2024, to date, is projected to be over \$185 million with a similar credit card rebate to Calendar Year 2023. The second extension of the existing PCard contract expires December 2025.

A subcommittee to develop an Accounting 201 course has been launched. This will be an extension of an introductory Accounting 101 course that is currently offered. Another subcommittee was launched to review and discuss potential enhancements for the Budget and Accounting course that is currently offered.

Lower Lease Costs and Restructure Lease Program – The Office of Management and Budget/Division of Facilities Management (OMB/DFM) Real Property Management Program covers 123 leases and approximately 1.8

million square feet of rented space occupied by various State of Delaware agencies, costing \$34 million annually. To date, OMB/DFM lease restructurings have resulted in more than \$35.7 million in hard dollar rent savings and more than \$9.9 million in soft dollar rent savings (e.g., paint, carpeting) over the life of the renegotiated and extended leases. On average, reconstructed leases have been extended 10 years with approximate hard dollar rent savings of \$3.1 million and soft dollar savings of \$1.3 million annually. The program will continue to expand to encompass all leased real property utilized by the State.

Inventory State Land – It is critical for Delaware State government to have a full and complete understanding of the real property it owns. Fully evaluating the State’s realty assets and generating a centralized, spatial, land inventory database will afford stakeholders the ability to identify assets, evaluate use, maintenance, funding, and ultimately manage these assets in a more streamlined and efficient manner. In response to past discovery workshops and recommendations, the Office of Management and Budget/Office of State Planning Coordination (OMB/OSPC) has initiated a business case with the Department of Technology and Information (DTI), sponsored a request for proposals (RFP), reviewed proposals received, worked with DTI on the architecture and design of the highest-ranking proposal, and is currently working with the selected vendor to implement the software solution to inventory all State realty assets. The project team and vendor have completed detailed discovery and data collection with all partner agencies and are proceeding with software design and integrations. The project is expected to be completed and operational in the first quarter of 2025.

Revamp School District Enrollment Projections – School district enrollment has a significant impact on the State operating and capital budgets. Centrally updated enrollment projections done on a regular basis can be used to improve long-range planning and better allocate resources in both operating and capital budgets within individual school districts and across multiple districts. The Office of Management and Budget/Office of State Planning Coordination partnered with the University of Delaware’s Center for Applied Demography and Survey Research over the past year to complete the enrollment projections for 2024 through 2050. It is the intent of OMB/OSPC to regularly update these projections. These projections will be used to improve long-range planning and resource allocation (e.g., determine needs for new schools and evaluate school district capital master plans). Additionally, the updates will be beneficial for other entities that interact with the student population in the allocation of their resources.

Improve Data Integration and Mapping – FirstMap is the State’s enterprise Geographic Information System (GIS), but it is not used uniformly by State agencies. The Department of Technology and Information’s (DTI) FirstMap team has worked diligently to restructure this repository and has completed the “FirstMap 2” delivery, which includes improved tools and features. The goal of this repository is to provide the mechanism for all State agencies to use a single, authoritative source of geospatial data. This will be economically advantageous for the State to provide one uniform data set for all agencies to use, while ensuring access to necessary information. Leveraging this data will provide essential information for long-range planning for various applications. In the FY 2025 State operating budget, OMB received funding to begin a regular update cycle for all base GIS data, including aerial imagery, land use/land cover, and LiDAR (elevation data). This will ensure that the State’s agencies, local governments, and the entire GIS user community is using up to date and accurate data.

Centralize and Modernize the Delivery of Human Resources Services – By investing in technology and centralizing core human resources functions such as recruitment, onboarding, employee benefits services, leave administration, classification, compensation, employee and labor relations, and training, the Department of Human Resources (DHR) is transforming the management and delivery of human resources services for the State. Modernization accomplishments include:

- Implementing an electronic enterprise document management system to strengthen human resources records' security and risk management.
- Implementing a new employee onboarding system, Delaware Launchpad, across Executive Branch agencies to assure consistent and streamlined preboarding, onboarding, and offboarding processes.
- Partnering with DTI to implement identity lifecycle management for managing IT onboarding, offboarding, and changes in a State employee’s digital identity that governs access to the State’s computing networks, systems, and online services and to develop a proof of concept for automation of the reclassification process.
- Streamlining the employee complaint process and enhancing the coordination of employee and labor relations.

- Partnering with the Delaware Department of Labor, Division of Paid Leave, and OMB PHRST to conduct planning meetings for implementing the State’s paid family medical insurance leave program.
- Updating and implementing over 180 Statewide policies, templates, and forms supporting enacted Federal and State legislation and Governor’s initiatives to promote consistency and efficiency.
- Expanding workplace planning functions by launching several strategic workforce initiatives to improve recruitment and retention, including a comprehensive recruitment, marketing, and social media campaign, legislation to promote delayed retirement, advanced data analysis for retention support, a standardized new employee onboarding process, and flexible work schedules.

In 2023, several DHR individuals and teams were nominated for and received GEAR P3 Awards for their work across these areas. Recognition included a GEAR Trailblazer Award for the streamlining of training and policy curricula, a GEAR P3 Trailblazer Award for implementation of the electronic document management system, and a GEAR P3 Innovation and Efficiency Award for implementing a centralized, agile workspace for DHR’s hybrid workforce.

Drive Leadership Training Opportunities – In 2024, DHR, in partnership with GEAR, offered 2 cohorts of the Continuous Improvement Practitioner (CIP) Program, increasing the total number of graduates to 118 since its inception. Beginning in Fiscal Year 2024, additional funding for training was secured through the First State Quality Improvement Fund (FSQIF) in the State budget. This expanded funding supports the implementation of 2 new programs: 1) Project and Process Leadership training, focusing on the people side of leadership skills crucial for fostering collaboration, driving innovation, and achieving goals, and 2) Operational Excellence (OpEx) Program designed to provide specialized skills to existing practitioners through certificate programs that lead to industry-recognized credentials in agile, applied project management, business analysis, or Lean Six Sigma.

In March 2024, DHR implemented the first Administrative Professional Curriculum covering critical areas, such as professional compliance, communication, interpersonal skills, time management, and technology proficiency, to empower participants to excel in their roles and contribute effectively to their organizations. Consisting of 71 hours of training and 33 training courses, this training program received positive feedback from the over 200 employees enrolled in the first 4 months of launching.

Expand Employee Recognition – DHR continues to streamline the Statewide Recognition Awards Program that consists of The Delaware Award for Excellence and Commitment in State Service which recognizes individual employees or small groups who go above and beyond and provide exemplary services; the Delaware Award for Heroism recognizes employees for demonstrative bravery or acts of courage; the Governor’s Team Excellence Award Program, which consists of the GEAR P3 Innovation and Efficiency Award (that recognizes teams of 6 employees or more demonstrating innovation and efficiencies), the Champion Award, and the Commitment Award, and the GEAR P3 Trailblazer Award (that recognizes individuals and small teams of 5 or less employees for continuous improvement projects). The GEAR P3 awards were established by GEAR in partnership with DHR and the private sector in conjunction with the GEAR P3 Taskforce, with half of the funding from the private sector and half from the State. Representatives from both the public and private sectors participate in the awards selection committee. The GEAR P3 awards include a monetary incentive, which in 2024 was \$15,000 shared among team members for the GEAR-P3 Innovation & Efficiency Award and \$1,500 for individual GEAR-P3 Trailblazer recipients. In 2024, the Governor recognized 3 teams as recipients of the GEAR P3 Innovation & Efficiency Award and 10 individuals for the Trailblazer Award.

Promote Respectful Workplaces – As Delaware’s largest employer, the State of Delaware remains steadfast in its dedication to advancing a workplace environment characterized by fairness, diversity, equity, inclusivity, and accessibility. In support of these initiatives, the Talent Management section began updating statewide policies and procedures to become accessible (e.g., policies were converted into Haitian Creole and Spanish languages and made available on DHR’s website). The Office of Women’s Advancement and Advocacy programming workgroup developed and distributed lactation room guidelines, as well as launched 6 webinar series focused on the needs and interests of women State employees. The Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has actively collaborated with State agencies to establish local diversity committees dedicated to identifying initiatives that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion and hosted a summit emphasizing disability inclusion and offered 14 learning opportunities during Cultural Heritage Month to advance understanding and inclusivity within the State. DHR Training and HR Solutions launched the Statewide Workplace Wellness training program with monthly topics

for employees with a focus on living and working well. The program is a centralized approach to training delivery for the benefit of state employees.

Contain Health Care Cost Growth – As health care costs continue to increase, DHR’s Statewide Benefits Office (SBO), under the guidance of the State Employee Benefits Committee (SEBC), continues to develop strategies to engage Group Health Insurance Plan (GHIP) members to contain the State’s health care costs for employees, retirees, pensioners, and their dependents. To address a projected Fiscal Year 2025 deficit of \$232.2 million, the SEBC approved a 27 percent increase in State health plan premiums (rates) which were effective July 1, 2024, for active employees and non-Medicare retirees and are effective January 1, 2025, for Medicare retirees. The State is projecting to close Fiscal Year 2025 with an ending cash balance of \$99.7 million to the Group Health Fund and a surplus of \$69.6 million after reserves. On July 1, 2023, the State began offering a solution for non-Medicare prescription plan participants to help address the GHIP’s significant pharmaceutical spend. This solution is an independent third-party organization that the current prescription plan vendor has partnered with to offer cost savings for specialty medications. The program leverages drug manufacturer copay assistance programs and allows participating members to get specialty medications at no cost. Members can choose to opt in or out of the program anytime. This solution provided significant cost savings to the GHIP in Fiscal Year 2024, with an overall net savings of \$12.3 million. The State continues to review and adopt strategies to offer programs that manage and prevent the development and worsening of chronic conditions while also focusing on engaging GHIP members through education and training to encourage them to become more responsible health care consumers.

Adopt Electronic Signature Across State Agencies – DTI conducted a comprehensive review of electronic signature solutions to streamline document signing processes across State agencies, citing rising costs related to paper, ink, and manual document handling. Transitioning to electronic signatures not only enhances operational efficiency but also integrates seamlessly with existing document management systems and enterprise software, fostering productivity gains. Research shows that electronic signature transactions are notably faster, saving approximately 1.5 to 2 hours per transaction compared to traditional pen and paper methods. Based on the median hourly pay of State employees, each electronic signature transaction avoids approximately \$50 in material costs (toner, paper, logistics) and staff hours that could be redirected to more impactful tasks. Implemented by the Enterprise Architecture and Solutions Integration team in DTI, the enterprise wide DelSign solution has successfully served over 240 users from 10 agencies.

Centralize Information Technology - In 2021, DTI refocused its strategy from an agency-by-agency information technology centralization (ITC) effort to concentrate on how best to deliver a highly secure, equitably provisioned computing environment. Development and implementation of the shared services cost model, in collaboration with Office of Management and Budget (OMB), reflecting the total cost of ownership of IT service towers (groupings of services used by agencies, such as email, Internet, telephone, and data security), is crucial to moving ITC forward. Secure End User Services (SEUS) is part of a new shared services cost model which supports ITC. Under the SEUS subscription model, costs are based on a per-user annual consumption rate, tied to a service agreement. At the time of this report, Fiscal Year 2025 SEUS contracts for partner agencies have been put in place and monthly billing per the shared services cost model commenced with the Fiscal Year 2025 billing cycle.

Deliver Digital Government (Go DE) – Delaware is rapidly moving toward a user-centric digital government strategy that delivers a consistent and intuitive user experience. Many government services are accessible online – and many others should be – allowing resident and visitor access anytime, from anywhere, and on any device. Delaware has implemented a single sign-on solution with identity proofing to facilitate a single point of entry for digital State services. DTI has onboarded 70 applications and 101,000 unique users as adoption continues to grow with an initial focus on the State’s payment systems. Delaware has also embarked on a larger initiative to create a resident and visitor portal, branded as *Go DE*, for the public to use the State’s various digital government services under authenticated identities.

Modernize the Registration of Trade Names, Partnerships, and Associations - Since 1909, Delaware law required any person or association doing business using a trade name to register with the Prothonotary of the Superior Court in each county in which the person or association conducts business. A suggested improvement provided by a member of the public was posted to the GEAR website, noting that it would be more efficient and business-friendly if the process was moved to the Department of Finance, Division of Revenue as part of its collaborative online, One Stop process for business licensing. The Department of Finance, Division of Revenue and the Judicial Branch worked with the Legislative Branch, resulting in Senate Bill 291 which was introduced and passed in the General Assembly. The Bill has a February 2025 effective date, enabling the Judicial and Executive

Branches to provide sufficient notice to individuals and entities currently registered with the Superior Court that they will be required to re-register their trade name as part of the modernized yearly business licensing process.

Streamline Through CASCADE – The implementation phase of the Centralized, Accessible, Secure, Configurable, Agile, Digital, Evolutionary (CASCADE) initiative to modernize and streamline e-filing, case management, and document management solutions across all courts for the Delaware Judicial Branch has begun. The project will improve the way the Delaware Judicial Branch conducts business day to day and the quality and convenience to the citizens of Delaware. More specifically, the project will support a consistent and efficient experience for staff, partners, and the public, and enable better tracking, analysis, and synthesis of court data. Civil case management and e-filing in Superior Court, Court of Common Pleas, and the Justice of the Peace Court is scheduled for completion in winter 2026, with Family Court to follow in Calendar Year 2028.

Establish e-Courtrooms - The Delaware Judicial Information Center embarked on a project to enhance courtroom technology, particularly focusing on hi-tech courtrooms capable of facilitating remote and hybrid hearings. A total of 33 courtrooms have been upgraded throughout the State for improved audio, video, connectivity, annotation functionality, multi-angle video feeds, and integrated virtual meeting functionality.

Evaluate Criminal Justice Data Systems - The Criminal Justice Systems Evaluation Committee was established in September 2023. To date, the Committee has focused on outlining the current state of all Criminal Justice data systems and sources of data within the State, and understanding the gaps in these systems that affect how data is accessed and analyzed. Once this is completed, the State will be in a better position to evaluate future technology investments and improvements for the criminal justice system.

Reduce Debt Burden for Ex-Offenders – The Judicial Branch wants to ensure a fair process for those who are unable to pay their debts, with the goal of helping people exit the criminal justice system and lead the most productive lives possible. However, a large amount of criminal justice debt only causes additional hardship. In 2022, the Judicial Branch reported fee reform successes which included the passage of House Bill 244 with House Amendment 2 of the 151st General Assembly, along with the Judicial Branch review and discharge of aged accounts over 10 years old. HB 244 eliminated the Department of Correction Supervision Fee and the Public Defender Fee. HB 244 also created the Criminal Legal System Imposed Debt Study Group, which convened throughout 2023 to review the State’s financial structure as it related to fees, and to make recommendations consistent with best practices. In FY 2024, 3 additional reform bills passed the General Assembly, eliminating the Senior Trust Fund Fee, the Substance Abuse, Rehabilitation, Treatment, Education and Prevention (SARTEP) Fee, the Interstate Compact Fee, and the DELJIS Fund Fee.

Implement the Digital Government Payment System – The Office of the State Treasurer (OST) is focusing on digital government services in partnership with the Department of Technology and Information (DTI) and the Department of State’s (DOS) Government Information Center (GIC). Over the last several years, OST has worked with these partners to integrate with the overall *Go DE* initiative, an integrated web portal for resident and visitor digital government services. A primary feature of the new system is a single touchpoint for payments - the *Go DE* Payment Engine. Through the *Go DE* portal, users can now make trusted web payments in a manner that is secure, responsive, and accessible. This aligns with the State of Delaware’s shift from agency-centered managed services to an enterprise-wide, customer-centered platform that will evolve over the next few years.

Comply with Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI DSS) - By analyzing agencies’ current business processes involving how credit and debit payments are handled, the OST merchant services team is mitigating and reducing agencies’ IT and operational payment system vulnerabilities. OST’s primary strategy for ensuring all agency merchants are PCI DSS compliant is to reduce the scope of agencies’ payment environments by providing Point-to-Point Encrypted (P2PE) payment devices for in-person payments, and vendor-hosted online payment pages with secure checkout environments. Among the outcomes achieved are the establishment of an annual training program, ongoing workshops to guide agencies on how to properly attest compliance, the completion of quarterly internal and external IT system scans, and the formalization of a State PCI DSS policy. The current deadline to attest PCI DSS compliance for all State agency merchants is December 31, 2024.

III. GEAR Field Team (GFT)

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES (DHSS)

Redesign Service Delivery and Improve Client Experiences at State Service Centers – DHSS operates 15 state service centers in Delaware. At a state service center, residents and visitors can apply for many benefits, such as food assistance, cash benefits, health care, and housing. The structure and operation of the centers has not been reviewed recently, and there are opportunities to improve the service delivery model. All work processes were documented starting in 2022 and continued through 2024, and efforts are currently underway to ensure that all processes are performed uniformly at each service center. Additional enhancements to improve service delivery across state service centers include the installation of a new client queuing system, improvements to the automated telephone voice system, improvements to the front desk experience, and an enhanced website portal for clients. This project will continue to implement improvements across state service centers consistent with project management methodology.

Employ Data-Driven Decision Making by Using a Department-Wide Dashboard – Comprised of 10 divisions, DHSS is the largest department in the State with a wide range of services delivered, from psychiatric care to distributing food benefits and providing animal control. Historically, there has not been a single data source that leadership could leverage for data driven decision making. This project established a centralized dashboard with a range of key performance indicators for various divisions to focus on meaningful and measurable indicators. The DHSS dashboard tracks every division’s monthly key performance indicators, aggregates the data and extracts the information into easy-to-understand charts and graphs to guide decision making for senior leadership.

Save Nearly \$3 Million Dollars by Identifying and Eliminating Underutilized Blocked Vehicles – The DHSS Planning Unit reviews the number of blocked (reserved) State fleet vehicles to determine if there is an optimal and more cost-effective number vehicles to be held for the department’s use. Based on utilization data, a DHSS project manager conducts a monthly analysis of the blocked fleet vehicles assigned to the department. This analysis includes the identification of all blocked vehicles and a review of those vehicles considered underutilized. A calculation is performed to quantify the cost of those underutilized blocked vehicles. Every month, the results of the analysis are distributed to department and division leaders to determine if their complement of assigned vehicles may be reduced. Since the project inception in January 2021, DHSS has reduced the number of blocked vehicles by 74 vehicles. That translates to an estimated annual savings of \$424,000, or a 7-year estimated savings (the average life of a fleet vehicle) of \$2,900,000.

Renew Medicaid Services for Social Service Beneficiaries - As a result of the federal Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023, additional Medicaid funding that was made available during the COVID-19 pandemic expired on March 31, 2023. Under this legislation, states were authorized on April 1, 2023, to begin redetermining Medicaid enrollment for individuals who qualified for Medicaid during the pandemic, to ensure that clients who still qualify continue to receive services. The Division of Social Services faced the challenge of completing over a quarter of a million Medicaid Renewal redeterminations by July 2024. To accomplish this task, the Division of Social Services (DSS) created the Unwinding Team to develop and implement many new initiatives in a very short time with successful outcomes being achieved over the prior year. This team within DSS was nominated for and received a 2023 GEAR Innovation and Efficiency Award thanks to their leadership and the outcomes achieved in implementing this project.

Improve Access to Long-Term Services & Supports Through Strategic Resource Usage – The Division of Services for Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities (DSAAPD) is carrying out strategic efforts to ensure timely access to community-based long-term care services and supports by improving efficiency and reducing the cost-of-service provision. Through consultation with national experts in the field of aging and disabilities, DSAAPD has developed a multi-tiered action plan to infuse person-centered practices in its work, ensuring services meet the goals and needs of older adults and persons with physical disabilities while being provided from the most appropriate funding source. It is estimated that some of these changes could result in at least \$5 million in savings for the State. The anticipated quantifiable outcomes of this plan include reduced cost, enhanced value, and improved customer outcomes.

Implement Inter Resident Assessment Instrument (RAI) Home & Community Based Assessment - The Division of Services for Aging & Adults with Physical Disabilities is actively working to modernize services to improve efficiency of operations, while establishing a strong infrastructure to support the individuals we serve in

the community. The result will improve the division's ability to address the long waiting lists for services and ensure the appropriate funding source for home and community-based services. Implementation of the InterRAI Home and Community Based Assessment process will provide a person-centered, data-driven process that will determine eligibility and establish service packages by offering input on care planning, case mix classification, outcome measurement for quality management and participant safety.

Partner for Healthy Aging through Senior Centers – The Delaware Division of Services for Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities has partnered with 22 senior centers across the State of Delaware to support healthy aging programs. This partnership has allowed senior centers to identify what healthy aging looks like in their communities, and to implement programming to best support older Delawareans. This program has allowed centers to provide transportation, health and wellness, nutrition, and other community services that promote healthy lifestyle choices to further healthy aging and serve active older adults.

Restructure the Continuous Quality Improvement Section - The Division of Services for Aging & Adults with Physical Disabilities (DSAAPD) recognizes the importance of meaningful data collection and usage across all initiatives and responsibilities. To effectively utilize data at all levels, the division created the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Section, comprised of the Data Team and Information Systems Unit. Since its inception in 2020 and restructuring in 2023, the CQI Section continues to evolve, enabling data-driven decision-making and ensuring relevant data points are collected throughout the division's multiple operations systems, in both long-term care and community settings. This team was nominated for and received a 2023 GEAR P3 Innovation and Efficiency Award due to their achievements in implementing numerous process improvements across DSAAPD.

Review Longitudinal National Core Indicators for Aging and Disability - The Division of Services for Aging & Adults with Physical Disabilities and the Division of Medicaid and Medical Assistance collaborate biennially on the National Core Indicators - Aging & Disabilities project. This consumer survey provides both divisions with valuable data regarding the impact of their programming on participants' quality of life. Beginning this year, DSAAPD's data team will consolidate the survey's findings over the years for both divisions to identify potential opportunities for development and increased collaboration.

Centralize Statewide Physical Supports for Aging in Place - The Division of Services for Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities is disbursing \$3,500,000 of awarded American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to address the current need for home, vehicular, and assistive technology supports. With these ARPA funds, DSAAPD is seeking Delaware service providers to support home and vehicle modifications, as well as assistive technology.

Launch Sussex Blue Zones Ignite Phase I - The Division of Services for Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities is working with the organization Blue Zones to complete an assessment to determine how to make select communities within Sussex County a healthier place to live, work, grow up, and grow old. The first phase of a Blue Zones community transformation is the assessment and feasibility analysis where experts collaborate with community leaders to assess readiness and build a plan for change. During this period, Blue Zones evaluates the communities' current state of well-being, identifies the highest priority strengths, challenges and opportunities, educates and mobilizes local leaders and residents, and produces and presents a plan for transformation.

Utilize Certified Peer Recovery Specialists in Long Term Care – To meet the specialized psychiatric needs of residents at Delaware Hospital for the Chronically Ill (DHCI), DSAAPD partnered with the Division of Substance Abuse & Mental Health (DSAMH) to develop the Peer Services Liaison Program starting in 2023. In 2024, the first Certified Peer Recovery Specialist began working on-site full-time. The team continues to collaborate to ensure that a structure exists to maximize efficiency and utilize resources appropriately while establishing this new program.

Ensure Therapeutic Programming in Secure Dementia Care – Individuals with dementia often reach a point where continuous supervision is necessary for safety and well-being. Delaware Hospital for the Chronically Ill is one of many facilities in the state with a secured dementia unit. DHCI has undertaken an initiative to ensure that appropriate therapeutic programming is in place to meet the psychosocial needs of individuals at this stage of dementia.

Expand the Connect Community at DHCI – Loneliness has long been recognized as a crucial social determinant of health and is an area of specific concern for residents of long-term care (LTC) facilities, due to the high risk of loneliness combined with complex chronic health issues. DHCI has taken steps to deliberately foster relationships and prevent loneliness in residents by establishing the Connect Community, which is built on the creative use of existing resources. To date, 50 percent of residents have been matched with a specific Connect Community member for individual engagements. This team was nominated for and received a 2023 GEAR P3 Trailblazer Award due to

their achievement in growing the Connect Community, ultimately improving the quality of life for DHCI's residents and experience of staff participating in this project.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (DDA)

Create a Delaware Farm Lending Program – The Department of Agriculture and Department of State's Division of Small Business, are working together to repurpose an existing, underutilized irrigation finance program to create the Delaware Agricultural Finance Program which will more broadly serve the needs of farmers. Existing revolving loan funds were reauthorized to fund the new program. The new program takes advantage of existing finance knowledge and authority housed at the Division of Small Business and the Delaware Economic Development Authority, requiring far less administrative overhead than creating a new agricultural finance authority. The new program provides loans for agricultural equipment, up to 50 percent of costs, at a fixed low interest rate with favorable repayment terms. In addition, it offers lower interest rates to beginning farmers and the aquaculture industry to support priority areas of State focus. Applications to the new program started on September 3, 2024.

Strengthen Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program with Digital Payments - DDA was awarded a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant in 2018 to aid income-eligible seniors (age 60+) to purchase fresh, locally grown fruits, vegetables, cut herbs and honey directly from Delaware farmers at farmers markets and farm stands. Initially, the program utilized a paper voucher system which required a great deal of manual work with a contracted bank to sort payments from DDA and the farmers. In 2022, the USDA made American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding available to transition from the paper vouchers to digital payments. DDA, in tandem with the Department of Health and Social Services which operates a parallel initiative through the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, researched available options and chose a contractor to operate a QR-code based electronic payment system beginning with the 2023 program. After implementation, the program achieved a 10 percent increase in usage along with other benefits.

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL (DNREC)

Modernize Online Services – DNREC continues to transform legacy applications and manual permit, license, and registration processes to better serve customers and improve efficiency. The Digital DNREC ePermitting portal continues to expand as DNREC adds more online permits, licenses, registrations, and provides continuing education. In addition, the Digital DNREC team is working closely with the Digital Government project team as an early adopter for the new *Go DE* portal.

Establish Ready in 6 (Ri6) DNREC Subaqueous Permitting Improvement Prototype - The DNREC Division of Water is developing a prototype to improve the application process for boat docking facilities on private and public subaqueous lands. This initiative is based on insights from a consulting report sponsored by the Delaware Business Roundtable. The Ri6 report along with supplemental survey data from GEAR, assessed the time taken by government agencies to issue permits. The project employs a 3-phased approach to analyze current processes, define future states, and recommend and pilot solutions to boost efficiency, reduce backlogs, improve response times, enhance process visibility and consistency, improve predictability, and engagement with both internal stakeholders and customers of the process. Ultimately, this prototype aims to offer valuable insights for further permitting process improvements within DNREC including the ongoing e-permitting initiative.

Improve Chemical Inventory Reporting in Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA) Program – The Division of Waste and Hazardous Substances (Waste) Emergency Response and Strategic Services Section EPCRA Program is carrying out strategic efforts to improve the timely submission of accurate chemical inventory reports by facilities through training workshops and concurrent report review process. In 2024, the program received roughly 98 percent of EPCRA reports by the due date of March 1st compared to ~95 percent in 2023 and ~90 percent in past years. Continuous follow up with delinquent facilities increased submission of EPCRA reports to ~99 percent by May 2024.

Streamline the Clean Vehicle Rebate Program Through Third Party Administration - The Division of Climate, Coastal and Energy (CCE) Climate and Sustainability section manages the Clean Vehicle Rebate Program which provides incentives for Delawareans and Delaware businesses to buy or lease new battery electric or plug-in hybrid vehicles. CCE partnered with a third-party to support administration of the program thereby redirecting approximately 30 percent of staff efforts toward other initiatives. Since the program has been administered by the

third-party, the anticipated rebate applications have increased from approximately 900 to 1800 over the past year. Recently, the program was updated to include a used EV rebate and higher rebate amounts for lower-priced vehicles. These changes aim to distribute the funds more equitably and expand the program’s reach.

Improve Stakeholder Communication in Remediation – The Remediation Section of the Division of Waste and Hazardous Substances is streamlining the current internal response to external inquiries related to the Remediation Section’s program process. The remediation section experiences inconsistent response times to external stakeholders' inquiries as well as duplication of staff efforts. The anticipated quantifiable process improvement and customer outcomes of this project include a 50 percent decrease in response time to external stakeholder inquiries and 50 percent reduction in staff time dedicated to these efforts. The section estimates a savings of \$250,000 annually once efficiencies are generated. Over the past year, this section experienced considerable turnover and focused on subprocess improvements with a broader project launch anticipated for December 2024.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE (DOS)

Build Delaware Communities of Excellence: Year 4 – The Delaware Division of Libraries’ (DDL) work with the Delaware Communities of Excellence (DECOE) continues to build the Delaware Literacy Alliance, a collaborative of State agencies and non-profits working to produce a statewide literacy ecosystem. This ecosystem will provide literacy services that are easier to access, equitable, cost effective, with measurable, impactful results in improving literacy for Delawareans across their lifespans. Only 41 percent of Delaware children are proficient in English Language Arts, and 20 percent of Delaware adults read below a third grade reading level. Low literacy skills reduce the opportunity to build successful lives. DECOE and the Delaware Literacy Alliance are committed to improving literacy levels for all Delawareans. During Fiscal Year 2024, the Delaware Literacy Alliance continued increasing public awareness of the issue and building out its internal infrastructure, while its subcommittees worked on early learning, adult literacy, and health literacy activities.

Install Radio Frequency Identification Infrastructure in Delaware Libraries – Book circulation (check-in and check-out) and inventories are time and resource intensive activities at Delaware’s libraries. Starting in 2022, public libraries’ collections and Delaware Library Consortium and Catalog (DLC)-participating school libraries’ collections have been tagged with radio frequency identification (RFID) tags and scanning/self-check equipment installed by a vendor to reduce the time needed to check items in and out, as well as perform inventories. The project’s goal is to create a system where libraries’ collection items are tagged, staff are trained to effectively use the scanning equipment, with self-checkout available to patrons. Phase one (public libraries) has moved into implementation. Phase 2 (participating school libraries) is underway with installation and implementation occurring simultaneously as school libraries join the DLC. Staff, patrons and students are adopting the new circulation and inventory processes, leading to improved productivity.

Integrate School Libraries into the Delaware Library Catalog and Consortium – School age children need access to current books and other materials to support literacy and learning. School libraries have been in crisis and struggle to keep their collections up to date and relevant. Starting in 2016, Colonial School District participated in a successful pilot project with the Delaware Division of Libraries to join the Delaware Library Catalog to expand their students’ access to current materials. Having proved the concept and with the Delaware Division of Libraries receiving funding in Fiscal Year 2023 to fund school library integration, individual school districts are beginning to opt-in to the Delaware Library Catalog and Consortium. In Fiscal Year 2024 the Delaware Division of Libraries started a collaborative book purchasing pilot project with all participating school libraries using State funds. This pilot prepares for a project to upgrade school library collections in Fiscal Year 2025-2026 using \$1.9 million in congressionally appropriated federal funds. This overall effort provides equity and bridges the “last mile” to books and other learning materials for children who do not typically access their local public libraries, as well as creates efficiencies by enabling improved circulation of purchased books and materials.

Innovate Social Services in Delaware Libraries - Delaware Division of Libraries has a long history of leveraging the statewide library technology and facilities infrastructure, supported by a robust partnership network, to deliver equitable services in communities throughout the state. Delaware Libraries support individuals and communities in achieving their full potential. DDL’s Social Innovation Team meets Delawareans in times of need and is well positioned to help bridge gaps in state-provided services as well as to recognize where systems may be broken.

DEPARTMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND THEIR FAMILIES (DSCYF)

Provide a Statewide Community Resource Directory and Contracted Services Dashboards – In October 2023, the Department of Services for Children Youth and Their Families launched a community resource directory, which is an easy to navigate dashboard where all Delawareans can search for and filter information on community resources throughout the state. The resources and community agencies listed on the dashboard are for both adults and children. A person does not need to be receiving State assistance to access these resources, although some programs might have income and other eligibility requirements. A similar approach was followed to develop an internal contracted services dashboard which allows DSCYF staff to filter services by county, provider, service setting, and service type to assist them in case planning with a family and determining who to contact for additional information about a program or referral process.

Strengthen PCard Uniform Guidelines & Repayment – DSCYF has a large number of PCard (the State’s purchasing credit card) users across its 4 divisions. The Fiscal Accounting Services (FAS) unit struggles to reconcile an acceptable percentage of PCard transactions, due to employee cardholders failing to document or substantiate their charges. FAS identified a need for a uniform set of instructions to be written, shared, and enforced across divisions. This project blossomed from a short document of simple instructions into an exhaustive set of PCard Guidelines which will be converted into a required Delaware Learning Center (DLC) training, as well as a new “PCard Repayment Form” which will provide repayment to the State of Delaware by payroll deduction when and if all other avenues to reconciliation have been exhausted.

Streamline Case Review Processes and Practices – DSCYF staff implemented a department-wide administrative case review process to assess cross-divisional practices and identify opportunities for improvement and consistency in support of a trauma-informed system of care approach to service delivery and family engagement. Full implementation of the new process was realized in 2023. This included implementing protocols for sampling, timeframes, and procedural expectations; implementing the review tool that assesses case management practices and service delivery quality; developing a reference guidebook to ensure inter-rater reliability; training staff in the administration of the tool and process; and completing one full year of department-wide implementation. This team was nominated for and received a 2023 GEAR P3 Trailblazer Award due to their achievements in implementing a systematic approach to case reviews and service delivery improvements.

Automate PHRST Data Extractions – The Department of Services for Children Youth and Their Families Management Information Systems (MIS) team worked with PHRST (the State’s payroll and human resources enterprise resource planning system/organization) to obtain a daily file of all information relating to DSCYF staff. MIS technologists developed scripts to leverage non-confidential data fields from this file to update select network user info, which populates the Microsoft Outlook address book. This effort automates a manual process of entering information into Outlook relating to the user. Additionally, automatic emails are sent to DSCYF’s case management system mailbox notifying them of the need to update information related to the user. This method reinforces PHRST as the system of record for job titles, division, and reporting information.

Update the Division of Prevention and Behavioral Health Services’ (PBH) Records Retention Schedule - The Department of Services for Children, Youth, and their Families approved a crucial update to the Delaware Public Archive’s retention schedule for the Division of Prevention and Behavioral Health. By revising this schedule and reducing excessively long retention periods, hundreds of boxes of records that no longer need to be stored have been identified. This initiative is projected to save the State of Delaware over half a million dollars each year.

Organize and Support the DSCYF Network Infrastructure - The Department of Services for Children Youth and Their Families Management Information Systems team successfully completed several projects to improve the responsiveness, reliability, and quality of their network infrastructure within DSCYF. The MIS team completed a network switch replacement project across the agency, installed a redundant network and internet connection at the administration campus, as well as utilize Lean 5S methods to reorganize and clean their network switch closets. Overall, these practices contribute to a more efficient, scalable, and cost-effective network management strategy.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION (DOC)

Enhance Employee Wellbeing, Recruitment and Retention through DOCares – The Department of Correction continues to recognize that employee happiness, health, and engagement is essential to having an effective organization. In September of 2023 DOC established the DOCares project that focuses on promoting a Lean

management strategy - designed to listen to our employees to develop programs to meet their needs in a meaningful way. The DOCares project continues to work on establishing a work environment that focuses on work-life balance for all employees by evaluating their needs through systematic data collection and analysis. An initial survey of DOC employees identified work schedules, freezes, and culture as having the greatest impact on work-life balance. A second survey is seeking employee input as to how each of these areas could be improved. The data gathered will be used to develop strategies to build an organizational environment that promotes a positive culture, fosters communication, supports the use of creative scheduling systems to meet operational needs, and enhances staff well-being.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR (DOL)

Modernize Core Unemployment Insurance Processes - The Department of Labor's Division of Unemployment Insurance (UI) previously launched a business process mapping project to better streamline the appeals process while also seeking to translate the revamped processes into a modernized electronic system. While this project initially focused on the appeals process for UI, it could be extended to other areas for modernization such as benefit payment control. The mapped current state models were analyzed to generate future state enhancements and measurable outcomes, primarily a reduction in errors and additional time and money saved through process efficiency. The new processes will be built into a new electronic UI system which is being developed through 2026.

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (DeIDOT)

Magnify Project Development by Migrating from Primavera P6 to Unifier Software – The Delaware Department of Transportation Unifier migration team was created to ensure a coordinated and systematic conversion of project management tools and associated data. Unifier is a software that has aspects of cost management, document management, schedule, and fund management. The migration from the previous software system, known as Primavera P6, to Unifier was implemented in 2022 and the team continues to create and improve workflow-based business practices within the software. Not only has the department realized initial cost savings by shifting to a singular software application for managing a project through its lifetime, but this has allowed the department to dedicate more staffing to improve the Unifier workflow, continuously improve the individual business processes, and develop additional processes to improve efficiency through the lifecycle of a project.

Improve Utility Permitting Regulation Processes – As a prototype project associated with phase 1 of the Ready in 6 initiative, the Delaware Department of Transportation (DeIDOT) has been working with their utility team, external utility partners, and the business development community to improve the utility permitting process and coordination. DeIDOT has engaged in reviewing regulations to make them clearer and more concise in the areas of exception requests/hardship letters, clear zones, aerial services/crossings, pole spacing, relocations, as well as other key areas. Significant progress has been made, and a draft of the updated regulations is complete, with the plan to promulgate and adopt the revisions by early 2025.

DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY AND HOMELAND SECURITY (DSHS)

Reconstruct Carry Concealed Deadly Weapons (CCDW) Licensing - The current CCDW approval process is slow, cumbersome, and is barely able to keep up with the number of requests that have vastly increased since the beginning of the Pandemic. Further, the lack of digital inputs makes tracking and data analysis needlessly difficult. DSHS is currently working on creating process efficiencies in the CCDW approval procedure to improve responsiveness and customer satisfaction.

Improve the Criminal History Background Review Process - The current background review process can take 3 to 6 weeks to obtain a criminal history. This obstacle strains several industries that are legislatively, both state and federally, required to obtain history prior to hiring prospective applicants. This project is proceeding rapidly with the onboarding of an identity provision vendor while other paths are being explored to further advance the process.

Administer Permit to Purchase - Delaware Senate Bill 2 was signed into law in May 2024. The enactment of the law places the development and administration of an application process to obtain a handgun qualified purchaser permit with the DSHS through its Division of State Police, specifically the State Bureau of Identification (SBI).

The SBI has an average workload of 55,000 applicants annually, though SBI projects that the average workload will increase to 113,000 applications (including fingerprinting and criminal histories) annually. This expansion of duties and responsibilities of SBI is significant in terms of personnel positions and process enhancements to implement and enforce this Act.

Upgrade to Project 25 (P25) Interoperable Land Mobile Radio Compliance - Project 25 (P25) develops standards for interoperable land mobile radio (LMR) systems, which allows emergency responders to exchange critical communications across agencies and jurisdictions. P25 standardizes interfaces between the various components of the LMR systems emergency responders use. This is a large-scale project that involves modernizing all state, county, and local radio systems to meet modern encryption standards, eliminate congestion over communication channels, and ensure first responders can communicate efficiently across public safety organizations. To date, Delaware is in very good shape with 95 to 99 percent of the first responder radios having been converted to P25 radios.

Access Control to State Video Systems and Buildings - It became evident after recent events that State agencies have a significant problem with building access controls that do not interface effectively. This includes both building entry controls and video surveillance systems. This creates limitations in responding to the needs of the public and employees in State facilities. Given the current limitations, DSHS has launched a project to migrate to one common structure for these various security systems.

Recruit and Retain Law Enforcement - The DSHS is assisting the Delaware Association of Chiefs of Police (DACP) and multiple municipal agencies in the acquisition of a recruiting and retention platform and professional service for the acquisition of law enforcement personnel. The recruitment numbers for future police candidates are declining to critical levels due to various social, political, and economic forces. This project between DSHS and DACP is underway to ensure Delaware can attract and retain law enforcement personnel in the future.

Align the Delaware Integrated Data System (DIDS) - The Department of Safety and Homeland Security seeks to prevent, deter, and respond to increased violence and crime by establishing a data integration platform for safety and law enforcement. In addition to strategic planning and tactical resource deployment, the data will be used for budget planning, identifying crime trends, proactive policing, supporting the violence reduction strategy, criminal analysis, and performance measurement. At this time, detailed business requirements for the operational dashboard have been completed along with the identification of the initial data that will be pulled into the DIDS.

DEPARTMENT OF INSURANCE (DOI)

Support Data Access and Use in Primary Care - The Delaware Office of Value-Based Health Care Delivery (OVBHCD) within the Department of Insurance was created via unfunded legislative mandate in 2019 to address rising health care costs by increasing the availability of high quality, cost-efficient healthcare. Increasing the investment in primary care aims to preserve patient access and build a stronger and more robust primary care system. The OVBHCD is now staffed by one full time staff member but has been supported by a contractor since initiation. Monitoring the amount of spending in primary care services by health insurers is a key metric of both success and compliance with related recent laws. Health insurers are required to meet spending percentage targets each year. For instance, in 2023, insurers were required to spend at least 8.5 percent of their total medical expenses on primary care. The OVBHCD must monitor and measure this percentage. Data collected is related to medical expenses, hospital spending, and primary care spending, among other factors. Due to the nature of the unfunded mandate and having no additional staff to assist, reliance on the contractor for data analysis was significant and, over time, costly. Implementing a data dashboard helped improve data access, analysis, and efficiency at a time when the department faced necessary expense reduction efforts and sought to reduce contractor hours. Through eliminating data management silos, an estimated \$113,000 in cost savings has been achieved by reducing reliance on contractors to perform data analysis. In addition, this project has resulted in an improved data analytics process since the OVBHCD can be more self-sufficient, which can be scaled easily in the future.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE (DOJ)

Establish the Delaware DOJ Data Lab (D3L) for Enhanced Data Management and Efficiency - The Office of the Attorney General is establishing a state-of-the-art data lab to streamline data management and enhance decision-

making capabilities. By employing a dedicated team and implementing advanced infrastructure, the new lab aims to significantly improve efficiency, reduce errors, and provide comprehensive dashboards for both internal and external stakeholders. Initial setup costs will be offset by long-term savings and productivity gains, leading to a more effective and data-driven organization.

IV. Education GEAR (EdGEAR)

Replace the Student Information System- Delaware Public Education has been utilizing the existing student information system (legacy system) since the initial transition to electronic record keeping over 25 years ago. The Department of Education went through a formal procurement process for the replacement of that system and is currently in the first wave, year 1 of implementation. The new student information system, once fully implemented, will improve efficiencies in public education data collection and processing.

Update the School Finance System - Delaware Public Education has been utilizing the existing school finance system since the initial transition to the automation of charter school funding calculations in 2008. The Department of Education contracted with the Data Service Center to build a replacement system with enhancements and is currently in phase 3, out of 5 phases of development. The new school finance system, once fully implemented, will improve efficiencies in public education funding processes.

Modernize the Unit Count System - Delaware Public Education had been utilizing the existing unit count system since 2009. The Department of Education contracted with the Data Service Center to build a system that interfaced directly with the student information system and provided more reporting flexibility and user-friendly features. The system was implemented as a trial mid-year in 2023, with full implementation occurring in the 2023/2024 school year.



STATE OF DELAWARE
GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW
[ESTABLISHED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER NUMBER FOUR]

REPORT TO GOVERNOR CARNEY
FROM THE GEAR BOARD
NOVEMBER 1, 2024

Executive Order #4, signed by Governor John Carney on February 16th, 2017, established the Government Efficiency and Accountability Review (GEAR) Board. At the time, the State faced a projected Fiscal Year 2018 budget deficit of \$385 million that was addressed that year through a combination of spending cuts and tax increases. It was understood in 2017 that similar deficits would be likely to recur in the foreseeable future if long-term actions, including structural spending and revenue reforms were not undertaken. As part of this effort, GEAR was created to develop recommendations for increasing efficiency and effectiveness across State government, improving the strategic planning process, improving the use of metrics in resource allocation decisions, and developing continuous improvement practices.

It is important to note that GEAR is just one component of ongoing fiscal reform efforts that build upon the State's existing strong fiscal governance practices. In June 2018, the General Assembly approved a budget that appropriated 97 percent of available General Fund revenues, holding back \$47 million of projected revenues above the constitutional mandated 98 percent rule. That same month, Governor Carney signed Executive Order 21 requiring the Delaware Economic & Financial Advisory Council (DEFAC) to calculate an advisory benchmark appropriation based upon sustainable measures of economic growth to guide the development of the Governor's Recommended Budget. In June 2019, the General Assembly adopted a budget largely adhering to the advisory benchmark appropriation, using extraordinary revenues for one-time operating and capital expenditures, and establishing a \$126.3 million Budget Stabilization Fund to be available for appropriation in exactly the types of scenarios faced by the State in 2017 and 2020. In 2024, the Legislature codified the Budget Stabilization Fund, which has grown to roughly \$469 million, through passage of Senate Bill 270. By codifying this process in statute, rules are established for deposits to and withdrawals from the Budget Stabilization Fund and an objective and stable measure of sustainable budget growth is defined as a benchmark.

The Executive Order directs the GEAR Board to issue to the Governor an annual report, no later than December 1st of each year. This 2024 report contains recommendations that may be included in the Governor's Recommended Budget and policy priorities for Fiscal Year 2026. This report is available online on GEAR's website.

The Board supports the recommendations of the following organizations within GEAR:

- GEAR Program Management Team
- GEAR Public/Private Partnership (P3) Task Force
- Enterprise Services Delivery Team
- GEAR Field Team
- EdGEAR

GEAR PROGRAM MANAGEMENT TEAM

Evolve the State’s Culture of Continuous Improvement

GEAR’s mission is to improve the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of government services, build a sustainable culture of continuous improvement statewide, and bend the arc of government spending growth downward. Consistent with this mission, GEAR worked with the Governor’s Office, State leadership, private sector partners, and GEAR Field Team members to develop change management messaging and assess priorities for the future aligned with the States’s evolving continuous improvement culture. An outcome of the GEAR Program Management Team’s efforts is a video series (gear.delaware.gov/gear-stories/) highlighting the impact of GEAR to date. With a new Administration it will be important to establish an ongoing vision for continuous improvement in State government. To foster a strong sense of support and sponsorship around a revamped GEAR Executive Order it will be just as essential to highlight the new Administration’s support for building a culture of continuous improvement with a series of clear and concise communications about the business need for ongoing change to make government work better.

As part of this process, the GEAR Program Management Team met with GEAR Board members to reflect on the accomplishments of GEAR and consider what improvements can be made in the following areas:

- Progress on the many government efficiency projects in flight throughout the State.
- Achievements in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of State government to date.
- Input on and self-assessment of departmental efforts toward a sustainable culture of continuous improvement through short term projects.
- Suggestions on how to improve the measurement of quantifiable outcomes and use of data driven decision making.
- Barriers or obstacles toward continuous improvement efforts.
- Specific recommendations for the next Administration on current and new continuous improvement projects.

The primary recommendation that resulted from the meetings is that Delaware’s next Governor reaffirm GEAR through a revised executive order in consideration of the enhanced elements provided by the GEAR Board and other State leadership which are summarized in the table below.

GEAR Board Recommendations	GEAR Board - Primary Theme	GEAR Board - Other Ideas Noted
1. Proposed Near Term Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further enrollment in the CIP training program • Tracking utilization of the CI positions being created • Piloting a Government Accountability Act initiative with select agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run the gubernatorial transition as a GEAR project (each agency would cite specific continuous improvement projects they would like to implement/continue with) • Each agency leader also noted existing projects for their organizations currently underway or planned to launch in the coming year
2. Barriers to Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turnover • Vacancies • Competing priorities • High levels of existing operational demands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of change • Increased legislative demands which detract from focusing on customer outcomes • Limited understanding of continuous improvement methods/tools among leadership and their capacity to mentor emerging leaders • Difficulty level in implementing data driven budgeting practices

<p>3. How to Improve Outcome Measurement and Data Driven Decision Making</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhancing leadership awareness/knowledge due to a lack of training in continuous improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing incentives for staff to work on or mentor others in continuous improvement Support credentialing in the CI field Establishing more meaningful KPIs/dashboards Improved project portfolio management within divisions Measuring employee engagement Facilitating more detailed inter-agency roundtable discussions Creating incentives that would encourage agencies to save funds rather than protect/spend appropriations Creating clear guidelines for agencies to reinvest savings generated by CI Continuing to quantify savings from GEAR projects and business process mapping activities Balancing efficiency with the need for distributed authority and democratic participation within government
<p>4. Building a Culture of Continuous Improvement (Most Meaningful Vision Statement)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process visibility (documenting processes and creating visible/repeatable processes) Data driven decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactive (not reactive) problem solving Adopting an enterprise mindset Enhancing sponsorship from leaders Putting customers first (an "outside-in mindset")
<p>5. Future GEAR Goals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue with a body like GEAR in State government as an essential function Enhance the forum for collaboration/communication across agencies Reinforce this is the way to do business in Delaware 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating a continuous improvement "lite" course for all State employees and for teams at project kickoff Improving GEAR marketing - a CI newsletter to all State employees Generating efficiencies within agencies to focus on the most important customer outcomes Supporting efforts that allow for more one-stop solutions for both internal and external customers (e.g., Go DE)
<p>6. Bridging the Administrative Transition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand training to emerging and current managers/leaders Distribute communications with success stories of CI practitioners (video series) along with communications from the Board/community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforcing process improvement at the local level ("just do it" - propose a change, make the change, test the change and report) Embedding CI into the goals of the next Administration Establishing a playbook for agency leadership to make the most of CI practitioners Determining criteria for assessing and prioritizing projects for improvement Building best practices for utilizing CI positions once established, growing GEAR's headcount for an expanded "quality" team Engaging legislators in the conversation citing specific constituents who experienced positive outcomes Highlighting the support of the business community for CI work

In general, the primary themes and recommendations from the GEAR Board members and other State leadership stress the importance of continuing with a continuous improvement body like GEAR for the following reasons:

- A. Sharing knowledge and coordinating projects across State agencies – there has not historically been a forum such as GEAR to communicate consistently on an inter-agency basis about policy priorities, projects, and best practices.
- B. Training more State employees in skilled project management, Lean, business analysis, and change management methods – the resulting return on investment in business practices and processes has been promising. It is recommended that training be expanded to State managers to support practices through their staff at the ground level, for new employees during orientation to illustrate how continuous improvement is among the State’s core values, and with executive leadership to increase sponsorship and alignment of outcomes.
- C. Furthering policy alignment to support continuous improvement practices – several State leaders noted the need for clarified policies surrounding budgeting practices that reinforce generating cost savings, criteria for assessing and prioritizing projects, and guidelines for making the most of best practices.
- D. Continuing the journey to build core competencies and practices in data driven decision making and process visibility – these are 2 of GEAR’s core values and vision statements, which both support greater transparency to become a less reactive, and more proactively informed operating environment.

In addition to the input provided by the GEAR Board, the GEAR Program Management Team met with the leadership and members of the GEAR P3 Taskforce to obtain their input on key barriers, opportunities, and goals to be developed in the future. The membership provided the feedback outlined in the following table.

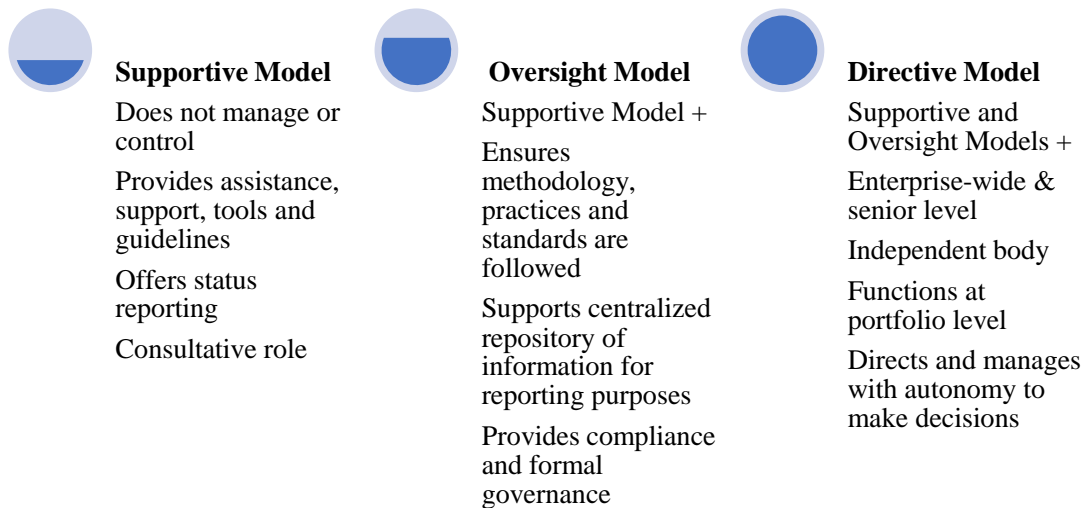
<p>1. What process improvement barriers or obstacles do you see as we consider working toward our current goals?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Getting to a real Ready in Six - need counties and municipalities involved. Providing predictable timelines to the private sector for business permitting. B. In Delaware there might be 1-2 people that are effective at processing a specific type of permit. C. Identify areas like affordable housing or clean energy - consider changes to Title 22 and Title 9 to regulate zoning differently. Work on streamlining the permitting processes with the counties and Levy Court system. D. Limited number of engineering professionals/resources in State agencies and to contract with. E. Continue the journey in building ROI estimates. F. Identify \$50M of cost reduction out of a \$6.1B budget, not just saving/repurposing funds - by engaging all cabinet members. G. Duplication of efforts and silos.
<p>2. What additional P3 goals would you recommend to the next administration? Consider anything we could do to align with the Delaware Business Roundtable Investment Agenda.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Continuing pursuit of Ready in Six (connect to DE Business Roundtable leadership). B. Double down on site readiness. C. Continue with the economic development ombudsman role in the Governor's office. D. Consider programs where businesses would be willing to pay for expedited services. E. Track legislation that will work against business permitting optimization. F. Ensure Governor's Cabinet prioritizes GEAR’s continuation. G. Review opportunities to enhance workforce development - align training with employers that are ready to hire in specific fields. H. Process improvement within specific State functions. Reducing duplication of efforts and silos. I. Focus on the nimble story in Delaware to attract businesses - not the large dollar story. J. Utility connections and capacity. The real problem is not how fast we can build solar, it is the capacity to attach it to the grid. K. Health equity and educational efficiencies. L. Data dashboard containing KPIs and achievement against measurable goals.

<p>3. How can we enlist your active support to help assure GEAR successfully transitions to the next administration?</p>	<p>A. Accelerate – make "GEAR" a campaign mantra. It benefits the taxpayer. It benefits State workers. As there are fewer workers in the State, people need to do more with less.</p> <p>B. Focus on the proactive engagement with candidates (prior to and after primary election), highlighting successes and challenges, sharing honest feedback around resource needs and the definition of an unsuccessful transition.</p> <p>C. Meet with Delaware business leadership.</p>
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Given the feedback of GEAR’s leadership and stakeholders, it is recommended that the focus of GEAR would be strengthened by targeting the following key goals going forward:

1. Determine GEAR operating model and reauthorize the GEAR Executive Order with the next administration.
2. Achieve \$300M in cost savings through business process optimization over the next 4 years to be reinvested in value added activities.
3. Expand training opportunities in Lean, project management, strategic leadership, and change management to existing CIP graduates, State personnel during onboarding, and State leaders.
4. Implement the full-scale Ready in Six initiative based on the existing prototype projects.
5. Establish pilot projects in Lean management with a focus on aligning State budgeting and operational practices through business process optimization, data driven decision making, user experience design (UX), and the application of artificial intelligence.

These goals can leverage and be applied to various strategic projects to maximize the value of State service delivery and align with building a Lean government culture. A key facet of GEAR’s efficacy in the future will be how to appropriately structure the Board, GEAR Program Management team, and overall operating model. To date, GEAR has primarily operated from a supportive stance within State government - suggesting best practices, offering training and coaching, and setting recommended goals and outcomes. A revised framework could range from today’s supportive model to a more directive framework or something in between (see graphic below). It will be beneficial for the next Administration to give consideration as to the most effective operating model that aligns a body like GEAR with their objectives to further enhance the use of industry accepted best practices, achieve measurable outcomes, and ultimately grow the State’s culture of continuous improvement.



Strengthen Quantifiable Outcomes

GEAR supports efforts over the long term by developing operational excellence initiatives that reduce or temper State government spending growth, thus freeing up resources for other needs. Overall, the GEAR teams are leveraging industry best practices to develop the skills of its membership base as the number of projects and GEAR Field Team membership increase. GEAR estimates that a rough order of magnitude savings to the State across 88 percent of the 147 projects (detailed by organization in the table below) currently reporting estimated return on investment in the portfolio will be \$96-101

million over the life of projects underway. GEAR will also continue to consider qualitative measures that are as important as, and should be balanced with, quantitative measures of success.

Department	Number of Projects
Health and Social Services (DHSS)	29
State (DOS)	6
Judicial	7
Education (DOE)	8
Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC)	16
Services for Children Youth and their Families (DSCYF)	7
Labor (DOL)	2
Correction (DOC)	1
Safety and Homeland Security (DSHS)	3
*Enterprise Services Delivery (ESD)	56
GEAR P3 (Public-Private Partnership)	2
GEAR	8
State Housing Authority (DSHA)	2
Total	147

- *Enterprise Services Delivery Team includes:**
- State Treasurer (OST)
 - Finance (DOF)
 - Technology and Information (DTI)
 - Human Resources (DHR)
 - Management and Budget (OMB)
 - Auditor of Accounts (AOA)

Drive Continuous Improvement Training and Development

Based on recommendations made in the 2018 GEAR Annual Report, the First State Quality Improvement Fund (FSQIF) was reinstated in Fiscal Year 2020 as a line item in the Department of Human Resources (DHR) budget and funded at \$150,000 per year. In 2020, DHR Training and HR Solutions and GEAR partnered on a project to develop the Continuous Improvement Practitioner (CIP) program as a joint venture to build project management, Lean process improvement, and change management skills of State employees. GEAR solicits nominations for participation in the program from State leadership and the GEAR Program Management Team is represented on the panel to select participants. The CIP training program graduated its first 21 certified practitioners in the second quarter of 2021.

CIP continues to evolve, and the training program has graduated 118 practitioners to date with an additional cohort of 20 presently in training. Graduates receive 135 hours of training. All CIP graduates subsequently become contributing members of the GEAR Field Team as specified in the terms of application to the program. In Fiscal Year 2023, the FSQIF was amended by Senate Bill 90 to modernize the language in the Delaware Code to reflect current industry accepted terminology from the continuous improvement field and affirm the partnership between GEAR and DHR in administering the training programs developed under the law. In Fiscal Year 2024, with the support of the Governor and General Assembly, the FSQIF was provided an additional \$200,000 (for a total appropriation of \$350,000) to fully fund 2 annual cohorts of CIP training and implement additional continuous improvement training programs. In 2024, 2 additional training programs were funded through the FSQIF, developed, and launched to enhance the skills of the GEAR Field Team - 1) Process and Project Leadership (PPL) training to focus on leadership skill development, and 2) Operational Excellence (OpEx) training to focus on advanced skill development in Lean six sigma, business analysis, project management, and agile methods.

Grow the GEAR Field Team (GFT)

Established in 2020, the GFT is a community comprised of CIP training program graduates who are applying their skills throughout State government. With approximately 110 members representing 23 State organizations including the Judicial Branch, the team is delivering value through the execution of approximately 90 projects that leverage the skills and tools of continuous improvement. As the GFT’s efforts have evolved, an additional focus area of business process management (BPM) emerged in early 2024 with a sub-team in place. The BPM sub-team is focused on sharing best practices, tools, and techniques. The BPM team is meeting every other week and uses the ARIS BPM software tool in mapping and evaluating State operations for areas of waste and inefficiency. In addition, this team is currently drafting a BPM Playbook to enhance the ability of State employees to effectively implement process mapping and streamline business processes.

Last, the GEAR Program Management Team continues to support the use of the GEAR Project Management Playbook as a reference for trainees and graduates of the Continuous Improvement Practitioner (CIP) training program. It is designed to provide current project management standards and tools to current and future project managers within the State. Over time, it is anticipated that a Project Management sub-team would benefit the State similar to the learning community that has developed within the BPM team to better advance the practices of operational excellence.

Solidify a Strategic Path for the Enterprise Services Delivery Team

The GEAR Board's initial 7 focus area teams were organized by agency affiliation until 2020 when consolidated focuses on financial services delivery, human resources, and information technology emerged. Beginning in 2021, these 3 focus area teams with statewide responsibilities were reorganized into the single Enterprise Services Delivery (ESD) Team. Representing most of the State's major financial, human resources and information technology agencies and functions, ESD has been delivering value through the implementation of over 50 cross-agency enterprise-wide projects and programs. In 2022, the framework for evaluating the impact of enterprise level projects was revamped using a Strategic Project Roadmap, that addressed the impact of change saturation, return on investment, and risk management across agencies. Though ESD was dealing with state-wide projects, there was still a silo mentality dominating the presentation of these projects. In 2023 and 2024, the ESD team worked on rechartering its efforts to better align the agencies, projects, and service delivery toward a more unified State of Delaware perspective. These efforts were led by an 11-member Enterprise Services Delivery Team Charter Drafting Sub-team to prepare the revised mission, vision, role, guiding principles, stakeholder and preliminary goal statements for the ESD Team. The final versions of these statements were approved by the members of the Enterprise Services Delivery Team in April of 2024.

ESD's purpose and function has crystalized as a clearinghouse where business and technical experts talk together to understand the business processes, technical solutions, and resource requirements (personnel and funding) for statewide finance, human resource and information technology projects and communicate these requirements externally so that the resources, time, and capacity necessary to sustain and complete these projects could be prioritized. The key concept is that these projects are enterprise-wide in scope, not just agency-specific, and will impact all of State government.

The ESD mission is to "support, promote, monitor and strategically guide statewide, multi-organization, financial services, human resources and information technology projects to facilitate inter-organizational collaboration on these projects and elevate communication of project details and outcomes to stakeholders." The vision of ESD is "to foster a culture of collaboration and success by ensuring inter-organization collaboration on enterprise-wide finance, human resource, and information technology projects and adequate resource allocation to sustain these projects over time." The role of ESD is fivefold: 1) emphasize inter-organizational collaboration over competition; 2) enhance efficiency of State operations and identify opportunities for economies of scale; 3) identify enterprise needs, devise solutions and advocate for resources; 4) serve as a forum for collaboration of experts and communication to stakeholders and 5) formulate enterprise strategies, provide reporting on change capacity, risk management, integration, resources, and assess the return on investment and quantitative and qualitative outcomes. Currently, ESD is working on confirming its list of the projects it is monitoring, identifying project status and seeking to consolidate the projects on the list.

Foster Career Pathways for Employee Recruitment and Retention

With few exceptions, State agencies did not possess job classifications to employ highly qualified and credentialed project managers, business process analysts, Lean continuous improvement analysts, and change management specialists relying instead on primarily outsourced resources. The demand for these functions continues to grow in government as evidenced by the increase in large scale enterprise projects being developed on a regular basis, as well as ongoing demand for Continuous Improvement Practitioner training in these skills that facilitate improved operational and project outcomes.

Consistent with Executive Order #4, which specifies that GEAR shall "identify changes in the State personnel system that would foster a culture of continuous improvement and improve the recruitment, development and retention of State employees", GEAR worked with DHR to identify job classifications that would increase the ability of State agencies to drive and sustain continuous improvement over time. The GEAR Program Management Team drafted and implemented 4 new classification series (each with a career ladder) for project managers (5 roles), business process analysts (5 roles), change management specialists (3 roles), and Lean continuous improvement specialists (5 roles). In total, these 18 new job descriptions became available to State agencies beginning in August 2024 in support of the Fiscal Year 2026 budget cycle.

Support the Delaware Artificial Intelligence Commission

In 2024, House Bill 333 was passed establishing the Delaware Artificial Intelligence (AI) Commission, which includes the Executive Director of GEAR as a member. This Commission is tasked with making recommendations to the General Assembly and Department of Technology and Information on AI utilization and safety within the State of Delaware. The Commission shall additionally conduct an inventory of all Generative AI usage within Delaware's executive, legislative, and judicial agencies and identify high risk areas for the implementation of Generative AI. The GEAR Executive Director's involvement provides direct input on the use of this technology for business process optimization and automation over time.

Amend the Delaware Governmental Accountability Act (GAA)

Per Executive Order #4, GEAR is tasked with recommending changes to the Delaware Governmental Accountability Act that will better drive strategic planning, help develop meaningful performance metrics, foster more effective monitoring of performance and allocation of scarce resources as part of the budget process, and promote continuous improvement programs throughout State government. GEAR drafted 2 bills to amend the Delaware Governmental Accountability Act: SB 263 (2018) and HB 133 (2019-2020). The proposed amendments shifted the focus from the budget books to the budget process. The new language specified that the State's annual budget process be part of a performance management system, dedicated to incentivizing continuous process improvement and making government more efficient. This performance management system was to have been composed of 1) strategic planning, 2) performance measurement/evaluation, and 3) performance budgeting. The Governor and the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) would have been directed to use performance metrics when evaluating programs and program enhancements during the annual budget process. Both bills passed one house of the General Assembly in their legislative sessions, but ultimately were not passed by both houses.

There is still interest in undertaking a pilot effort to look at groups of agencies that comprise a budgetary focus area with significant budgetary impacts prior to proposing legislation again. For example, examining childcare funding could involve the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families, the Department of Health and Social Services, the Department of Education, and other associated agencies. A deep dive into these agency's programs, expenditures, and outcomes could be prepared by the Executive Branch as part of the Governor's Recommended Budget and reviewed by the Joint Finance Committee. Additionally, there is a model program that Delaware could investigate as the basis for a pilot: the State of New Mexico has a process known as BudgetSTAT for Executive Branch budget preparation and LegisSTAT for legislative review of the budget proposals.

Enable Enterprise Solutions for Project and Process Management (Planview Projectplace and ARIS)

In 2022, there were 2 recommendations put forth by the GEAR Program Management Team to expand enterprise software solutions for project management and business process analysis for GEAR Field Team (GFT) members. First, in consultation with DTI, Planview Projectplace software was selected as the software solution to transition over 130 GEAR Program Portfolio projects into an online, cloud-based portfolio. The transition of the portfolio from an Excel-based system to ProjectPlace was completed in July 2023, and over 30 licenses have been provisioned to GFT members to maintain their projects in the new system. Ongoing investments in this system will continue to equip all GFT members with licenses to support the application of industry best practices in project management, gather measurable outcomes from the GEAR portfolio, and work toward improved enterprise integration across agencies.

Second, an industry leading business process management (BPM) software tool called ARIS was introduced as a GEAR standard in July 2019. To date, ARIS is being used to accomplish objectives by multiple organizations as GFT members better define current state processes, measure performance, identify and eliminate waste, and implement optimized future state solutions. In July 2023, a business process analysis workgroup has been formed under the GFT and continues to meet biweekly, and it is recommended that in Fiscal Year 2025 a combination of 23 ARIS designer and 40 ARIS viewer licenses are needed to equip and train any GFT members committed to advancing their skills in BPM. In FY 2025, the Department of Finance was appropriated \$52,000 for ARIS and Planview Projectplace licenses.

Benchmark Continuous Improvement Activities Against Other States

Several of GEAR's continuous improvement activities for the State of Delaware are included in Results for America's 2023 Invest in What Works State Standard of Excellence national state benchmarking program. Results For America is a non-profit organization with roughly 10 years of experience promoting data-driven, outcome-oriented leadership at every level of government, from every region, who are committed to delivering better results. The 2023 Invest in What Works State

Standard of Excellence demonstrates that states are increasingly using data and evidence to produce better, more equitable results for their residents. The GEAR Program Management Team completed a survey provided by Results for America in 2023 and Delaware was noted as having 5 “promising examples” of state standards of excellence. For the 2024 Invest in What Works State Standard of Excellence Submission, the GEAR Program Management Team listed activities, practices, policies, and organizations under the following topic areas:

1. Evaluation Leadership – establishing the Government Efficiency and Accountability Review (GEAR) Board per Governor Carney’s Executive Order #4.
2. Data Leadership – having a Director of Enterprise Data in DTI and a Delaware Open Data Council to promote data sharing.
3. Evaluation Policy and Learning – having a statewide partnership between State officials and external researchers and connections between State agencies and these external researchers per operating budget Epilogue language and appropriations to institutions of higher education.
4. Data Policy and Practices – coordinating and collaborating through the Family Services Cabinet Council (FSCC) to develop the Delaware Integrated Data System (DIDS) and supporting the Open Data Portal with over 400 datasets available.
5. Performance Management – pursuing the amending of the Delaware Governmental Accountability Act that would mandate agencies, the Governor, and the legislative budget writing committees to include performance measures in budget process decision-making.
6. Results-Driven Contracting – encouraging results-focused contracts and active contract management with pay for success contracts authorized by the Delaware Code.

Results for America has offered, and OMB is open to accepting, technical support to work towards improving Delaware's use of evidence in its budget process, starting with best practice enhancements to the budget request forms utilized each budget cycle over the course of the next year. Detailed information for the participating states can be found at Results for America’s website.

GEAR PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP (P3)

Strengthen and Grow the GEAR P3 Innovation & Efficiency and P3 Trailblazer Awards

The GEAR P3 Taskforce was created in 2018 to promote private sector engagement in State government activities. The founder and CEO of The Precisionists, Inc. is a member of the GEAR Board and chairperson of the Taskforce. The Taskforce leveraged the GEAR/DHR partnership to establish the GEAR P3 Innovation & Efficiency and Trailblazer Awards as apex awards within the Governor’s Team Excellence Award program. These awards recognize and directly incentivize State employees who successfully implement high-impact initiatives that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of State processes, programs, and services.

The annual financial commitment to the awards is funded by \$25,000 from the private sector, with a matching \$25,000 from the State. The GEAR P3 Taskforce remains essential to ensuring the participation of the private sector in this important award. The Taskforce coordinates with the Delaware Business Roundtable and the Delaware State Chamber of Commerce, as well as other partner organizations that contribute to this program. 2023 marked the 5th year of the GEAR P3 Innovation & Efficiency and P3 Trailblazer awards where winners are recognized for their work with financial incentives based on their application of continuous improvement skills in their projects. A 5th Year Anniversary celebration was held with Governor Carney in October of 2023 that recognized the 2022 award winners, as well as the 2022 contributing private sector companies, which include: Highmark Delaware, WSFS, W.L. Gore, CSC, JPMorgan Chase, M & T Bank, The Precisionists Inc., Bank of America, and Delmarva Power. The logos of the 10 contributing companies to the 2023 GEAR P3 Awards are shown below, along with pictures of the 2023 GEAR P3 Innovation and Efficiency and Trailblazer award winners.



2022 GEAR P3 Awards 5th Anniversary - Contributing Company Representatives



2023 GEAR P3 Awards – Contributing Companies



2023 GEAR P3 Innovation and Efficiency Award Winner - DHR Agile Workspace Project Team



2023 GEAR P3 Innovation and Efficiency Award Winner - DSS Unwinding Team

GEAR PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP (P3)



2023 GEAR P3 Innovation and Efficiency Award Winner - DHSS Continuous Quality Improvement Team



2023 GEAR P3 Trailblazer Award Recipient - Ashley Kavanaugh - DHR



2023 GEAR P3 Trailblazer Award Recipients - Ke'Andra Hackett, Nicole Jingoian, Barnabas Kerkula, & Dr. Melissa Winters – DHSS



2023 GEAR P3 Trailblazer Award Recipient Ashley Lebo, Alex LeClaire, & James Robinson – DHR/DTI



2023 GEAR P3 Trailblazer Award Recipients - Jerrica Boyer & Tina Selby Ware - DSCYF



GEAR P3 Taskforce Contributing Organizations

GEAR Public/Private Partnership (P3) Support for Ready in Six (Ri6) Initiative

Launched by the Delaware Business Roundtable and its partners, the Ri6 initiative supports efforts to reduce business permit approval timelines with a target of 6 months for the entire process, thereby making the State a more competitive option when businesses consider relocating to, or expanding in, Delaware. The Roundtable retained a consulting firm to make recommendations on how the State of Delaware could strengthen its permitting processes by streamlining communication between State and local government agencies, providing greater transparency and cost predictability, and implementing fast-track approvals for high priority projects.

The Taskforce has sought private-sector support to help providers of these public services to identify which overall permitting processes are insufficiently responsive, indicate which State permitting processes should be prioritized for improvement to better serve the business community, and to prepare for any potential legislative changes needed to help ensure success of the program. The Taskforce also expanded its membership to include new representation from government organizations, legal and other private-sector industries impacted by permitting processes managed at the State, county, and municipal government levels. In coordination with GEAR P3 leadership and the Office of the Governor, a survey was developed by the GEAR Program Management Team in 2022 and disseminated to over 1,500 industry focused partners to target specific areas for improvement in permitting processes. The results of the survey led to key findings within the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) and the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) as well as other State, municipal, and county organizations. In early 2023, the results were released to the participating organizations, key stakeholders, DelDOT and DNREC leadership, and the Governor's Office.

Based on this input and their knowledge of related challenges within their organizations, each agency selected a core permitting process area that needed improvement. DelDOT selected a focus on utility permitting regulations and DNREC chose to focus on subaqueous permits. The focus on these processes correlated to improvement targets identified in the survey.

A project charter was developed to address the targeted bottlenecks identified by the survey. The project was then implemented starting with the first of 2 phases - focusing on conducting Lean business analysis and process improvement surrounding 1 key process each within DNREC and DelDOT. Currently, the DNREC Subaqueous Permitting Prototype project for boat docking facilities is underway with active GEAR Program Management Team support, while DelDOT's prototype focuses on regulatory review associated with utility relocation work to achieve efficiencies in the short term. Once the first phase pilot initiatives have been completed near the end of Calendar Year 2024, State leadership will determine if a larger phase 2 initiative will be launched spanning State, county, and municipal governments. Further detail about the first phase pilot projects are available in the DelDOT and DNREC sections of this report.

Identify New Public-Private Partnership Opportunities

Work continues to increase the momentum of the GEAR P3 Taskforce and the impact of the GEAR program. The Taskforce is working with State agencies, the Delaware Prosperity Partnership, and other entities to determine how the public and private sectors may work together to create the most efficient and effective solutions that enable the State to better serve businesses, residents, and visitors.

ENTERPRISE SERVICES DELIVERY TEAM (ESD)

Financial Services Delivery

Advanced Planning for Replacement of Enterprise-Wide Computer Applications

Many of the financial, human resources, and information technology projects that are coming to GEAR's attention are enterprise-wide in scope and affect multiple agencies and branches of State government. Two such financial management projects are ERP Modernization and the Integrated Revenue Administration System (IRAS). The implementation of enterprise-wide solutions often requires long implementation timelines, changes to these systems often require long-term projects on the scale of 5 to 10 years. ESD's purpose and function is to be a clearinghouse where business and technical experts talk together regarding understanding business processes, technical solutions, and resource requirements (personnel and funding) for statewide finance, human resource and information technology projects and communicating these requirements externally so that the resources, time, and capacity necessary to sustain and complete these projects can be prioritized. The key characteristic is that these projects are enterprise-wide in scope, not just agency-specific, and will impact all of State government. ESD is delivering value through the monitoring of nearly 50 cross-agency enterprise-wide projects and programs.

Modernizing the State's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Systems

Utilizing funding obtained in the Fiscal Year 2023 Capital Budget, a consulting firm was contracted to provide resources and assist in the modernization of the State's ERP systems (Financial Management & Accounting; Payroll, Human Resources; Benefits & Time Administration; and Pension Administration). Resources from the consulting firm, together with State subject matter experts, documented system and business processes, key performance indicators, and user stories. In addition, State experts, and ERP System Administrators established the overall project goals. The consulting firm analyzed all areas within each module of the ERP systems. Recommendations from the analysis have been provided using the following criteria:

- Eliminate the process if it is deemed unnecessary.
- Adapt the process to fit the current available technology, as delivered.
- Identify a technological configuration option to accommodate the process.
- Customize the technology to accommodate the required process, but only as a last resort.

The project team conducted feedback sessions with central and end user agencies, school districts, charter schools, and higher education institutions to ensure all business processes have been documented and consideration was provided for inclusion in the Request for Proposal (RFP) for a new software solution.

As the project team has completed feedback sessions and associated documentation, the consulting firm, in accordance with the statement of work, has quantified the level of customizations and potential approaches for ERP modernization. The firm recommended a proposed scope of work for a technology solution based on business requirements and the State's objectives to modernize operations, standardize business processes, reduce costs, improve security, and enhance service outcomes.

Incorporating the requirements, the State, in coordination with the contracted firm, developed an RFP for ERP Modernization targeted to be published in the third quarter of Calendar Year 2024, with contract awards targeted for the first quarter of Calendar Year 2025. This RFP will determine which software solution will be selected. A second RFP will subsequently be drafted and posted once a contractual agreement is in place with the selected software solution. The second RFP will determine the integration partner that will be responsible for implementing the new software solution. The full migration to a new system is expected to take a minimum of 3 to 5 years after the award of contracts. It will require considerable State resources, both internal and contractual staff, along with support from all levels of government to adopt business process changes that will eliminate expensive system customizations, result in streamlined processes, and generate a more efficient workforce.

Progress for Replacement of State's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Systems

The Financial Management System, Payroll/Human Capital Management, and Pension Administration systems are more than 20 years-old, based on outdated web-based technologies, and will not be supported by the original software manufacturer as they reach end-of-life in the coming years. They consist of highly complex customizations having heavy maintenance demands. To ensure the continuity of State operations the ERP Modernization Project was initiated in June 2022 and consists of 2 phases:

1. Phase 1

A. Document *as is* requirements, process flows, user stories, and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – Completed for Pension Administration, Financial Management System, and Payroll / Human Capital Management

B. RFP activities

1. Pension Administration

Completed and In Process:

- a. Pension Administration System RFP Published - Complete
- b. Pension Administration System Vendor Response to RFP – In Process

Upcoming Milestones:

- c. Pension Administration System Vendor Evaluations and Vendor Demos
- d. Pension Administration System Vendor Selection

2. Financial Management System; Payroll / Human Capital Management

Upcoming Milestones:

- a. Publish Solution Software Provider RFP
- b. Solution Software Provider Vendor Response to RFP
- c. Solution Software Provider Vendor Evaluations and Vendor Demos
- d. Solution Software Provider Vendor Selection
- e. Publish Solution Integrator RFP
- f. Solution Integrator Vendor Response to RFP
- g. Solution Integrator Vendor Evaluations and Vendor Demos
- h. Solution Integrator Vendor Selection

2. Phase 2

A. Pension Administration System Implementation

B. Financial Management System; Payroll / Human Capital Management Implementation

The State appropriated a total of \$62.5 million toward this major initiative with \$25 million in each of the Fiscal Year 2023 and Fiscal Year 2024 bond bills and an additional \$12.5 million in the Fiscal Year 2025 bond bill. It is anticipated that the total cost of this project may exceed \$100 million dollars.

Implement an Integrated Revenue Administration System (IRAS)

The Delaware Department of Finance, Division of Revenue (DOR) is responsible for collecting more than \$3.6 billion in annual State taxes, processing more than \$350 million in tax refunds, ensuring compliance with the State's tax laws, and providing taxpayer services. As a result of modernization efforts, DOR has largely moved away from mainframe technology that is over 30 years old and consisting of more than 100 client server applications. The IRAS system has modernized DOR's processing for all but the most complicated business returns by creating a web-based, real-time, integrated user experience, automating processing capabilities, optimizing the efficiency and effectiveness of DOR staff, and strengthening

security and internal controls. IRAS has improved DOR's ability to mitigate fraud and increase revenue with new automated audit programs and better technology to assist with the collection of delinquent taxes as further tools are implemented. The project will also create numerous opportunities for improved efficiencies and enhanced taxpayer service through collaboration with other State and local agencies. For example, in August 2021, DOR began a pilot project to collect the public accommodations tax for one county and one municipality, allowing the hotels and motels to utilize a single filing system to pay tax to multiple entities. DOR and the Department of Labor will discuss how IRAS could be leveraged to help modernize the State's Unemployment Insurance tax collection system. IRAS also provides an improved level of system recovery by leveraging a cloud based service provider.

In addition to modernizing DOR's processing systems, IRAS is dramatically improving the user experience for taxpayers through the development of a modern public facing portal that provides taxpayers access to online filings, account information, service requests, and the ability to delegate access to tax preparers. The public-facing portal (tax.delaware.gov) went live for taxpayer registration in December 2020 and has been available for tax filings since January 2021. To date, more than 665,000 returns have been filed through the portal and more than \$1.9 billion in payments have been received and applied to taxpayer accounts. The portal also created online filing opportunities for industry sectors that were previously only available on paper. DOR achieved a significant reduction in paper filings (roughly a 33 percent decline overall), which reduces manual processing efforts and streamlines return processing, allowing for the reallocation of personnel to higher-value, revenue-generating activities.

The IRAS project is being implemented in 3 releases:

- Release 1 (went live in fall 2020) – Business related taxes.
- Release 2 (went live in late 2022) – Personal income and estate taxes.
- Release 2.1 (went live in late 2023) – Enhancements to business and personal taxes and the Delaware tax portal.
- Release 3.1 (went live in July 2024) – Retail Marijuana Tax and IRS CP2000 audit program plus an upgrade with the latest changes to the base processing package.
- Release 3.2 (to go live in late 2025):
 - Corporate income taxes as well as partnership, S corporation, fiduciary, headquarter management income tax returns.
 - Data warehouse and tax master audit program.

Prior to the start of the project in the summer of 2019, the IRAS initiative yielded several benefits that can be leveraged across other Delaware agencies. A procurement and project readiness methodology, focusing on large State government IT project implementations was created in collaboration with the DTI and OMB's Government Support Services. As part of this methodology, a consistent and repeatable process was documented and used. The process included an initial discovery step reaching out to more than 30 states to better understand their experiences and lessons learned on similar projects working with vendors that provide revenue administration products and services. Leveraging input from states that had successful implementations, an RFP with more than 1,500 requirements was created. During onsite sessions, bidders were required to demonstrate more than 70 real-life scenarios.

Governor Carney and the General Assembly approved funding for the project in the Fiscal Year 2020 budget and a contract was awarded in July 2019. To gain fast traction at project initiation, almost a dozen project readiness activities were undertaken to develop a thorough binder of information on DOR systems, processes, and tax laws that were provided to the selected vendor prior to arrival on site. On-site activities began in July 2019 and included development of a project management office and a project structure.

Procurement Card (Pcard) Program

The combined total spend for the State's credit card program (PCard) and the Single-Use Account program for vendor payments in Calendar Year 2020 was \$162.9 million. This produced a rebate of \$3.1 million to the State to help fund the State's financial management systems. Calendar Year 2021 PCard spending increased to \$177.0 million with a rebate of \$3.4 million. Calendar Year 2023 provided a record level of total PCard spending of \$189.2 million with a rebate of \$3.6

million. Calendar Year 2024, to date, is projecting annual spending over \$185.0 million with a similar rebate to Calendar Year 2023. The second extension of the existing PCard contract expires December 2025.

Financial Services Delivery Onerous Processes— After the Fact Purchase Order Approval Process

Per the Budget and Accounting Policy Manual, when a purchase order is established or approved after the delivery of goods or services, an after-the-fact situation is said to exist. State organizations finding themselves in this situation must apply, and receive approval for, an after-the-fact waiver to get the purchase order approved and the vendor paid. To process and approve after-the-fact waiver request applications, it previously took a minimum of 7 persons. Three of the 7 persons (42 percent) reviewing and approving these waiver request applications were Cabinet Secretary level leaders. Further, all after-the-fact waiver requests were historically reviewed and approved by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Secretary of the Department of Finance (DOF). Overall, it was projected that this workload could be reduced by 76 percent (based on the Fiscal Year 2020 after-the-fact waiver request workload for OMB and DOF cabinet secretaries and their staffs).

On March 1, 2021, the Financial Advisory Committee (FAC) subcommittee for onerous paper processing requirements implemented changes to streamline the after-the-fact waiver request application approval process. These changes: 1) increased the purchase order threshold from \$5,000 to \$10,000, 2) permitted cabinet-level leaders of State organizations to internally approve after-the-fact waiver requests between \$10,000 and \$50,000, and 3) required Director of Management and Budget and Secretary of Finance approval only for those waiver requests over \$50,000. The changes have been successful in reducing the approval workload for the Cabinet Secretaries and their staff with the targeted reduction being met. While the number of after-the-fact waiver requests reviewed by the Director of Management and Budget and the Secretary of Finance is still below that of Fiscal Year 2020, the recent trend is that the number of approvals are increasing. Some of this increase is attributable to turnover in agency fiscal staffs, understaffed fiscal offices and lack of knowledge of financial processes.

July 1st to June 30th	Fiscal Year 2020	Fiscal Year 2021	Fiscal Year 2022	Fiscal Year 2023	Fiscal Year 2024
OMB/DOF Approval Totals	105	76	18	41	65
% Workload Change		(28%)	(76%)	128%	59%

Financial Advisory Committee (FAC) and Travel Policy

The FAC continued its quarterly meetings over the prior year with a First State Financials (FSF) training subcommittee being created and accomplishing several of their goals in streamlining FSF training for new hires. The Travel subcommittee completed travel policy changes, and an agreement has been finalized with a travel management company to streamline and reduce costs for the booking of transportation and lodging associated with State personnel travel as an option for agencies to utilize.

A subcommittee to develop an Accounting 201 course was launched. The new accounting course will be an extension of an introductory Accounting 101 course that is currently offered. Another subcommittee was launched to review and discuss potential enhancements for the Budget and Accounting course that is currently offered.

Drive Effective Internal Control System(s) in State Government

Internal controls are a critical part of effective risk management. Designing, implementing, and managing an effective system of internal controls can be challenging, and adapting to rapidly changing business models, new technologies, or globalization requires that system to be highly adaptable. An internal control system requires the use of judgment to monitor and assess its effectiveness, and it must provide insight on the application of controls. Different entities in the State each have different objectives and goals, different levels of resources, and different processes or programs, which make each environment unique.

The Office of Auditor of Accounts (AOA) has instituted a range of initiatives with the goal of increasing operational efficiency by sharpening State managers’ abilities to assess risks and implement effective internal controls. One area of

focus is to mitigate the degradation of the internal control system through the implementation of an ongoing Internal Controls Training Program and to provide related tools and resources. In 2024, AOA offered internal control trainings to enhance internal control design, implementation, monitoring for operational effectiveness, and periodic updating based on a changing environment. AOA has also instituted stricter internal controls for department spending, helping AOA continue to demonstrate best practices for fiscal management.

Lower Lease Costs and Restructure Lease Program

The Office of Management and Budget/Division of Facilities Management (OMB/DFM) Real Property Management Program consists of 123 leases, covering approximately 1.8 million square feet of rented space occupied by various State of Delaware agencies, at a current year annualized cost of \$34 million. Based on the magnitude of this cost component in the State's collective operating budget across agencies, this GEAR project began as an initiative to minimize lease costs. Historically, real estate-related tasks were decentralized across numerous State agencies. This led to duplication of effort and expenditure, failure to leverage collective locations, common property ownership, and arms-length knowledge of the state of the local real estate market and its related peripheral indications such as borrowing rates, economic development interest, and general business conditions.

After the execution of a professional services procurement process, a contractual partnership was formed with a real estate firm. Efforts began in the Fall of 2018 with the largest leasing agencies being the first impetus to begin a strategic approach. The target was further defined as the 78 leases that would expire in the ongoing 5-year period. Over time, the confines of this target group of leases have been broadened due to market awareness and simple economic opportunity. Since the program began in 2018, 65 of the 78 leases have been renewed or relocated and 13 of the 78 leases have been terminated or transferred. As a result of the progress made during the initial 4 years, the contract with the consulting real estate firm was renewed for an additional 3 years with opportunities to extend the contract.

This GEAR project continues to achieve the targeted goal while at the same time evolves towards updating the lease document framework. This includes concessions such as environmental hygiene provisions that protect the State employee workforce, electric vehicle charging station installations on the leased premises, and owner-implemented cosmetic updates such as signage, paint, carpet, and restroom upgrades. These updates occur at the time of lease renewal and again every 5 to 10 years. The State has also explored new lease locations and build-to-suit opportunities where savings, as well as preferable and stable lease conditions, can be secured. Lastly, as the opportunity arises, the State is acquiring properties that it currently leases as well as properties where it has a need for additional space. Since October 2022, 8 properties have been acquired. These acquisitions reduce the lease inventory in addition to providing cost savings of \$20.6 million, to be realized over time.

To date, 74 leases have been affected either by renegotiation/extension of the lease term or relocation of the State's workforce to a facility with better, more economical lease conditions and/or a newly constructed facility completed as a build-to-suit arrangement. Under build-to-suit terms, one new building was constructed where financially, the transition to the new building with replicated conditions is expected to pay for itself out of lease savings. Thus far, the project has resulted in more than \$35.7 million total in hard dollar rent savings and more than \$9.9 million total in soft dollar rent savings (paint, carpet, parking lot restriping, bathroom/kitchen updates and other leasehold improvements) over the life of the renegotiated and extended leases.

As departments decide how to move forward with hybrid work schedules, OMB/DFM will continue to take advantage of spaces that have been vacated or downsized because of state employees telecommuting to work. To date, 3 agencies reduced their real estate footprint as a result of employees utilizing a hybrid schedule. This resulted in a savings of \$211,419 annually. In June 2024, an additional contractual partnership was formed with a real estate strategy firm that specializes in space planning. This firm will analyze the functional efficiency and relative quality of space utilization in State facilities and provide recommendations for improvement. These recommendations will include reconfiguring of spaces that incorporate the use of hybrid and fully remote work environments and shall be provided in early 2025.

Data Integration and Mapping

Leverage FirstMap for Data Sharing

The FirstMap environment is managed by the Department of Technology and Information's (DTI) Location Intelligence team and is a web hosted environment providing a wide range of geographic information systems to anyone who is seeking non-secure data. Since the FirstMap 2 upgrade, the Office of Management and Budget Office of State Planning and Coordination (OMB/OSPC) and DTI have made strides in not only making this data more available but working to evaluate the consistency and accuracy of this data. These quality assurance processes are important to the ever-evolving state of Geographic Information System (GIS) data and the technology that helps State entities consume and disseminate it for broader statewide use. Additionally, as OMB/OSPC and DTI work through some of these processes they are helping to spread awareness to the user base and strengthen their individual and collaborative efforts as they leverage datasets to provide quality products to suit the needs of their respective agencies.

Additionally, the Location Intelligence team and Office of State Planning Coordination were able to engage the United States Geological Survey and Delaware Geological Survey for contracting and acquisition of Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) data. This data was last collected nearly 8 years ago, therefore, acquiring updated elevation data holds many benefits and uses for the ever-growing environmental analysis that the State is monitoring more closely. Once collected and completed this dataset will be made available via the State's FirstMap environment. In the FY 2025 State operating budget, OMB received funding to begin a regular update cycle for all base GIS data, including aerial imagery, land use/land cover and LiDAR (elevation data). This will ensure that the State's agencies, local governments, and the entire GIS user community is using up to date and accurate data.

Establish a State Land Inventory

It is critical for Delaware State government to have a full and complete understanding of the real property it owns. Fully evaluating the State's realty assets and generating a centralized, spatial, land inventory database will afford stakeholders the ability to identify assets, evaluate use, maintenance, funding, and ultimately manage assets in a more streamlined and efficient manner.

The proposed solution involves obtaining consultation to develop a centralized database that is accessible to all State agencies (i.e., 13 State organizations or divisions, higher education institutions, and school districts) that own and manage real property assets, including easements. The technical solution will leverage Geographic Information System (GIS) software as well as the State's FirstMap and the Delaware Integrated Data System (DIDS) architecture so that the database is accessible and secure across all agencies. Once operational, the individual agencies and divisions will retire their existing databases and spreadsheets and begin using the new database as a part of revised workflows. Ultimately, all data will be updated in real time and accessible to all who have permission to access it.

In response to past discovery workshops and recommendations OMB/OSPC has initiated a business case with DTI, sponsored a request for proposals, reviewed proposals received, worked with DTI on the architecture and design of the highest-ranking offer, and currently is working with the selected vendor to implement the software solution. The project team and vendor have completed detailed discovery and data collection with all partner agencies and are proceeding with software design and integrations. The project is expected to be completed and operational in the first quarter of 2025. The measurable outcomes associated with this project include process improvement, enhanced value, and possibly reduced costs through more efficient use of the State's real property assets.

School District Enrollment Projections

School district enrollment has a significant impact on State operating and capital budgets. Centrally updated enrollment projections done on a regular basis can be used to improve long-range planning and better allocate resources in both operating and capital budgets within and across school districts. Statewide enrollment projections have been produced twice in the recent past, once in 2007 and again in 2014. These efforts were useful at those points in time, but they have not been updated to reflect changing demographic conditions. This project is focused on the process of preparing regular updates to statewide school district enrollment projections and using these updates to improve long-range planning and resource allocation (e.g., determine needs for new schools and evaluate school district capital master plans). Additionally, the updates will be beneficial for other entities that interact with the student population in the allocation of their resources.

In the 2021-2022 legislative session, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 327. The Bill obligates the Department of Education (DOE), OMB/OSPC, the school districts, and county governments to work together to integrate an educational element into the county comprehensive plans. To support this effort, the school district enrollment projection data is necessary. The Office of Management and Budget/Office of State Planning Coordination partnered with the University of Delaware's Center for Applied Demography and Survey Research over the past year to complete the enrollment projections for 2024 through 2050. It is the intent of OMB/OSPC to regularly update these projections. The project will be managed by OMB/OSPC and DOE, and for future years, a sustainable funding strategy has been developed to ensure that enrollment projections are kept up to date. The measurable outcomes of this project are cost savings to the State and the districts due to having one unified set of projections (rather than each district contracting individually); but more importantly cost savings due to better decision making about school construction projects due to more accurate forecasting of enrollment growth and needs.

Treasury Management

Implement the Digital Government Payment System

With the modernization of general and local banking services nearly completed, the Office of the State Treasurer (OST) has shifted its focus to digital government services in partnership with the Department of Technology and Information (DTI) and the Department of State's (DOS) Government Information Center. While online payment (merchant) services were historically decentralized, OST launched a strategic endeavor to consolidate the payment infrastructure of more than 160 State merchants, including their security components for credit, debit, and Automated Clearing House (ACH) transactions occurring between the State of Delaware's residents, visitors, and State agencies.

In October 2020, OST launched a Request for Proposals (RFP) for comprehensive digital government services in partnership with DTI and DOS. The components put out to bid digital government services including payment gateway products, payment processing services, reconciliation software, account analysis software, and a single sign-on interface in which residents and visitors could transact and interact with the State online. The State recommended that the payment and reconciliation components be awarded to one vendor, while the provider for a single sign-on portal was awarded to another vendor. This combined set of services is yielding efficiencies in identity management, customer service, transaction processing, data security, and overall user experience for Delaware's residents and visitors. Branded as *Go DE*, these integrated systems serve as a single touchpoint with a *Go DE* Payment Engine as part of the first release of this new system. Through the *Go DE* portal, users are now making trusted web payments in a manner that is secure, responsive, and accessible. This aligns with the State of Delaware's shift from agency-centered managed services to an enterprise-wide, people-centered Digital Government services platform that will continue to evolve over the next few years. The *Go DE* roadmap includes support for both the State's legacy payment engine (i.e., Govolution) and an authenticated, customer experience by allowing residents and visitors to register by creating a secure *MyDelaware* identity. When utilizing their trusted identities, users will be able to monitor and view all their transactions enabled by *Go DE*.

Given the nature of conducting successive resource-intensive, statewide projects, OST continues to adapt its internal resources to meet outcomes. OST shall ensure all State agencies, customers and members of the public receive the appropriate level of operational support, while seamlessly transitioning banking and digital government services to new providers with the engagement of its agency partners. The *Go DE* solution went live in April 2024, with the Department of Agriculture having fully been onboarded, and several other agencies in queue.

Consolidate Local Banking

The local banking RFP was issued in March of 2019, and in August 2019, the State's Cash Management Policy Board approved a primary award for over-the-counter accounts receivable collections to M&T Bank, along with complementary contract awards to Citizens and TD Banks. In 2020, contracts were awarded to all 3 banks and the impacted agencies were surveyed by OST to develop an account migration plan. Overall, this project streamlines brick and mortar banking services from 14 banks to 3 banks, decreasing risk, while simplifying reconciliation and account management processes.

In conjunction with the local banking project, the OST team has been working to transition all State agencies and local school districts to a contracted bank for their over-the-counter local banking needs. To ensure successful transition, the OST team randomly selected State agencies and local school districts from each county as a pilot group to test the banking

transition. Although there were a few challenges discovered, the OST team worked with the local banking partners to successfully transition the pilot group.

Currently, OST is working with the remaining State agencies and local school districts to create a consolidated effort between their local, general banking, and over-the-counter transactions. State agencies and local school districts have expressed a business need to keep old accounts open longer than expected for payments to clear, accounts to be reconciled, or time to improve technology within their new accounts. The project is currently extended to be completed by December 31, 2024, with 82 accounts remaining to be closed for this project, though these remaining State agencies and school districts have already opened new accounts with the contractual banking partners. OST anticipates that the December 31, 2024, extension will allow all new account transfers to take place and legacy accounts to be closed.

Comply with Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI DSS)

By analyzing agencies' current business processes involving how payments are handled, OST's merchant services team is making recommendations for improvements that can reduce an agency's IT and business vulnerabilities when handling credit and debit card payments. OST's primary strategy for ensuring all agency merchants are PCI DSS compliant is to reduce the scope of potential vulnerabilities within agencies' payment environments by providing Point-to-Point Encrypted (P2PE) payment devices for in-person payments, and vendor-hosted online payment pages with secure checkout environments. In addition, OST assists State agencies with updating policies and procedures for securely handling payment transactions and aids with remediating payment security vulnerabilities. These efforts ensure that payment best practices are being implemented, the PCI DSS burden is minimized, and that the State's data systems are secure. The consequences of failing PCI DSS compliance include the State's loss of credibility, fines, and no longer being able to accept credit card payments. OST continues to work with agencies to ensure that other current payment types are being handled in a manner that is compliant with PCI DSS.

Delaware has positioned itself as an "early adopter" State when it comes to PCI DSS Compliance, embracing version 4.0 of the Self-Assessment Questionnaires (SAQs) that State agencies use to evaluate and remediate their payment environment(s). The scheduling of SAQ workshops with agencies started in November 2023 and remain on-going. It is important to note that PCI DSS is a recurring yearly mandate. Among the achievements are the establishment of SAQ workshops that assist agencies in completing their SAQs in real-time and the drafting of a State of Delaware PCI DSS policy. Additionally, OST has met all PCI DSS stipulated remediation timelines, having promptly and effectively addressed internal and external quarterly IT environment scans.

In a collaborative effort with DTI and a contracted Qualified Security Assessor, OST will continue to work with State agencies to ensure that payments are being handled in a manner that is compliant with PCI DSS as well as similarly defined security procedures from NACHA (National Automated Clearing House Association) for ACH transactions. The current deadline for OST to attest PCI DSS compliance on behalf of all State agency merchants is December 31, 2024.

Modernize Check-Printing Services

Historically OST has printed approximately 11,000 checks per month for vendors, payroll systems, and the Department of Services for Children Youth and their Families using a 20-year-old on-premises application. The primary goals of modernizing OST's check printing solution were to: improve workflow and increase efficiency by reducing the number of checks printed in-house, increase customer support by providing alternate check-printing services, and establish a disaster recovery backup system. As of June 2024, OST has successfully migrated check-printing services to a cloud-based SaaS solution called Payments and Cash Management (PCM). In the initial stage, this implementation has created more efficiencies within the check printing process and has allowed OST personnel the ability to accomplish higher value daily operations.

Upgrade Bank Account Reconciliation and Account Fee Analysis Software

The Office of State Treasurer is modernizing its reconciliation processes through updated bank account reconciliation software. OST currently uses an on-premises hosted application that has reached end of life and is no longer receiving updates from the vendor. As part of the Digital Government RFP, an existing vendor was awarded the contract for a SaaS reconciliation solution. In addition to the opportunity for modernization of the technology, there are business processes that are currently handled manually, outside of the existing system, that will be improved and streamlined by automation through

this more robust platform. Implementation began in spring of 2023. The new solution is expected to be fully implemented by December 2024.

In September 2023 OST replaced the on-premises bank fee analysis software application that also reached end of life. As part of the Digital Government RFP, the same vendor was awarded the contract for their SaaS bank account fee analysis solution. Currently this solution has reduced manual effort and time, streamlined workflows, and promoted faster and more frequent analysis and recovery of banking fees.

Human Resources Modernization

Centralize and Modernize Human Resources Delivery

On February 16, 2017, Governor Carney issued Executive Order #4, which established GEAR, with one of its key objectives being “identifying changes in the State personnel system that would foster a culture of continuous improvement and improve the recruitment, development, and retention of State employees.” Since the establishment of the Department of Human Resources (DHR) in 2017, significant progress has been made in modernizing service delivery through service centralization, effective use of technology, and streamlined and improved work processes. To centralize services and aim for consistency, efficiency, and effective service delivery, DHR has revised and executed new service agreements with State agencies to clearly define the department’s services.

DHR remains committed to promoting efficiency, upholding accountability, and addressing critical issues affecting the State’s workforce. As DHR adapts to changing business dynamics, centralizing HR functions is essential to enhance efficiency, consistency, and overall effectiveness in managing its most valuable asset – State employees. In Fiscal Year 2024, DHR continued centralizing resources and expertise to optimize HR practices and drive organizational successes already realized in employee and labor relations, classification, compensation, and talent acquisition and expanded the centralization efforts to include training and organizational development, employee benefits services, and leave administration to strategically enhance workforce development, service efficiency, effectiveness, and overall quality.

In 2023, the DHR Agile Workspace Project, in collaboration with DTI, introduced 2 innovative, agile workspaces, catering to the needs of a dynamic, hybrid workforce. DHR was faced with the challenge of centralizing services across 26 State agency locations along with technological limitations and hybrid work schedules. The Agile Workspace Project Team took a holistic approach that emphasized open layouts and shared spaces with the aim of enhancing collaboration while reducing office footprints. Technological upgrades like SharePoint access, Wi-Fi coverage, Jabber softphones, eFax, and off-network printing were implemented to empower staff to work seamlessly from any location. Through collaboration, creativity, and resilience, the DHR Agile Workspace Project Team has not only transformed DHR's operational landscape but also positioned the organization as a forward-thinking pioneer in workspace innovation. The project's success sets a precedent for future endeavors within DHR and other State agencies. This project, nominated by Barbara McCleary, DHR Director of Training and HR Solutions, was selected as a recipient of the 2023 GEAR P3 Innovation and Efficiency Award, due to their achievement in demonstrating the potential for cost-effective, flexible work environments to drive improved service delivery and employee satisfaction. The recipients of this 2023 Award were Joshua Austin, Lamar Demby, Kevin Graber, John Greenage, Clayton McGill, Andrew Starobynski, and Johnathan Welch.

In 2024, the Division of Training and HR Solutions was established to enhance the services offered to state agencies. The division comprises 4 new sections: employee development, agency services, organizational management, and human resources technology. It already delivers statewide training and organizational development services and manages the State’s enterprise learning management system. Recognizing an opportunity for efficiency, DHR centralized staff training within this division and training staff were moved to the division to provide centralized services to all executive branch agencies and their 14,000 employees.

Employment Benefits Services (EBS) was created in 2024 under the Talent Management division. DHR identified an opportunity to transition staff to provide centralized services for DHSS, DSCYF, and DOF. EBS handles new hires, pre-hire coordination, preboarding, onboarding, benefits, and payroll administration throughout the employee work cycle. Despite challenges in integrating varied processes from each agency, significant progress has been made in delivering consistent services through unified systems, standardized procedures, and integrated practices. One notable achievement is the standardized hiring packet submission procedure, which promotes consistency, efficiency, and protection against claims of inappropriate hiring.

Effective Use of Technology

DHR took a major step forward in early 2023 by implementing an enterprise document management system. This transition from physical filing cabinets to an electronic system has modernized employee record management. Over 3 million documents have been digitized and uploaded into the new system, with ongoing efforts to make it entirely paperless. This transition enables automated processes, enhances user access, minimizes risk, improves record management and retention, and bolsters security and confidentiality. DHR received funding to enhance the system's capabilities by incorporating record retention settings, scanning, and configuration of classification, compensation, employee and labor relations, and adding 2 high-speed scanners to support fiscal files. DHR seeks to add configurations to streamline Office of Pensions access and facilitate the seamless transfer of employee records upon retirement. This project, nominated by Barbara McCleary, DHR Director of Training and HR Solutions, was selected as a recipient of the 2023 GEAR P3 Trailblazer Award, a testament to the project's effectiveness and the team's dedication. The recipients of this 2023 Award were Ashley Lebo, Alex LeClaire, and James Robinson.

In early 2023, DHR overhauled New Employee Orientation into a comprehensive onboarding process, refining policies and establishing a uniform approach. DHR successfully implemented a new recruitment system contract in July 2023 and continues standardizing the hiring process by implementing a recruitment system training program for hiring managers that enables managers to submit requests to fill positions directly and provides a mechanism for applicants to self-schedule interviews. Collaboration with DTI continues to standardize identity-proofing and onboarding processes that provide new hires with access while assuring the safety of the State's computing networks, systems, and online services.

DHR developed and implemented 5 critical human resource curricula in September 2023, marking the next phase of a comprehensive redesign and centralization initiative for DHR's new employee orientation and onboarding processes. The primary objective of this project was to centralize and standardize management compliance of over 50 key policies and required training across different employee groups with varying needs for 14,000 employees and provide ease of finding and completing required training and improving reporting to track compliance. Within the first month of launching the new curricula, there was a 56 percent increase in compliance – a substantial improvement from previous practices. This project, nominated by Barbara McCleary, DHR Director of Training and HR Solutions, and Ashley Kavanagh was selected as a recipient of the 2023 GEAR P3 Trailblazer Award due to her outstanding efforts in creating these efficiencies. Along with the new curricula, DHR issued the first statewide Onboarding Policy and Procedure. The policy standardizes the requirements for hiring new employees in the Executive Branch and establishes standards for implementing the State's first automated HR onboarding and offboarding solution.

In October 2023, DHR initiated the implementation of a new onboarding and offboarding solution including creation of standardized checklists and statewide forms to simplify the processes of preboarding, onboarding, and offboarding. In May 2024, DHR implemented the Delaware Launchpad across Executive Branch agencies. The Delaware Launchpad simplifies processes with standardized checklists assigned during preboarding and onboarding, includes essential forms like the I-9, W-4, and provides all the documentation new employees need to complete them. HR staff will assign these tasks before the employees' first day, assuring employment verification is done in advance. All documents can be conveniently completed electronically and are securely stored until they are transferred to DHR's electronic document management system.

Since 2021, DHR has sought funding for an Employee Success Center, a single portal to provide essential HR services to State employees. This portal would offer case and knowledge management, enabling employees and agency leaders to make inquiries, service requests and track their status through a unified virtual point of contact. The Employee Success Center would simplify navigation by eliminating the need for multiple websites, letting employees know where to go for assistance, and enabling HR staff to focus on more valuable tasks. It would link various systems, providing a seamless experience across HR, payroll, and IT. A recent proof of concept conducted by DTI indicated that expanding the State's ServiceNow modernization to include HR would be the best delivery method. DHR seeks \$2.1 million in funding, including \$600,000 for annual license costs, to implement this advanced HR technology with features like closed-system AI and automated tracking and notifications unavailable in existing HRIS or ERP systems.

The Delaware Learning Center (DLC) Support Portal was introduced in early 2022. This portal revolutionized the DLC helpdesk by automating case creation from emails, providing email notifications, enhanced data analytics, case tracking, and a knowledge bank. This effort transitioned the help desk from manual ticket management using emails and phone calls to a fully automated system. DHR is seeking to expand the system to automate the tracking of agency training and facilitating training programs and organizational management requests, which are essential to manage centralized training services; therefore, DHR will request \$50,000 investment for system enhancements and expanded user licenses.

Streamlined and Improved Work Processes

Since its creation, DHR's leadership and staff have focused on transforming human resources services by fostering a culture of continuous improvement and enhancing employee recruitment, development, and retention. The State of Delaware has launched strategic workforce initiatives, including a recruitment and marketing campaign, legislation for delayed retirement, advanced data analysis for retention, a standardized onboarding process, and flexible work schedules. Delaware is committed to refining these efforts for effectiveness.

Delaware also joined the National Governor's Association Skills-Based Hiring Initiative, which furthers DHR's shift from mandatory degree requirements to valuing relevant experience, expanding internships, and exploring AI for skills-based hiring and talent management. The revised annual DHR Workforce Report now features up-to-date statistical data, trend analysis, and the "Our Path Forward" section, providing recommendations and action plans for ongoing improvements. This ensures a thorough understanding of workforce dynamics and actionable insights for future enhancements.

DHR released the "State of Delaware Retirement Eligibility Report," revealing that nearly 25 percent of State employees are eligible to retire by June 30, 2027, and acknowledging that the State has had a stable retirement rate over the past 16 years, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. Enhancing the State's recruitment and retention efforts, DHR continues to implement strategic initiatives to address workforce challenges, including hiring incentives such as sign-on, referral, and retention bonuses, a comprehensive recruitment and marketing campaign, legislation encouraging delayed retirement in specific areas, and advanced data analysis to strengthen retention efforts.

In 2023, DHR updated its New Employee Onboarding Survey and Employee Exit Survey to provide critical information leading to improvements. The Onboarding Survey examines the job search and application experience, pre-arrival communications, initial impressions, work environment, culture, and supervisor support to ensure a positive start for new hires. The Exit Survey, now confidentially administered to all departing employees, collects detailed information on reasons for leaving, including wages, benefits, job satisfaction, and management. Central HR manages this data and conducts quarterly analyses to identify retention challenges and opportunities for organizational improvement.

Beginning in 2023, the GEAR Program Management Team began working with DHR to create 4 new classification series for project management, business analysis, Lean continuous improvement, and change management roles. In August 2024, these roles were published and made available to State agencies. This initiative will enable State agencies to leverage highly skilled professionals trained in continuous improvement methods and techniques. Agencies utilizing these roles are expected to achieve cost savings by reducing the need for contractual resources to manage projects and lead process improvement efforts. These roles also focus on generating efficiencies in the State's business processes by reducing non-value-added activities, managing projects effectively by utilizing State resources, and streamlining service delivery.

Drive Leadership Training Opportunities

Since 2021, DHR and GEAR have worked to enhance the State's internal capacity to promote, facilitate, and implement continuous improvement efforts by developing leadership and specialized operational excellence skills to lead and support those efforts. Training continues to be developed and made available to employees. In 2024, DHR, in partnership with GEAR, offered 2 cohorts of the Continuous Improvement Practitioner (CIP) Program, increasing the total number of graduates to 118 since its inception. The CIP Program provides training to employees to build knowledge and skills necessary to lead efforts with training in project management, Lean process improvement, and change management. In Fiscal Year 2024, DHR and GEAR received additional funding for training in the First State Quality Improvement Fund (FSQIF) through the State budget. This expanded funding supports the implementation of 2 new programs: 1) Project and Process Leadership (PPL) training, focusing on the people side of leadership skills crucial for fostering collaboration, driving innovation, and achieving goals and 2) Operational Excellence (OpEx) training providing specialized skills to existing practitioners through certificate programs that lead to industry-recognized credentials in agile, applied project management, business analysis, or Lean Six Sigma.

Project and Process Leadership (PPL) is a comprehensive program designed to expand on the training from the Continuous Improvement Practitioner (CIP) program, equipping participants with the knowledge, skills, and strategies to lead projects and teams effectively. The program focuses on 3 key areas: 1) Continuous Improvement Leadership: Understanding core leadership principles such as communication, motivation, conflict resolution, and decision-making; 2) Facilitation Skills: Cultivating high-performing teams through effective meeting facilitation, presentation skills, managing information, and

building stakeholder engagement; and 3) Strategic Thinking: Aligning project goals with organizational objectives, anticipating future challenges, and identifying opportunities for innovation and improvement.

The Operational Excellence (OpEx) Program builds upon the training offered under the CIP program by providing existing GEAR Field Team members the opportunity to complete one of four certificate programs in either agile, applied project management, business analysis, or lean six sigma. This advanced coursework results in the opportunity to achieve industry-recognized credentials and advance the State’s culture of continuous improvement.

The iLEAD Delaware Leadership Program, created to build future leaders, provides opportunities for employees who lead people and those who lead projects and process improvement initiatives. To date, 756 State employees have completed Leadership Essentials, and 24 individuals have completed the requirements of the Frontline Leadership certificate program, which requires over 40 hours of training. This program has 114 actively enrolled current, new, and aspiring leaders.

iLEAD
Leadership Training Paths
Building leaders who can lead teams to achieve excellence in state government.



There are leaders throughout State government in various roles, and DHR develops training to meet the needs of these State employees. In March 2024, DHR implemented the first Administrative Professional Curriculum consisting of 71 hours of training and 33 training courses covering critical areas such as professional compliance, communication, interpersonal skills, time management, and technology proficiency to empower participants to excel in their roles and contribute effectively to their organizations. This customer-focused training provides valuable knowledge to an underserved group of employees and benefits not only administrative professionals but also State agencies and their leadership.

Strengthen and Grow the GEAR P3 Awards

DHR manages statewide award programs to celebrate the accomplishments of State employees. Among these awards are the GEAR P3 Innovation and Efficiency Award and the GEAR P3 Trailblazer Award to honor exceptional State employees and teams who employ continuous improvement methodologies and effective project management techniques. The GEAR P3 awards were established by GEAR, and continue to be coordinated in partnership with DHR, and the private sector through the GEAR P3 Taskforce. Annually, these awards celebrate employees’ use of continuous improvement tools to excel in leadership, team dynamics, and communication, ultimately enhancing customer service and achieving tangible results. These awards are the pinnacle of the Governor’s Team Excellence Award Program. Award-winning projects showcase innovative, sustainable, and efficient business processes and services.

In 2024, the GEAR P3 Innovation & Efficiency Award recipients were awarded \$15,000, shared among team members, while those employees receiving the GEAR P3 Trailblazer Award each received \$1,500. The annual financial support for these awards includes a \$25,000 contribution from the private sector matched by a \$25,000 State contribution.

This year's GEAR P3 Innovation & Efficiency Award winners included 3 teams: 1) the DHR Agile Workspace Project Team, which, in collaboration with DTI, created 2 innovative, agile workspaces for DHR's flexible workforce; 2) the DHSS/DSS Unwinding Team, which processed over 85,000 Medicaid renewals; and 3) the DHSS Continuous Quality Improvement Team, which improved data efficiency and accuracy through a new medical records system.

Recipients of the GEAR P3 Trailblazer Award in 2024 included an individual who developed and implemented DHR's critical human resources training curricula, resulting in a 56 percent increase in compliance, and 3 teams: 1) one from DHSS that implemented the Connect Community Project to reduce loneliness in long-term care residents; 2) a cross-functional team from DHR and DTI that digitized 3 million documents and implemented DHR's electronic content management system; and 3) a DSCYF team that created a Comprehensive Review Tool for case review across divisions. As the State's capacity for process improvement grows, the number of nominations for the GEAR P3 Innovation & Efficiency Award is expected to rise.

[Incentivize the Delaware Award for Excellence and Commitment in State Service Award](#)

Since its inception in 1990, the Delaware Award for Excellence and Commitment in State Service, known as the "Employee of the Year" Award, has recognized outstanding employees. Before the 2009 recession, recipients of this statewide award received a \$3,000 monetary incentive. Nominees compete against Employees of the Quarter within their agencies. Up to five individuals or small teams of fewer than six are selected annually.

DHR has continued to streamline the Statewide Recognition Award Program which includes the Delaware Award for Excellence and Commitment in State Service, the Delaware Heroism Award, the Governor's Team Excellence awards that include the GEAR-P3 Innovation and Efficiency Award, the Commitment Award, and Champions Award, and the GEAR-P3 Trailblazer Award. With tight timelines for execution, DHR continues to streamline the application and selection processes. In addition, to retain top talent, DHR will advocate for a \$45,000 Statewide Employee Recognition budget in Fiscal Year 2026 to restore a \$1,200 monetary incentive for each recipient of the Delaware Award for Excellence and Commitment in State Service and provide financial support for the statewide recognition programs.

[Promoting a Respectful and Inclusive Workplace](#)

DHR is committed to advancing a workplace environment characterized by fairness, diversity, equity, and inclusivity and it continues to implement policies and practices to nurture a trauma-responsive atmosphere of respect and inclusivity. In 2024, DHR implemented initiatives and delivered programs supporting an accessible, respectful, and inclusive workplace for 14,000 Executive Branch employees.

DHR is dedicated to developing impactful and equitable statewide policies and procedures supporting enacted legislation and the Governor's initiatives. During FY 2024, DHR created and updated 97 policies and operating procedures, 9 templates, and 82 forms. Key developments included an Anti-Nepotism Policy assuring fair hiring practices for related employees within State agencies; a Bereavement Leave Policy supporting women and families during times of loss; an updated Military Leave Policy to provide State employees with 225 or 240 hours of paid military leave; an expanded Paid Volunteer Leave Policy to allow State employees to serve as mentors at public schools; the updated Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA) Policy to align with federal PWFA and PUMP for Nursing Mothers Act, protecting employees from discrimination and ensuring reasonable accommodations for pregnancy-related conditions.

DHR created enhanced reports and toolkits, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Toolkit found on DHR's ADA website, that provides employees with quick access to various topics and resources to enhance the inclusion and understanding of working with people with disabilities. The annual DHR Workforce Report was enhanced to include up-to-date statistical data and a comparative analysis of trends from previous years. The report includes a section outlining recommendations and action plans for continued improvement. This comprehensive approach ensures a thorough understanding of workforce dynamics and provides actionable insights for future enhancements.

DHR began updating statewide policies and procedures to make them accessible to employees, applicants, and the public under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). These same policies were also converted into Haitian Creole and Spanish, the 2 common languages spoken in Delaware in addition to English. These documents are available on DHR's website to create more inclusivity for these populations by making them more readable and available. The Statewide ADA Coordinator continues to conduct quarterly trainings about reasonable accommodations in the workplace and partnered with the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) to discuss the Americans with Disabilities Act, reasonable accommodations in the workplace, and its impact on having an inclusive workplace.

The Employee and Labor Relations team upgraded the Respectful Workforce and Anti-Discrimination (RWAD) policy to provide the State workforce with an improved form to address discrimination issues of protected classes in the workforce. Additionally, a Standards of Conduct (SOC) policy and form was developed to reduce improper use of the RWAD and to provide a mechanism for addressing discrimination issues for those not meeting the protected class requirement of the RWAD. These tools have helped address discrimination in the workplace.

The Office of Women’s Advancement and Advocacy (OWAA) enhanced its outreach and programming for State employees by conducting a comprehensive interest survey, receiving 1,417 responses. The survey highlighted priorities such as professional development, health and wellness, personal development, and financial literacy, with a preference for virtual and in-person programming. OWAA formed a programming workgroup of 217 women State employees to provide quarterly input. In response, OWAA launched a webinar series 2024 on topics like breast health, childcare, student loans, menopause, goal setting, and women’s history, attracting over 2,000 registrants. Additionally, OWAA created and distributed lactation room guidelines to aid state supervisors and managers in supporting lactating employees.

The Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion has collaborated with State agencies to form local diversity committees. These committees focus on identifying initiatives promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within State government workplaces. They play a crucial role in providing insights, feedback, and actionable recommendations to improve access and opportunities for all individuals, thereby fostering an equitable work environment. DHR DEI staff offer coaching sessions and logistical support to each committee lead, assisting in advancing various DEI initiatives.

To further DHR’s commitment to growth and education in the DEI field during Fiscal Year 2024, DHR organized 14 distinct Cultural Heritage Month Learning Opportunities that corresponded with the cultural calendar. These events addressed a wide array of topics, from Hispanic Heritage Month to Martin Luther King Jr. Day, and each session attracted an average attendance of 200 participants. The Talent Management Director moderated a panel discussion titled A Celebration of Hispanic Heritage in the Workplace for Hispanic Heritage Month featuring the President and CEO at the Latin American Community Center, the Supervisor of Student Services and Equity Initiatives at Cape Henlopen School District and the Director of Community Engagement at Nemours Children’s Health.

Contain Health Care Costs

As health care costs continue to climb, the DHR Statewide Benefits Office (SBO), under the guidance of the State Employee Benefits Committee (SEBC), continues to develop strategies to engage Group Health Insurance Plan (GHIP) members to contain health care costs for State employees, retirees, pensioners, and their dependents. To address a projected Fiscal Year 2025 deficit of \$232.2 million, the SEBC approved a 27 percent increase in State health plan premiums (rates) which became effective July 1, 2024, for active employees and non-Medicare retirees and will be effective January 1, 2025, for Medicare retirees. In addition, House Bill 330 with House Amendment 1 was passed by the House and Senate and was signed by the Governor on September 30, 2024, to increase the amount of the annual appropriation to pre-fund future State employee retiree health insurance as recommended by the Retiree Healthcare Benefits Advisory Subcommittee of the SEBC. Like other required contributions to the Other Post-Employment Benefits Fund (OPEB) Fund, this appropriation must be included in the review of, and plan for, proposed expenditures that the Director of the Office of Management and Budget submits to the Governor and in the Governor's Budget Appropriation Bill. This Act also revises existing law to allow the current practice of making the annual payment to the OPEB Fund of 1 percent of the operating budget appropriations for the prior fiscal year in a supplemental appropriation bill. Investment earnings on the OPEB Fund partly offset rising retiree health care costs.

The State projects that health care costs will increase between 6.4 and 8.5 percent in Fiscal Year 2025. Pharmaceutical costs are trended to increase between 11 and 15 percent in Fiscal Year 2025, primarily due to the coverage and continual expansion of weight loss medications and other GLP-1 drugs. The State must continue its strategies to offer programs to manage health and chronic conditions and engage GHIP members through education and training as health care costs cannot be addressed solely through rate increases.

A workplace is an important setting for supporting health and wellness. The State has prioritized increasing member communications and engagement, such as providing educational materials and resources on the management of prevalent chronic conditions and preventable diseases in a monthly newsletter sent to all benefit-eligible employees, a biannual newsletter sent to all benefit-eligible retirees, as well as working with health plan administrators to ensure members are aware of the numerous resources they have available to them through their benefits to manage conditions and provide support. Health plan administrators have also increased communications with members on appropriate care sites and

prioritized educating members on their ability to lower out-of-pocket expenses, as well as expenses to the State, by visiting preferred locations for laboratory testing, imaging, and acute medical episodes. In addition to these efforts, the State experienced another successful benefit open enrollment period for 2024, with 84.2 percent of benefit-eligible State employees actively participating in the open enrollment process by editing or confirming their benefits selections.

On July 1, 2023, the State began offering a solution for non-Medicare prescription plan participants to help address the GHIP's significant pharmaceutical spend. This solution is an independent third-party organization that the current prescription plan vendor has partnered with to offer cost savings for specialty medications. The program leverages drug manufacturer copay assistance programs and allows participating members to get specialty medications at no cost. Members can choose to opt in or out of the program anytime. This solution provided significant cost savings to the GHIP in Fiscal Year 2024, with an overall net savings of \$12.3 million. The Statewide Benefits Office will continue advertising this benefit to eligible members, with the goal being to increase voluntary enrollment and provide savings to members and the plan.

The State moved coverage of bariatric surgeries solely to a special surgery benefit with a surgeon in the benefit network on July 1, 2023, meaning that bariatric surgery is no longer covered under the Aetna or Highmark Delaware non-Medicare health plans. This special surgery benefit is a comprehensive surgical program that provides personalized concierge experience from dedicated care advocates and access to excellent health care through a network of credentialed Surgeons of Excellence for planned, non-emergent surgeries. Enrollment in the special surgery benefit is automatic for individuals enrolled in a State of Delaware Aetna or Highmark Delaware non-Medicare health plan. The special surgery benefit negotiates a single cost (bundled rate) for entire surgical procedures, resulting in savings for the State of Delaware.

On July 1, 2023, the State began covering weight loss medications for non-Medicare health plan members. For the Fiscal Year 2024 plan year, this cost the State an additional \$14.2 million, excluding any rebates received from these drugs. The State anticipates the increase in utilization of these drugs will continue and cost the State approximately \$35.2 million in Fiscal Year 2025, excluding rebates. The SEBC and SBO are continuing to evaluate benefit programs that would address and reduce the cost associated with these medications and the overall prevalence of obesity in the GHIP population.

For several years now, the SEBC has worked alongside the General Assembly and other committees to identify options that assure that retired State employees retain access to high-quality and affordable health care while also making progress toward reducing the State's unfunded liability for retiree health care that threatens the long-term sustainability of these important benefits. On December 31, 2022, the previous 5-year Medicare Special Medicfill Supplement contract expired. In early 2021, the SEBC competitively bid the administration of the State Group Health Insurance Plans offered to State employees non-Medicare and Medicare retirees. In early 2022, the SEBC awarded Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Delaware a contract to provide Medicare retiree health care under a full replacement Medicare Advantage plan, beginning January 1, 2023. Following a legal challenge, a Superior Court Justice issued an interim ruling and order to halt the implementation of the Medicare Advantage Plan. After this order, the State negotiated with Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Delaware to extend the previous Medicare Special Medicfill Supplement plan through December 31, 2024. At the March 2024 SEBC meeting, the SEBC voted to approve a new Medicare Supplement Plan RFP recommendation to invite Highmark Delaware to negotiate for an upcoming Medicare Supplement Plan contract. This contract will result in an award for an initial 2-year term effective January 1, 2025, through December 31, 2026, with an optional one-year period extension. This plan is identical to the design of the current Special Medicfill Medicare Supplement Plan. Following this vote, the Delaware Supreme Court voted in the State's favor to overturn the Superior Court ruling.

Senate Bill 29, signed by the Governor, created the Retiree Healthcare Benefits Advisory Subcommittee (RHBAS), a Subcommittee of the SEBC, to conduct public meetings and engage in public comment about current and future State retiree health care benefits while taking into consideration the previous work of the SEBC and the Retiree Benefits Study Committee. The RHBAS issued a report of recommendations in January 2024 based on discussions throughout 2023 related to retiree health care and overall employee benefits. As a result of this report, 7 bills were filed in the 152nd General Assembly that ensure the continual coverage of high-quality health care for retirees, changes to the structure and authority of the SEBC, increases in OPEB funding, changes in state share percentages for new employees, and pensioner coordination of benefits (COB) policy. Most of these bills have been signed by the Governor, and the SBO will continue to monitor and implement them as appropriate.

Realizing that navigating health care can be challenging, in 2024, DHR's Statewide Benefits Office (SBO) created new website content for Men's* Health, Women's* Health, and LGBTQIA+ Health. The information is provided on the health plan pages and designed to assist GHIP members with their health needs. The website content continues to evolve as benefits

are added. (Note: **In this context, “men” and “women” refer to sex assigned at birth or noted on a birth certificate, not gender identity. Content may or may not be applicable.*)

DHR’s Statewide Benefits Office developed and implemented training and communication strategies to engage GHIP members, including educating enrolled members about benefit plans, appropriate care sites, member testimonials, high-quality/high-value providers, preventive care, and wellness/care management programs. Communication strategies included education using online and instructor-led training, monthly newsletters, targeted emails, and various webpages with condition prevention and management resources on areas such as diabetes, weight management, behavioral health/emotional well-being, cancer, and musculoskeletal pain. Additionally, SBO launched the Get the Facts on What’s Happening communications campaign in December 2023 to increase transparency and awareness among employees and retirees of what’s being discussed related to the GHIP at the SEBC and SEBC Subcommittee meetings and actions taken by the SEBC.

Technology Innovation

Electronic Signature Adoption Across State Agencies

DelSign, powered by Adobe Sign, has been fully implemented as an enterprise solution supported by a cost recovery model to sustain ongoing operations. Currently, DelSign maintains active contracts with 10 State agencies, serving a diverse user base of over 240 employees. Its seamless integration into core productivity software such as Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Outlook, and Teams empowers users to manage signature requests directly within familiar applications. The recent Single Sign-On (SSO) integration with identity management ensures compliance with rigorous State standards and policies, enhancing accessibility and security.

Moreover, DelSign has been at the forefront of innovation through strategic integrations with major State-hosted platforms such as Salesforce, ServiceNow, and the Microsoft Power Platform. These integrations significantly bolster the functionality of these cloud solutions by incorporating robust electronic signature capabilities. This proactive approach not only enhances operational efficiency but also underscores DelSign's commitment to optimizing document workflows across diverse government agencies, driving forward the mission of achieving a more efficient and responsive public sector.

Since its inception, DelSign facilitated more than 9,000 electronic document transactions, resulting in cost savings exceeding \$450,000. DelSign’s integration for Single Sign-On, Microsoft Office, Teams ecosystems, and third-party applications underscores its pivotal role in driving adoption and further operational efficiencies within the government sector.

Information Technology Efficiency

Delaware has adopted a standardized Information Technology (IT) services delivery model with shared services either delivered or brokered by DTI to maximize the benefits of Information Technology Centralization (ITC). DTI developed a plan that defines the delivery strategy for moving State government to commoditized enterprise IT services while maintaining a system for supporting agency-specific needs. The goal is a secure State computing environment maintained by right-sized IT resources and solutions that are financially supported in an equitable way which also funds future investments in IT innovation.

The following sections highlight the move toward a shared services cost model that establishes an annual rate per user for Secure End User Services (SEUS). This model streamlines the delivery of core IT commodities, pursues increased visibility, enhanced controls for risk prevention and mitigation and provides employees with equitable access, support, equipment, software, and security to be able to do their work in an evolving IT-driven environment.

IT Centralization (ITC)

In 2021, DTI refocused its strategy from an agency-by-agency ITC effort to concentrate on how best to deliver a highly secure, equitably provisioned computing environment. The resulting comprehensive Secure End User Services (SEUS) strategy and associated cost model provide stable technology and predictable billing to State agencies based on actual usage. In April 2022, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Department of Human Resources served as the pilot agencies for SEUS. As part of this effort, DTI established a repeatable process and standard templates for data gathering and communication, including lessons learned. Beginning in 2023, centralization efforts for the Delaware State Housing

Authority (DSHA) were launched and completed by the end of 2024. This effort ensures the DSHA network is secure and functioning in a manner that is aligned with DTI Architecture Standards and best practices.

Development and implementation of the shared services cost model, in collaboration with OMB, reflecting the total cost of ownership of IT services is essential to moving ITC forward. It forms the basis of a strategy for continued IT service improvement and is crucial for Delaware centralized IT to be self-sustaining and right sized to support digital government. Considerations were made to the product, service, and personnel costs driving the fixed annual rate for the consumption of SEUS and the fiscal impact to agency consumers.

Secure End User Services (SEUS)

Secure End User Services (which currently includes email/collaboration, enterprise voice and security services) is the first IT package to transition to the new shared services cost model with the following benefits and features:

- Maximizes security compliance.
- Uses Microsoft Office 365, SEUS’s productivity and collaboration tool, which is central to transitioning from a capital expense (device-based software) to an operating expense (per-user-per-year subscription Software-as-a-Service) model which makes IT service costs more predictable and scalable. Delaware completed Phases 1 and 2 of onboarding agencies to Microsoft Office 365’s Government Cloud-based modern suite of collaboration, communication, and productivity tools this year and it is a feature of SEUS.
- Includes cyber security monitoring, training, and authenticated user identity and access management.
- Provides licensing, support and access to enterprise voice devices and applications.
- Assures a predictive, consumption-based cost model for budget planning.

Under the SEUS subscription model, costs are based on a per-user annual consumption rate, tied to a service agreement that provides agencies with clear performance metrics. At the time of this report, Fiscal Year 2025 SEUS contracts for partner agencies were put in place and monthly billing per the shared services cost model commenced with the Fiscal Year 2025 billing cycle. Over the next fiscal year, DTI will be evaluating and refining the current suite of SEUS offerings to determine the best path forward.

Enterprise Digital Government: Single Sign-On for State Workers, Residents and Visitors

Delawareans have a view that State agencies collectively are “the government” and thus have a corresponding expectation that they will be able to access services in a seamless manner. Digital services have been deployed historically at an agency/division level in a non-integrated manner. Delaware is moving rapidly towards implementing a user-centric digital government strategy that delivers a consistent and intuitive user experience. Many government services are accessible online — and many others should be — allowing residents and visitors access anytime, from anywhere, on any device. The State has migrated services to the Internet but without an enterprise strategy. Instead, services must be sought out online from various agencies. Opening government to individuals and businesses, and breaking down the traditional barriers, encourages innovation while increasing efficiency and productivity for everyone.

Delaware implemented a single sign-on identity and access management solution with identity proofing to facilitate the launch of a single portal, called *Go DE*, for resident and visitor access to digital State services, similar to the Delaware One Stop portal for businesses. The vision is for a universal directory where anyone can register and prove their identity to conduct business with State agencies under that authenticated profile. Initially, Delaware onboarded State and school employees to Delaware ID, the access and identity management tenant for State workers. A larger initiative makes the resident and visitor solution *My Delaware* available for the public to create and maintain authenticated digital identities to consume State digital government services that will become available on the *Go DE* portal. DTI has onboarded 70 applications and 101,000 unique users to date and adoption continues to grow.

DTI and Department of State’s Government Information Center continue to work together, along with others, as collaborative partners to develop a strategy to integrate existing systems and deploy new systems into a modern enterprise platform. This includes several technology projects that support the digital government platform: an underlying customer relationship management application, single sign-on authentication, and identity proofing (State worker phase completed; resident and visitor platform operational), email marketing application, data management and analytics tool, and centralized

online payment tool that can assume responsibility for the legacy Govolution payment solution being sunset in 2025. An enterprise digital government access model built on a Cloud platform that easily connects and interfaces with existing backend systems enterprise-wide is a key component to enabling increased resident and visitor self-service and overall satisfaction. With the right strategic partners, Delaware can determine a course that leads to transformation from the legacy brick-and-mortar government services model to digital government experiences that meet current and future customer expectations. DTI continues to partner with Department of State, Department of Finance, Department of Human Resources, and the Office of the State Treasurer to further the digital government strategy, with support from the Office of the Governor.

Digital Government Go DE Platform Foundation

Currently, every Delaware State agency maintains its own web presence. Residents and visitors use the Delaware.gov website to find and navigate to a variety of web pages to procure state products and services. The Governor-sponsored Digital Government Platform Foundation program, known as *Go DE*, calls for a uniform, one-stop approach to streamline access to agency offerings via a secure and personalized experience. With an opportunity for all State agencies to participate on the platform, partnership with business, technology, external vendors, and consumers is key to the program's success. Innovative solutions and best practices applied by both Delaware State agencies and various states throughout the country provide direction for the development of a new technology stack including a purchasing cart, secure single sign-on, and mobile capabilities.

Delaware wants residents and visitors to be at the center of everything it does. The design and functionality of Delaware's digital government experience must be well-crafted, intuitive, accessible, and offer fast and focused transactions that result in a satisfying experience. Delivering on this outcome requires a commitment to the on-going evolution of Delaware's digital platform, consumer interests, and needs. Agency programs highlight both the demand for an improved digital experience and an increase in customer usage and satisfaction. In addition, user experience research, application and transactional data analysis, and resident dialog will drive priorities and expectations. The culmination of this multi-layered technology and end user access platform will result in a transformative experience for Delaware's residents and visitors by providing digital access to an increasing number of government services.

Making these transactions easier for Delawareans and visitors, and simplifying maintenance for agency staff, will improve the quality of interactions. The Digital Government Platform Foundation Program achieved several major milestones this year with the Release 1 implementation of *Pay with Go DE* and go.delaware.gov. The *Pay with Go DE* payment engine is now live with 2 integrated applications. An additional 28 hosted web forms with integrated applications are in development or agency acceptance testing. Through the remainder of 2024, use of *Pay with Go DE* will significantly increase with the launch of *School Pay* for several districts and charters, expanded use of web forms, and payment integration with multiple applications. Reacting to the needs of the agencies, development is also underway to support hosted forms and applications with payments, payment links, partial and scheduled payments to be made available by end of year 2024. The availability of these solutions will extend the reach of *Go DE* for agencies, residents, and visitors.

In addition to implementation of *Pay with Go DE*, efforts have been made to assess and develop digital solutions for the following opportunities:

- Migrating manual forms and payments to an ecommerce solution, for example, agency "collection" functions, school payments, and paper-based application/license fees.
- Discovering new opportunities to support agency initiatives that impact the delivery of products and services to residents and visitors (e.g., Reimagining Service Delivery at State Service Centers, Comprehensive Background Check).
- Improving fiscal reconciliation processes for e-commerce transactions by educating staff on Fiserv reports, data available through *Go DE*, and producing standard reports.

By September 2024, the *Go DE* offering of *School Pay* web forms will show immediate impact to the participating schools, their parents, guardians, and donors. *School Pay* will reach approximately 25,000 students registered in K-12 (36 individual schools) and higher education (i.e., DTCC's 4 campuses). This is a great example of identifying an opportunity and delivering a digital solution to reduce the number of payments made by cash and check, decreasing administrative responsibility for funds, and allowing end users to transact from any device.

Finally, development of the *Go DE* portal is nearing completion and will soon enter usability and user experience testing. From the *Go DE* portal, residents and visitors will have access to engage in State agency transactions and services. When authenticating using single sign-on, the user will have secure access to their state transaction history (when *Pay with Go DE* is used), status of submitted forms, and set personal preferences. The implementation date for this functionality is pending noted test results with a goal of fall of 2024.

Closing the Digital Divide in Delaware

Digital Accessibility is an important part of the digital government strategy. The U.S. Department of Justice (the regulatory and enforcement agency of Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act) promulgated *Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability; Accessibility of Web Information and Services of State and Local Government Entities*, effective June 24, 2024, which set requirements for digital accessibility compliance by April 24, 2026, for state websites and mobile application content that is not exempt from remediation. Removing barriers for persons with disabilities to ensure access to digital content is a priority and the State is moving forward with digital accessibility compliance efforts through an investment of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. In coordination with the Office of the Governor, Department of State Government Information Center, and the State Council for Persons with Disabilities, DTI developed a plan to improve inclusiveness and access to digital government services. DTI retained a vendor to:

- Build a statewide accessibility strategy and program;
- Automate testing across DTI's digital portfolio;
- Assess priority websites to fast-track remediation;
- Develop third party contracting policies; and
- Launch a statewide accessibility education program to raise awareness and train developers/designers on how to spot issues/maintain compliance.

Expansion of Broadband Access Across Delaware

Expanding access to high-speed internet across Delaware is a priority. There are 3 federal funding streams at work in the State through which the Delaware Broadband Office expects to achieve universal high-speed internet access. These funding streams include:

- \$33 million in ARPA funding to support wired broadband infrastructure expansion to be continued through the federal Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program. This work began in the summer of 2022 and will be completed by the end of 2025. At the conclusion of ARPA, DTI will have connected nearly 6,900 previously unserved broadband serviceable locations (BSLs) using this funding.
- \$13 million awarded by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to the federal Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) to connect homes to broadband in designated geographic rural areas. This funding is directly administered by the FCC without involvement by DTI or the Delaware Broadband Office. Should the program succeed, it will connect 3,100 currently unserved BSLs. The RDOF funded construction must be completed by 2028.
- \$107 million from the federal Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program, created by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to plan and implement broadband expansion between 2024 and 2028. This program can be used to connect unserved homes and to upgrade connections to homes with a lower-speed connection. While this program requires significant federal requirements before gaining access to the funding, Delaware is currently the fastest moving state at completing the federal requirements and is currently in the subgrantee application phase of awarding the construction programs to internet service providers. BEAD will deploy internet infrastructure to nearly 6,000 homes, which comprise all remaining known unserved broadband serviceable locations in Delaware.

DTI is also expecting to receive up to \$12 million in federal funding to promote digital equity priorities. This funding stream was created by the Digital Equity Act, passed as part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Delaware will receive 3 tranches

of funding over 3 years, according to a statutory formula. Delaware has received its first tranche of funding of \$4.8 million, which must be used within 5 years. Subject to federal approval, Delaware plans to use this funding as follows:

- \$1.2 million for workforce development, given through an MOU to the Delaware Departments of Labor and Education to expand existing technology training programs with assistive technologies, device access, and wraparound services.
- \$1.9 million to the Delaware Division of Libraries to hire and train digital navigators to help constituents access and utilize the Internet. The estimated impact will be 2,000, mostly low-income, Delawareans served per quarter.
- \$1 million for a competitive grant program for non-profit organizations and local governments to create/expand digital equity-related activities and programs.

Judiciary Reform

Modernizing the Registration of Trade Names, Partnerships, and Associations Process

Since 1909, any person or association doing business using a trade name had to register with the Prothonotary of the Superior Court in each county in which the person or association conducts business (25 Del. Laws Ch. 146). Presumably, the purpose of the law was to ensure that any plaintiff seeking to serve process on a business using a trade name could identify the individual(s) responsible for the business. This process required individuals registering a trade name to either mail their request and fee payment or physically visit a courthouse, and then continue with an online registration process with the Department of Finance, Division of Revenue.

A citizen reached out to the GEAR website with a suggestion, saying that it would be more efficient and business-friendly to move this process to the Department of Finance, Division of Revenue and put it fully online. The Judicial Branch and the Department of Finance, Division of Revenue met to discuss this suggestion and agreed that modern technology has made the purpose of having the registration process in the Superior Court unnecessary and inefficient. All agreed that it made sense to move the trade name registration process to the Department of Finance, Division of Revenue as part of its collaborative online, One Stop process for businesses, making it easier for individuals and entities to register a trade name.

Legislation was required to change the process through introduction of Senate Bill 291, which had the support of the GEAR Board, the Department of Finance, Division of Revenue and the Judicial Branch. It passed the General Assembly on June 30, 2024, and has been signed by the Governor. Having an effective date in February 2025 enables the Judicial and Executive Branches to provide sufficient notice to individuals and entities currently registered in the Superior Court that they will be required to re-register their trade name as part of the now modernized yearly business licensing process.

CASCADE: Integrated Enhancement(s) to Judicial Systems Applications and Processes

The Judicial Branch evaluated the existing e-filing, case management, and document management solutions used across the courts, and numerous critical issues were evident. The current e-filing and case management systems were built on outdated technology, expensive to maintain, and complex. In addition, inconsistent software, technologies, and processes were used between the Courts.

The Pandemic of 2020 required a sharp and sudden change of business. Relying more heavily on technology and remote applications, the Judicial Branch realized an urgency for replacing and unifying all e-filing, case management and document management solutions across all Courts with a single vendor solution. The Judicial Branch received approval for \$15 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for one-time costs associated with implementing such a solution. The completion of the project will improve the way the Delaware Judicial Branch conducts business day to day and the quality and convenience of the services we can offer the citizens of Delaware. The implementation of enterprise level technologies supports a consistent and efficient experience for staff, partners and the public, and enables better tracking, analysis and synthesis of court data to best serve the public and partner agencies. The improved technologies will allow people to more frequently access the court without stepping foot in the physical facilities, should another pandemic occur.

Integrated planning and implementation efforts for civil cases, supporting technologies, sunseting of replaced systems, and criminal process reviews are expected to yield outcomes which will be measured and communicated to both internal and external stakeholders through the lifecycle of the CASCADE initiative.

Successes to Date

- Secured ARPA funding for civil implementation.
- Executed the contract for civil e-filing and case management solutions effective July 1, 2024.
- Established meetings between the Judicial Information Center (JIC) team and leadership from the Courts included in Phase 1 to review the specifics of the project scope, timeline, and resource needs, as well as planning out communicate efforts with the courts.
- Developed a CASCADE website to provide information and project updates throughout the initiative.
- Produced an 8-minute video describing the project that is available to anyone online.

Criminal Case Management and e-Filing

It was the original intent of this initiative to include criminal case management needs. Due to the size and scope of this initiative, the cost and available funds of the project, and a review of statewide criminal justice information systems, this part of the effort has been deferred until the civil phases are complete. However, criminal solutions cannot remain stagnant for the next 5 years and the JIC is committed to moving some criminal case management efforts forward in parallel.

Next Steps

- Phase 1 will include the Justice of the Peace Court, Court of Common Pleas, and Superior Court. This will take approximately 2 and a half years, with completion expected in winter of 2026.
- Phase 2 will focus on Family Court. This phase would begin in winter of 2026 and run into 2028.
- There will be an option to add a third phase to expand the C-Track CMS solution to our Supreme Court and Court of Chancery, to be decided later.

e-Courtrooms

The Delaware Judicial Information Center embarked on a project to enhance courtroom technology, particularly focusing on hi-tech courtrooms capable of facilitating remote and hybrid hearings.

Courtrooms have been upgraded to include the following features:

- Improved audio quality with new microphones, speakers, amplifiers, and signal processing.
- Integrated video systems with monitors strategically placed at counsel tables, witness stands, podiums, judges' benches, and jury boxes.
- Installed low-profile monitors that do not obstruct the line of sight for courtroom participants.
- Enhanced connectivity for counsel to use laptops and other devices for visual presentations.
- Implemented annotation functionality and printing to mark up and capture images as part of the official record.
- Managed multi-angle video feeds, allowing clear views of the judge, witness, podium, and counsel tables.
- Integrated Zoom functionality, enabling the hosting and control of virtual meetings directly from the courtroom system.

Successes

- Secured ARPA funding.
- Successfully upgraded a total of 33 courtrooms between May 2022 and July 2024, to meet the specifications of hi-tech courtrooms. Of the 33 courtrooms, 31 of them were upgraded with ARPA funding; the remaining 2 utilized minor capital improvement funds.

Next Steps

The implementation phase of this initiative is essentially complete. The next step will be effective maintenance of the technologies.

Criminal Justice Systems Evaluation Committee

The Criminal Justice Systems Evaluation Committee was established in September of 2023 in accordance with Section 19 of the Fiscal Year 2024 Bond Bill (SB160). The committee is co-chaired by the Deputy State Court Administrator/Chief Information Officer for the Delaware Judicial Branch and the Executive Director of DELJIS.

Though funding was appropriated, it was particularly important to the committee to avoid prematurely contracting with a consultant for information that could be captured by the committee. Preliminary efforts remain focused on outlining the current state of all criminal justice IT systems and sources of data within the State and understanding the gaps in these systems that affect how data is accessed and analyzed. While this has not yet led to an expenditure of the funds allocated to this committee, it is expected that the outcomes determined through this evaluation will require significant technology investments.

In 2024, the committee met monthly, making progress in several areas. The committee is approximately 60 percent complete on a system diagram that will illustrate all criminal justice systems and data sources and how they are integrated. The initial diagram will be high-level and will then be leveraged to further map out databases, what data is in each source, what data can be shared and analyzed, and what data must be restricted to comply with rules and laws. The committee is actively exploring any restrictions presented by Delaware Code that prevent certain criminal data from being comingled for reporting and analysis, and whether legislative action would be needed to generate desired reporting and analysis. The committee is starting to review existing MOUs about inter-agency data sharing to better understand what volume of data is being shared into the CJIS system as the central repository.

Reducing the Debt Burden for Ex-Offenders

Reducing the debt burden for ex-offenders, in combination with more efficient and centralized fee collection processes, has been a major focus of the Judicial Branch since the advent of GEAR. Support from the General Assembly and the Governor has resulted in significant and continuing progress during the past 3 years.

It is not only inefficient to spend resources on the collection of fees from people who cannot afford to pay, but the imposed debts can add challenges to the lives of average citizens, rather than supporting those who may be trying to reform, rehabilitate, or otherwise improve their lives.

Many statutory fees have been added over the years to fund state and local services with the courts imposing and collecting these fees. Revenues support many critical services such as volunteer ambulance services, court security, transportation, and law enforcement. These fees can quickly add up for those who find themselves in the criminal justice system. People who are indigent or of modest means often face the unrealistic requirement to pay off overwhelming fees while struggling to pay for housing, food, childcare, or other necessities of life.

While fee reform provides some cost avoidance to the State, the true efficiencies will come from more successful reentries, rehabilitation efforts, and productive lives for citizens without the burden of unreasonable and overwhelming debt to the State.

Previous Year Successes

HB 244 with House Amendment 2 of the 151st General Assembly was signed by the Governor on October 3, 2022, which sought to help those struggling with the negative impacts of criminal justice fees. The bill instituted a number of reforms. The supervision fee for Probation and Parole, the Public Defender fee, late fees, convenience fees, and criminal fines and fees for juveniles in Family Court were eliminated. The suspension of driver licenses for non-payment of criminal justice fines and fees was also eliminated. The Criminal Legal System Imposed Debt Study Group was created to review best practices and continue reform efforts. The study group submitted a report with findings and recommendations on “the appropriateness of the State’s financial structure to support government and non-profit functions with funds charged to court users and make recommendation on a phased plan to reduce the dependence on those funds.” The recommendations included:

- Eliminating the suspension of driver licenses for non-payment of criminal justice fines and fees.
- Creating the Criminal Legal System Imposed Debt Study Group to review best practices and continue reform efforts; the study group submitted a report with findings and recommendations on “the appropriateness of the State’s financial structure to support government and non-profit functions with funds charged to court users and make recommendations on a phased plan to reduce the dependence on those funds.”

FY 2024 Successes

In FY 2024, there were 4 bills introduced with recommendations made by the study group. Three of those 4 bills passed, including SB 282, SB 283 and SB 284 of the 152nd General Assembly. These initiatives were recommended by the Criminal Legal System Imposed Debt Study Group, chaired by Representative Sean Lynn and Senator Darius Brown. SB 282 repealed the \$100 Senior Trust Fund Fee, the \$50 Interstate Compact Fee, and the 15 percent SARTEP Fund Surcharge imposed on criminal defendants. All outstanding balances are eliminated. The Senior Trust Fund Fee was a \$100 fee assessed if the victim was aged 62 years or older. Annual revenue totaled \$8,333 in FY 2022 and \$9,522 in FY 2023. This fee was likely not administered uniformly since it requires knowing the victim’s age and is so seldomly assessed. The Interstate Compact Fee was a \$50 application fee to transfer supervision into or from the State of Delaware to defray costs under the Compact. Creating a financial barrier to transferring probation may stymie people’s ability to rehabilitate and grow after justice-involvement. Less than \$25,000 was collected in FY 2023 through the Interstate Compact Fee. The Substance Abuse, Rehabilitation, Treatment, Education and Prevention (SARTEP) Fee was a 15 percent surcharge on any fine, penalty or forfeiture of applicable cases involving a possession or delivery of controlled substances and DUI. According to Code, the SARTEP Fund was to be used “only for the provision of and coordination of substance abuse rehabilitation treatment, education and/or prevention services”. In FY 2022 the fee revenue for SARTEP totaled \$31,439.

SB 283 repealed the DELJIS Fund Fee and eliminates outstanding balances. The DELJIS fee was a \$1 assessment on any criminal or traffic conviction to cover basic DELJIS operation costs. The DELJIS fee was intended to provide DELJIS with an additional \$260,000 in operating costs, but in FY 2022 only \$116,255 was collected. DELJIS could only spend annually what was collected.

SB 284 authorized the Courts to discharge outstanding balances owed on the Department of Correction Supervision Fee and the Public Defender Fee, both of which were previously repealed by HB 244 of the 151st General Assembly.

House Bill 391 was the fourth legislative proposal that was introduced in the 152nd General Assembly. HB 391 did not pass. Had this Bill passed it would have eliminated the following fees: Court Security Fee, a \$10 fee that pays for court security positions and equipment; Criminal Justice Council Videophone Fee, a \$1 fee that covers the cost of videophone services; Department of Justice Victim Rights Fund Fee, a surcharge on seat belt violations that goes toward victim notifications and victim services. The fiscal note for HB 391 exceeded the \$3.3 million dollars to maintain the critical services that the revenue received through these fees cover.

GEAR FIELD TEAM (GFT)

Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS)

Redesign Service Delivery and Improve Client Experiences at State Service Centers

There are 15 state service centers distributed across Delaware, which serve clients by providing them with a local location where they can apply for various services such as food assistance, cash benefits, health care, and housing. The genesis of this project originated in the desire to improve service delivery and the entire client experience within state service centers through concerted efforts of inter-divisional staff along with professional external program managers. There are various goals of this project, including:

1. Remodel internal workspaces to make them better able to meet client needs and expectations.
2. Standardize all work processes that were documented between 2022 and 2024 to ensure that all processes are performed uniformly at each service center.
3. Install a new client queuing system at each state service center.
4. Improve the automated telephone voice prompts when clients call in to a state service center.
5. Enhance the website portal when a client engages the State over the internet.
6. Merge the Division of Social Services (DSS) and Division of State Service Centers (DSSC).
7. Modernize computer and telephone hardware at each service center.
8. Integrate Delaware Learning Center training materials into training of merged DSS and DSSC staff.
9. Incorporate a universal eligibility screening tool to better meet client needs and expectations.

This project is a multi-year initiative, though specific improvements to service delivery and the client experience are being realized already.

There are several project deliverables that can be considered complete, some of which will produce measurable outcomes, which include:

- Surveying the community for its input regarding the current state of service delivery at state service centers.
- Identifying gaps in service excellence to be considered as the project objectives.
- Conducting town hall meetings with the public and community leaders to ensure the project was on track to deliver the changes needed to make the client's state service center experience better.
- Engaging vendors to begin planning an automated client queuing system that will better route clients and further improve the clients' experience while at a state service center.
- Merging the Division of State Service Centers (DSSC) and the Division of Social Services (DSS), which has begun.
- Training state service center staff in a more efficient and effective client centered approach, which has begun.
- Documenting the current state and future state client front desk experience in a visual process map.

Employ Data-Driven Decision Making by Using a Department-Wide Dashboard

The DHSS dashboard report collects metrics from the department's 10 divisions and presents the data in easy-to-understand bar and line charts, including year-over-year data when available. Key operational measures that have been reported over the prior year include staff vacancy rates, fleet vehicle usage, IT support provided, Medicaid reimbursements, facility maintenance requests fulfilled, the census at the State's acute and long-term care facilities, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollment, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) enrollment, and child support payments. The DHSS Secretary and other department leaders receive the monthly report.

The project originated with the desire to employ data-driven decision making using key operational metrics in the form of a departmental dashboard. The scope of the project includes:

1. Engaging every DHSS division
2. Identifying key metrics that tell the story of the work being performed
3. Building and maintaining the data repository—in the dashboard where data is captured and reported monthly using a shared Microsoft Teams workspace
4. Packaging the report and distributing it monthly to the Cabinet Secretary and other leaders

The project is ongoing and has assisted decision makers in spotting trends as to what’s happening in the department, which has been a valuable resource to leadership.

Before the DHSS dashboard project was initiated, the Secretary and other leaders would need to review 10 separate data sources from each division to understand the department’s current state condition. The DHSS dashboard project used continuous improvement thinking by bundling key performance indicators from each data source into 1 report, thus creating resource efficiencies.

Save Nearly \$3 Million Dollars by Identifying and Eliminating Underutilized Blocked Vehicles

The DHSS fleet optimization project identifies underused blocked (assigned) vehicles, calculates their expense, and persuades leaders to change their cost designation from blocked to pool site vehicles. A blocked vehicle is not shared among operational units and is billed for a full month’s use regardless of how often it is used. A pool vehicle is shared among operational units and is billed only when it is used. If a vehicle is driven very often, the better cost designation is to designate it as a blocked vehicle. If a vehicle is not driven often, the more cost-effective choice is to designate it as a pool vehicle.

When the DHSS fleet optimization project began, DHSS had more than 400 blocked vehicles. As a result of reviewing the vehicle needs and showing DHSS leaders the excess capacity of blocked vehicles, the number of blocked vehicles has been reduced by 74 to 332.

Because vehicles are retained for 7 years, the decrease in 74 blocked vehicles translates into cost savings exceeding an estimated \$2,900,000 to the State over the 7 year lease period. This is significant because money saved can be reinvested toward delivering services to Delawareans in need.

Improve Access to Long-Term Services & Supports Through Strategic Resource Usage

The Division of Services for Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities (DSAAPD) is carrying out a strategic effort to ensure timely access to community-based long-term care services and supports by improving efficiency and reducing the cost-of-service provision. Through consultation with national experts in the field of aging and disabilities, DSAAPD has developed a multi-tiered action plan to infuse person-centered practices in its work, ensuring services meet the goals and needs of older adults and persons with physical disabilities while being provided from the most appropriate funding source.

The division launched implementation of cost rebalancing efforts in Fiscal Year 2024. The division is implementing an evidence-based assessment tool to better allocate limited resources to those that need it most. This tool will greatly improve inter-rater reliability and is internationally known as the gold standard for person centered care planning. Additionally, the division has partnered with the Division of Medicaid and Medical Assistance (DMMA) to request support in Home and Community Based Funding (HCBS) to provide temporary assistance in Medicaid applications for the nearly one third of Medicaid eligible participants receiving services through DSAAPD. This is a major cost savings effort, as all the resources used for DSAAPD participants are funded with Older Americans Act or general funds. The savings will allow additional older adults to be served through the division. The 30 percent of DSAAPD’s current service and waitlist will benefit from the Diamond State Health Plan Plus (DSHP+) Home and Community Based Services waiver program. This program includes a 50 percent federal match, resulting in a lower cost to the State. Based on DSAAPD’s waiting list cost estimates, this equates to at least \$5 million in savings.

Implementing this strategic plan will optimize the use of State general funds and Older Americans Act dollars, enable the division to serve more people, potentially eliminate wait lists, and respond to emergency needs promptly. The action plan is being carried out with technical assistance from multiple grants and expert advice regarding national best practices. The anticipated quantifiable outcomes of this plan include reduced costs, enhanced value, and improved customer outcomes.

Using data-driven decision making, DSAAPD targeted its limited resources to prioritize the most critical participants' acceptance of services which will help keep them in their homes. Not only is remaining in their homes most participants' wish, but it results in exponential cost savings to the state. Next steps include enrollment specialists' effort in partnership with DMMA, using American Rescue Plan Act funding.

Implement Inter Resident Assessment Instrument (RAI) Home & Community Based Assessment

The Division of Services for Aging & Adults with Physical Disabilities is currently using homegrown assessment tools in the community to determine the amount of personal care, attendant services, and other in-home services for adult Delawareans with a physical disability, and for those who are age 60 and older. The current tools are not person-centered, yield inconsistent results, and favor subjective information that can lead to inconsistent services, hour allotment, and increased waiting lists. These tools were developed when DSAAPD operated a Medicaid waiver and do not reflect current operations, where a waiver is not utilized. Thus, these tools focus on medical diagnoses versus a strengths-based, participant-directed assessment process. To strengthen and improve efficiency of operations and establish a strong infrastructure, the Division is implementing the use of a new tool, the InterRAI Home Care assessment, which will provide a person-centered, data-driven process that will determine eligibility and establish service packages by offering input on care planning, case mix classification, outcome measurement for quality management, and participant safety.

DSAAPD staff and participants will benefit from the objective evidence-based tool, using existing structure and technology. Anticipated results include consistent service hours, improved efficiency within the division for all services, and a shorter waitlist for services with appropriate prioritization of needs. The integrity of the tool will allow for consistent capturing of data across all services. The tool will also allow for the collection of data on an individual level to establish at-risk areas, as well as empowering Delaware to review data at a population level to identify gaps and trends across people, zip codes, and services. The division will use the data to identify gaps in service and needs for a more focused approach. The tool will be able to export reports that will feed into national and international best practices as reviewed, analyzed, and established by the InterRAI Fellows.

Anticipated outcomes include:

1. Decrease in the number of individuals waiting for services in the community.
2. Increase in engagement with Delawareans for "Options Counseling" that lead to higher utilization of community resources and support.
3. Increase in individuals aging in the place of their choosing, an essential component of person-centered care.

Improved use of clinical assessment protocols and scales to guide and inform care plans, ensuring the health and safety of the individual in a more robust manner.

Partner for Healthy Aging through Senior Centers

The mission of the Division of Services for Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities is to promote dignity, respect, and inclusion for older Delawareans, adults with physical disabilities, and their caregivers. Guided by the vision of equitable, inclusive communities for all, DSAAPD promotes and advocates for person-centered services that enable older adults and persons with disabilities to live where they choose, with the people they choose, and to participate fully in their communities. The division is committed to the development and delivery of consumer-driven services which maximize independence through individual choice, enable individuals to continue living active and productive lives, and offer protective services to those who may be vulnerable and at risk.

DSAAPD partnered with 22 senior centers across Delaware to support healthy aging programs. Upon implementation of the program, senior centers were provided the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) framework, which are conditions in the environments where individuals exist that affect their health, functioning, and quality of life. The SDOH includes 5 domains: Economic Stability, Social and Community Context, Education Access and Quality, Health Care Access and Quality, and Neighborhood and Built Environments. The senior centers were provided these determinants as a resource to identify conditions that may impact proposed programming at their centers. In the development stages of the senior center mini grants, these determinants were planned to be used as a performance and evaluation measure to provide qualitative data to show how participants were supported in their centers' implemented programs, and how they are reflected in the

domains of the SDOH. Programming that aligns with the Social and Community Context determinant include CHEER Community Center's Language Exchange Adult Program (LEAP) which allows individuals to improve their language and literacy skills by learning Spanish or English to communicate with other community members who may have found challenges in engaging in their community due to language barriers. Although DSAAPD went with an alternative route of performance and evaluation measures by partnering with the University of Delaware, program managers at the centers did find the determinants beneficial when identifying and promoting initiatives that best fit their community's needs.

New programs that were implemented include the *Language Exchange Adult Program (LEAP)*, *Hope and Healing for Widows*, and *New Year, New You!* These programs empowered individuals to participate and socialize with other older adults, as social isolation is associated with a higher risk of dementia and other serious health problems. Approximately one-quarter of community-dwelling Americans aged 65 and older are socially isolated, and a significant proportion of adults in the United States report feeling lonely.

The senior centers also had the opportunity through this program to improve existing wellness programs which include nutrition enhancement and education, art programs, field trips, and exercise programs. Bingocize® is an evidence-based program approved through SNAP-Ed and the National Council on Aging (NCOA) that combines exercise and health education through bingo and has been implemented in various centers throughout this program period. Bingocize® promotes social engagement of older adults, information on falls education, improved nutrition, and mobility improvement.

In the early stages of the program, DSAAPD wanted to provide interested senior centers with resources to implement sustainable programming. The University of Delaware (UD) has been tasked with evaluating and measuring the success of the newly implemented or improved programs across Delaware. The UD team has spent time with each senior center to develop evaluation surveys that were personalized to each activity or program that the center implemented or improved with DSAAPD funds. Based on pre-survey data, 542 senior center members have participated in DSAAPD funded programs. The UD team is currently engaging in focus groups with each senior center to supplement the pre and post evaluation surveys conducted since the start of the programs in February. This allows program participants to share their experiences as well as provide qualitative feedback to DSAAPD. The UD team has recently concluded these focus groups. The anticipated quantifiable outcomes for this initiative include improved customer outcomes. Following the success of these programs as established by the third-party UD study, DSAAPD intends to expand these cost-effective and beneficial programs in the coming years.

Utilize Certified Peer Recovery Specialists in Long Term Care

Specialized mental health care is key to the health of individuals with psychiatric conditions, including those with significant medical needs living in a long-term care (LTC) setting. DSAAPD has partnered with the Division of Substance Abuse & Mental Health (DSAMH) to bring a source of specialized support through Certified Peer Recovery Specialist (PRS) services. Certified PRS staff are trained to use their own lived experience to help individuals build a sense of self-determination to take ownership of their own goals and empower them through direct support and advocacy with and for the resident. Peers achieve this through relationship-building as the primary mode of intervention, via individual and group support. So far, DSAAPD and DSAMH have been able to pair about 50 percent of residents who qualify and would benefit from a Peer match.

Delaware continues to lead the way as one of the first states to formally utilize Peers in LTC. The program is currently grant funded. The Peer Services Liaison Program is actively being developed. This involves a strong, cross-division project management approach. Using lessons learned from embedding Peers in other settings, the team is utilizing an active change management plan to support the full acceptance and utilization of this new resource. Other work-flow related processes are being developed, such as documentation practices, and clinical intervention schedules.

Outcome measures will be monitored both by the project team and the interdisciplinary treatment team, as DSAAPD and DSAMH anticipate improved clinical outcomes through specialized treatment. Also expected are quantifiable outcomes including reduced costs and enhanced customer outcomes. These anticipated outcomes will be evaluated in the next 6-12 months now that at least one Peer is in place.

Ensure Therapeutic Programming in Secure Dementia Care

The Delaware Hospital for the Chronically Ill (DHCI) has a secure dementia unit where individuals with advanced dementia can live safely and as independently as possible with 24/7 oversight and support. This unit is necessary because residents

with dementia often face safety risks such as getting confused, lost, or harmed in environments not designed for their needs. At DHCI, 71 percent of residents have some form of dementia, and 32 percent of these individuals live on the secure dementia unit.

To address their psychosocial needs, DHCI formed a Quality Assurance Performance Improvement (QAPI) Process Improvement Project (PIP) team, comprising members from 4 clinical departments. The PIP team has 3 objectives: to implement a comprehensive therapeutic activity plan that meets regulatory requirements and best practices, propose a learning plan focused on experiential learning delivered in a meaningful and feasible way, and design a staffing approach tailored to the sensitive needs of the secure unit.

The project is under-way. A set of training tools have been chosen and the proposed learning plan has been approved by nursing administration. Staffing approach recommendations have been approved to ensure consistency with state and union guidelines. A dementia-specific addition to performance plans has also been developed and incorporated. Participants, volunteers, and specialized community programs are being recruited to design the activity program. A therapeutic space has been created with features which are sensitive to the needs of those with advanced dementia. There is exploration of various activity-based programs, including the Montessori approach, to determine the best fit for DHCI's residents and to gain a clearer understanding of the potential benefits for residents in various stages of dementia.

At this point in the project, proposed objectives include a structured activity calendar for the secure Lakeview unit, including music therapy, gentle exercises, non-denominational spiritual services, pet therapy, cognitive stimulation, guided relaxation/mindfulness practices, and sensory activities. Larger group programs will be held in a quieter therapeutic space away from distractions, and the Snoezelen room - a controlled multisensory environment providing soothing and stimulating experiences through light, sound, scent, and touch - will continue to be regularly utilized. The Lakeview unit will have dedicated activity staff trained in dementia care, ensuring continuous and consistent engagement with residents.

To create a homelike atmosphere, soothing lighting, attractive décor, elements of nature, and personalized spaces for residents to display personal items will be introduced. Socialization will be encouraged during meals and activities while respecting individual preferences. Staff will be trained to honor these preferences, ensuring resident comfort and support.

All staff will be encouraged to engage and socialize with residents, supported by regular training on communication techniques and dementia-friendly interactions. Individualized activity boxes tailored to residents' interests will be provided to promote staff and resident interaction. In addition, memory corners, technology integration, gardening projects, and a comprehensive music therapy program are being explored.

Key components of the Lakeview program include individualized activity plans, a structured daily schedule, environmental enhancements, social interaction initiatives, health and wellness activities, and therapeutic interventions. The program will be supported by staff trained in dementia care, ensuring that residents receive specialized and consistent engagement. The anticipated quantifiable outcomes from these efforts will include enhanced value and improved customer satisfaction for our residents and staff.

[Expand the Connect Community at DHCI](#)

The serious adverse effects of loneliness on physical health can be surprising, especially for those over 65, who are more likely to develop a weakened immune system, cardiac conditions such as heart disease, cognitive decline, and other physical health issues. Loneliness is considered a risk factor for poor aging outcomes. It increases the risk of death just as much as smoking and obesity. As a long-term care (LTC) facility, DHCI invests heavily into maximizing the quality of life for every resident. This includes taking psychosocial factors, such as social relationships, as seriously as physical health. Hospital Administration invited staff from all nonclinical departments to spend time with residents 1-2 hours per week during their regular work hours. In 9 months, DHCI has created a structured program called the Connect Community through the creative use of existing resources.

Connect Community is comprised of staff from 24 different departments and nonclinical teams such as Timekeeping, Medical Records, Quality Assurance, Housekeeping, Dietary, and Laundry. Staff voluntarily chose to join the program and be paired up with a resident in the facility, and/or to assist various residents in different activities and around the grounds. To support non-clinical staff in a new environment and role, DHCI further expanded to include the Ambassador program. Ambassadors are individuals who work with the residents daily and can help Connect partners build relationships and navigate the complexities of the clinical environment. Everyone coming into the program goes through a formal orientation,

which includes a component of training in dementia. Recently, the program was further expanded by welcoming the first members from DSAAPD staff who work in the community providing services and supports.

The core leadership team continues to gather data to measure outcomes. Connect partners are asked to capture their visits on “story sheets”, which helps DHCI staff track utilization and fulfill care plans. To date, there are 85 Connect Community members who have documented over 450 encounters with the residents, which is a vast underestimate of total encounters. Data has been gathered to assess the impact on employee satisfaction, and the assessment results have noted that 80 percent of employees report feeling more connected to the bigger purpose of their work, 80 percent report that being part of the program brightens their day, and 100 percent report that the program helps them feel like they are giving back. Connect members also state that it has been good for morale, they look forward to their time with the residents, and it is a way to de-stress on work time. Residents report that they enjoy seeing new faces and spending time with new people. Social relationships promote improved health outcomes, and it is anticipated that these improvements will translate to healthcare cost savings. Potential quantifiable outcomes in the form of reduced costs, improved customer outcomes, process improvement, and enhanced value for DHCI residents and staff are anticipated through this project. As nominated by DSAAPD Director Melissa Smith, this project team was nominated for and received a 2023 GEAR P3 Trailblazer Award due to their efficacy in improving quality of life for their residents. The recipients of this 2023 Award were Ke’Andra Hackett, Nicole Jingoian, Barnabas Kerkula, and Dr. Melissa Winters.

[Restructure the DSAAPD Continuous Quality Improvement Section](#)

The Division of Services for Aging & Adults with Physical Disabilities recognizes the importance of meaningful data collection and usage. Numerous internal and external processes and stakeholders need to be kept informed on Division activities. These include federal reporting requirements, grant reporting, performance measurements, utilization metrics, caseload distribution, budgeting, root cause analyses, and other data-related obligations.

In 2020, the division recognized the need for an organized approach to the use of data and systems. The division strives to carry out its values of using measurable outcomes and data-driven decision making to maximize performance and compliance in all domains. In response to these needs and values, a data team was established. This team consistently expanded over the years and in 2023 adopted a new organizational structure that allows for improved functionality by creating the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Section, comprised of the Data Team and the Information Systems Unit. This integration has enabled the unit to incorporate relevant data collection into all the division’s operations, and to review the data routinely to ensure data integrity and identify areas for development, improvement, and best practices. This allows the division to serve as many customers as possible with its limited resources and to minimize loss and error.

The primary quantifiable outcomes being tracked by this section are in the domain of process improvement and improved customer outcomes. In addition to these, the newly restructured CQI unit provides prompt and significant support to several of the division’s other GEAR initiatives. Because the quality of data has increased so significantly, the division is empowered to make data-driven decisions more effectively for Delawareans who want to age in place. As nominated by DSAAPD Director Melissa Smith, this project team was nominated for and received a 2023 GEAR P3 Innovation and Efficiency Award due to the implementation of a variety of continuous improvement initiatives across their division. The recipients of this 2023 Award were Dortris Downs, Rodney Farrar, Malia Islam, Amy Maguire, Molly Merrill, James Monahan, William Morett, and Zachary Rezac.

[Review Longitudinal National Core Indicators for Aging and Disability](#)

The Division of Services for Aging & Adults with Physical Disabilities and the Division of Medicaid and Medical Assistance collaborate biennially on the National Core Indicators - Aging & Disabilities (NCI-AD) project. This consumer survey provides both divisions with valuable data regarding the impact of their programming on participants’ quality of life. Beginning this year, DSAAPD’s data team will consolidate the survey’s findings over the years for both divisions to identify potential opportunities for development and increased collaboration. By consolidating the validated National Core Indicators - Aging & Disabilities data from across surveys, the DSAAPD Continuous Quality Improvement Unit intends to identify trends for improvement as well as highlighting portions of the Division’s programming that are working well. The review will also include survey results for DMMA’s care recipients across several Managed Care Organizations (MCOs).

The NCI-AD uses sound data principles to aggregate data across recipients which has been helpful in identifying areas for development, such as emergency planning. Additional questions have been added over the years to capture the impact of

COVID-19 on the participants. By exploring trends in the data, DSAAPD intends to find even more insights to help direct future projects and enable data-driven decision making. The CQI team will share its findings with DSAAPD's partners in DMMA for DMMA-specific surveys and will stratify these findings across MCOs to assist them in identifying which MCOs may need additional support, and the type of support needed.

These efforts are expected to result in a return on investment, as it will allow both divisions the opportunity to target their limited resources in ways most impactful to their participants. The divisions will also be able to review the efficiency and impact of prior interventions that were created in response to previous NCI-AD findings.

Centralize Statewide Physical Supports for Aging in Place

The Division of Services for Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities recognizes the importance of aging in place, which means maintaining independence for as long as possible by staying in the individual's own home. To age in place, it is important to maintain safety and accessibility. DSAAPD is redesigning the Home Modification Program in partnership with DHSS partner agencies (Division of Developmental Disabilities Services, Division for the Visually Impaired, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Division of Medication and Medical Assistance, Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health), University of Delaware, community partners, and policy makers to address service gaps that exist for older Delawareans and adults with physical disabilities who are in need of services to assist with independence in activities of daily living (ADL). This initiative is a redesigned pilot approach that will run from September 2024 through March 2025, and is expected to disburse \$3,500,000 of awarded American Rescue Plan Act funds to address the need for home and vehicle modifications and assistive technology across the state. DSAAPD's Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) will serve as the centralized front door for this program, connecting DSAAPD specialists with eligible participants and referring them to appropriate sister agencies as warranted. As a part of this initiative, DSAAPD has also added other home modification programs for older Delawareans and adults with physical disabilities.

In addition to this initiative, DSAAPD has piloted the Community Aging in Place Advancing Better Living for Elders (*CAPABLE*) program, which is a person-directed, home-based program created by John Hopkins University that integrates services from an occupational therapist, registered nurse, and a contractor who work together with the participant to set goals and action plans that improve activities of daily living and allow individuals to maintain independence in their homes. This program is projected to conclude in October 2024 as DSAAPD begins the home and vehicle modifications and assistive technology initiative. DSAAPD also has expanded the *Healthy Homes* program, which partners with Habitat for Humanity in each Delaware county. With this partnership, DSAAPD assists Habitat for Humanity to complete home modifications in high-need areas of each county. Habitat for Humanity manages their own waitlist for modifications and partners with other local organizations to fund larger scale modifications to ensure aging in place.

With these modification programs in place, the quantifiable outcomes for this initiative will include process improvements and enhanced customer outcomes. DSAAPD has already improved processes and procedures to its existing home modification programs and is enhancing customer outcomes by focusing on increasing customer satisfaction by providing resources for older adults and adults with physical disabilities to stay in their homes independently. The expected return on investment for this project will also be assessed.

Launch Sussex Blue Zones Ignite Phase 1

Blue Zones is an organization with deep expertise in community well-being transformation, with over 15 years partnering with leading researchers and evidence-based science at its foundation. Inspired by the world's longest-lived cultures, Blue Zones Ignite initiatives help communities live better, longer by improving their environment. It all starts with key changes which progress to massive transformation at the people, places, and policy levels of a community.

Towns and cities in the United States that have engaged with Blue Zones have seen incredible returns on their investments in health infrastructure. Fort Worth, Texas has seen \$20 billion in lifetime reduced smoking value from adopted and city-wide policies, Alberta Lea, Minnesota has seen a 49 percent decrease in medical claims costs for city workers and 2.9 years added to life spans of residents within one year of participating in the Blue Zones Project.

The initial phase of this transformation work is a readiness and feasibility assessment to understand the well-being activities currently underway in the community as well as the communities' interest and readiness to support a Blue Zones initiative. Blue Zones experts will perform a structured exploration across 5 towns and cities in Sussex County: Milford, Seaford, Millsboro, Lewes, and Georgetown, and collaborate to build a plan for change.

This initial stage will focus on engagement, education and mobilization of community leaders and residents, an evaluation of the communities' current state of well-being and readiness, identification of the highest priority challenges and gaps and the production of a Blue Zones Transformation plan. The assessment will include a review of all relevant state and local plans that could influence next steps, engagement with the communities through community wide events, expert summits, and the findings and recommendations will include an expert assessment, population well-being analysis and impact forecast and a blueprint plan and proposal for moving forward.

Renew Medicaid Services for Social Service Beneficiaries

The COVID Public Health Emergency (PHE) declared that states were required to pause Medicaid renewal redeterminations to ensure no lapse in medical coverage during this period. On April 1, 2023, the PHE requirements were lifted, and states were required to resume medical redeterminations and complete them by July 2024. For the Division of Social Services (DSS), over a quarter of a million clients need to be redetermined within that time frame. To accomplish this task, DSS had to develop and implement many new initiatives in a very short period. Initiatives included new process-design system changes, the development of new policies, procedures, training material, press releases, new contracts, and 3 new sub-units.

Due to the collaborative efforts within DSS, roughly 85,000 medical renewals were completed by January 2023. Ninety six percent of Medicaid renewal confirmations had occurred within 45 days to ensure no lapse in coverage. Over 5,000 pieces of return mail were processed by DSS's new Mail Room unit. Upon receipt, 48,780 Medicaid documents were uploaded into a verification housing system to ensure no document is lost. Due to the PHE lifting, DSS has seen an agency-record-high number of applications submitted through the Federally Facilitated Marketplace (FFM) receiving over 8,200 FFM applications over 2 months. During this period, 99% of the FFM applications were processed within 45 days. This is due to the collaborative efforts within this team, DSS, and with our sister agencies, DMMA and DSSC. As nominated by Social Services Chief Administrator Ashley Giancopolis, this project team was nominated for and received a 2023 GEAR P3 Innovation and Efficiency Award due to their responsive efforts in implementing the medical renewal system in an efficient manner. The recipients of this 2023 Award were Kara Bristow, Dana Cook, Stephanie Fitzgerald, Shynell Formey, Ashley Giancopolis, Denise Greenfield, Belvie Herbert, Jessica Horn, Gina Jimenez, April Johnson, Carolyn Kincaid, Tina Skinner, Margaret Smith, Francine Stone, Joanne Sunga, Essence Thomas, Julius Timmons, Jennifer Timothy, Valerie Turner, Clarence Richardson, and Kelsy Gordy.

Department of Agriculture (DDA)

Create a Delaware Farm Lending Program

Farming is a vital activity in Delaware that supports food production and approximately \$9 billion in economic activity. Yet agriculture is a challenging industry requiring expertise, equipment, access to land, cash flow due to crop cycle volatility, as well as risks including commodity prices, pests, and weather. The Department of Agriculture seeks to increase support for farming by creating an agricultural lending program. Lending programs tailored to the needs of agriculture have been used in other states to support farmers, especially new farmers, and to build markets for local agricultural products. Commercial loans are difficult to obtain for farmers with less experience and collateral, while state agricultural finance programs report low default rates on loans.

The Department of Agriculture worked with the Department of State, Division of Small Business to reauthorize an existing farm lending program, the Delaware Rural Irrigation Program (DRIP). DRIP provided partial loans to install irrigation systems using a dedicated revolving fund but had not funded new loans recently. The new program expands this to include equipment loans for any agricultural purpose, including aquaculture. The aquaculture industry has had trouble getting past the initial stages of the overall program's development and equipment loans were listed as a barrier given that existing banks often have trouble underwriting specialty equipment. All program loans will be at a fixed rate of 4.25 percent, which is lower than prevailing rates through traditional commercial and farm lenders. In addition, loans for beginning farmers and the aquaculture industry will be at 3.25 percent, recognizing the department's interest in supporting those constituents. Loans are provided for up to 50 percent of equipment costs.

Expanding this existing program to include more farming activities will support agriculture without creating a new finance authority, while also leveraging existing resources for loan administration at the Division of Small Business. The existing revolving loan fund was reauthorized by the Council on Development Finance to provide funds to launch this program.

Department of Agriculture and Division of Small Business have drafted program guidelines, finalized the loan review process and began accepting loan applications for the program on September 3, 2024.

Modernize Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program with Digital Payments

Delaware distributes \$45,000 each year in Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) benefits for low-income seniors in Delaware to purchase their choice of fresh local fruits, vegetables, herbs and honey directly from farmers at farmers markets and farm stands. Initially the DDA issued \$50 worth of vouchers in \$10 increments to each senior to redeem at participating farmers markets and farm stands. The banking operations to reimburse the farmers under this system were complicated and involved considerable manual labor. Money was deposited in a single account and each farmer endorsed each check they received with a unique number. The bank had to sort the checks by those numbers to determine how much to reimburse each farmer. Banks were less interested in this work and in 2022 the single contractor offering this service to Delaware and other states declined to renew its contract.

Other downsides to the paper voucher system included:

- All sales had to be in \$10 increments.
- Theft and loss of bank vouchers was a potential problem.
- Farmers could wait to deposit bank vouchers, meaning DDA had no understanding of the utilization of the program until it ended each November.
- Large numbers of paper checks for farmers to handle, stamp, keep track of, and deposit.

American Rescue Plan Act funding allowed DDA and the Department of Health and Social Services – Women, Infants and Children’s (WIC) program, which operates a parallel program for its recipients, to transition to an electronic payment system. The departments researched available options and chose an electronic payment system that uses a phone application to read a QR code for reimbursements. The program was implemented in June 2023.

First year response to the program has been very positive. In 2022, seniors spent \$33,270 of the \$45,000 distributed. Reimbursements improved 10 percent to \$36,496 in 2023 with the electronic payment system.

Other improvements to the program with electronic payments include:

- Farmers are paid weekly, with no waiting period.
- DDA monitors reimbursements in real time.
- Sales can be in any amount.
- The ability to send email and text reminders to participants.
- Farmers are not required to handle large stacks of checks.

Security features allow DDA to deactivate and replace lost or stolen cards.

Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC)

Modernize Online Services

The DNREC Modernization of Online Services project has continued to expand providing a single portal into DNREC services. Through 2023, permits and licenses added to the portal include water licensing, non-hazardous transporters and open burn submissions. DNREC continues to add application processes for permits, licenses and registrations to the Digital DNREC portal. Recent additions include asbestos, gasoline tank truck air pollution, outdoor water tank paint removal, and watershed coastal construction permits.

As these processes are digitized, they’re optimized for efficiency and integration with the department’s enterprise content management solution. These changes allow the department to better track and archive records without additional manual steps. Further, modernizing applications, like asbestos registrations, supports mobile submissions and requires mandatory data fields improving the accuracy of information. The antiquated asbestos application, created in 2017, is now being retired.

The project team has also added business permits. These new profiles allow businesses operating in Delaware to have a single window into their permits and licenses, status, renewals, and compliance information.

The next phase of digitization in 2024 includes septic, and well and water allocation permits. As with other permits, these updates will simplify the customer experience and will contribute important information to data management and data sharing systems like EQUIS, DNREC's environmental data management solution, and the State's Open Data Portal.

The Digital DNREC project team is working closely with the Delaware Digital Government program as an early adopter to the Go DE portal. Currently the teams are collaborating on the migration of DNREC's payment engine to the State's new provider. DNREC's work with the Go DE team, including functional design, testing the customer experience and evaluating the reporting tools will ensure the customer experience and the back-end processing are optimized.

Since Digital DNREC was first introduced well over a million online applications have been processed. The ability for customers to access a digital permit or license for storage on their phone or local reprinting has reduced calls for this assistance by 75 percent. Further, DNREC's process review and optimization that proceeds digitizing the functionality has reduced duplication of staff efforts by 60 percent and improved the efficiency and predictability of services.

Establish Ready in 6 (Ri6) DNREC Subaqueous Permitting Improvement Prototype

The DNREC Division of Water is currently developing a prototype aimed at improving the application process for boat docking facilities on both private and public subaqueous lands. The division is responsible for issuing roughly 600 subaqueous permits and leases annually for various projects, with approximately 300 permits/leases dedicated to boat docking facilities. This permitting process is crucial for managing Delaware's water resources and ensuring compliance with environmental regulations. However, the division faces significant challenges in efficiently processing these applications, resulting in delays and unpredictability in permit issuance.

The concept for this project is informed by the Ready in Six (Ri6) initiative, which included a consulting report sponsored by the Delaware Business Roundtable that evaluated the time taken to issue permits across Delaware's government agencies. The report recommended a reduction in total permit processing time to 6 months, compared to the estimated baseline of 24 months. Following this, GEAR conducted a survey within the business community to identify specific processes affecting permitting delays. This survey highlighted numerous inefficiencies in government processes, including those within DNREC's subaqueous permitting processes, leading DNREC to target this area as a scalable prototype for future process improvements.

Currently, the estimated time for issuing certain wetlands and subaqueous permits is lengthy and unpredictable, compounded by the complexity of processes and a backlog of applications. The typical subaqueous permit application involves multiple steps, such as pre-application requirements, administrative intake, scientific review, and public notice periods. If the application is for a lease, a final review and approval from the DNREC Secretary is required. While some operational data exists through the division's permitting software, it requires updates to establish baseline metrics for analyzing these processes. This project employs a 3-phased approach to analyze current processes, define future states, recommend, and pilot solutions aimed at enhancing efficiency, reducing backlogs, and improving engagement with both internal and external stakeholders. Additional expected benefits include enhanced process visibility and consistency of processes and improved predictability. The prototype is scheduled to be completed by the end of the 2024 calendar year. Ultimately, this prototype will guide further permitting process improvement initiatives within DNREC (including the ongoing e-permitting initiative).

Improve Chemical Inventory Reporting in Emergency Planning and the Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA)

The Division of Waste and Hazardous Substances (Waste) Emergency Response and Strategic Services Section state EPCRA Program regulations require Hazardous Chemical Inventory be sent to the Delaware State Emergency Response Commission (SERC), Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPC) and the local fire department. This reporting is done through an online system, the Tier II Manager (Tier II database) managed by DNREC. The EPCRA program has ~2700 small to large scale facilities handling about 14,000 chemical entries in the Tier II database. Each facility is required to update and report chemicals annually by March 1st. There were several facilities with delayed reports or missing status' which prompted the section to work on this project. The project goal was to improve the quality of the EPCRA program by providing planners and responders with chemical reports in the Tier II database with 99percent compliance in reporting and accuracy by March 1st.

The EPCRA Program deployed several strategic efforts such as modified training workshops, feedback surveys, and concurrent report review process to improve the timely submission of chemical inventory reports by facilities. Training workshops were split into 4 shorter but focused sessions for improved engagement. In December 2023, the EPCRA team conducted the first workshop focusing on regulatory overview of the program to educate facilities on reporting requirements. In January & February 2024, the team provided 2 training workshops to facility personnel on reporting procedures. The fourth workshop was dedicated to live question and answer session with a demonstration of reporting process. About 200 facility representatives attended the workshops. Workshop surveys were conducted to gain insight into Tier II reporting from users throughout the state, and to improve the workshop in the future. Overall, 57 percent of survey participants preferred the new workshop format, 7 percent preferred the old format, and the remaining 36 percent had no preference. Workshop received an overall ~4.7/5.0 rating. Over 75 percent of participants felt more prepared for EPCRA reporting after the workshops. The EPCRA team's customer service was rated as excellent by 83 percent of the participants while the remaining 17 percent rated the team's customer service as good or great.

The program also worked closely with the LEPCs to review the status of unreported facilities. The program initiated a simultaneous report review process to identify any errors in submitted reports and correct them in a timely manner. Additionally, the program works closely with the provider of the Tier II database, to improve features in the database to manage the chemical data efficiently.

In 2024, the program received about 3 percent and 8 percent increase in EPCRA reports received by the due date of March 1st compared to 2023 and 2022, respectively. Overall, the program received roughly 98 percent of EPCRA reports by the due date of March 1st compared to ~95 percent in 2023 and ~90 percent in past years. Continuous follow up with delinquent facilities increased submission of EPCRA reports to ~99 percent by May 2024.

Although there are currently 2,700 facilities, each year the number of facilities may vary due to change in their reporting status and addition of new facilities. Reporting may also be impacted by factors such as facility staff turnover rate (quick turnover), internal training program, and LEPC interaction with such facilities.

[Streamline the Clean Vehicle Rebate Program through Third Party Administration](#)

The Division of Climate, Coastal and Energy (CCE) Climate and Sustainability section has been managing the Clean Vehicle Rebate Program since 2015, issuing over 5,000 total rebates for electric vehicles and charging stations to date. The program's popularity has steadily grown each year as more people adopt electric vehicles resulting in a 65 percent increase in the number of rebate applications from 2022 to 2023.

To efficiently handle this growing demand, the division enlisted the services of a trusted third-party vendor to administer the program. This strategic partnership with the vendor enabled the redirection of approximately 30 percent of staff time allowing them to focus efforts on larger planning initiatives and opens opportunities to expand the program's offerings to a wider audience.

In addition to developing an online application portal and processing rebate applications, the vendor plays a pivotal role in shaping the division's rebate program. Their responsibilities include offering design recommendations for future funding rounds, conducting outreach to dealerships, and providing top-notch customer service to rebate applicants. The vendor has mechanisms in place to expand the program's reach by incorporating used vehicle incentives in future funding rounds and income verification capabilities for potential income-based incentive programs.

The vendor was selected through a competitive RFP process due to their extensive experience in managing state-run rebate programs. Before the vendor, the application process was cumbersome, requiring applicants to fill out forms, attach documentation, and email them - a process prone to errors and delays. The introduction of an online portal has transformed the experience for applicants, allowing them to submit their information effortlessly and ensuring accurate submission. Moreover, applicants now receive their rebate payments much faster, thanks to streamlined processes. Applicant rebates are now being processed anywhere from 2-4 weeks versus the standard turnaround time of 8-10 weeks with the vendor's dedicated program staff on hand to promptly address any inquiries or concerns. Over the past year, the Delaware EV Rebate Program continues to run effortlessly under the vendor's administration. The streamlined process has greatly improved efficiencies, allowing division staff to focus more on other projects and tasks, as well as improving customer interactions. Since the program has been administered by the vendor, the anticipated rebate applications have increased from approximately 900 to 1800. Recently, the program was updated to include a used EV rebate and higher rebate amounts for lower-priced vehicles. These changes aim to distribute the funds more equitably and expand the program's reach.

Improve Stakeholder Communication in Remediation

To protect human health and the environment, the Remediation Section of Waste leads the investigation and clean-up of properties (sites) contaminated with hazardous substances and facilitates redevelopment of these sites. The section is currently working on streamlining the internal process to respond to external inquiries from stakeholders related to their programs. The section received complaints from staff regarding lack of consistency, duplication of effort and the lack of a well-defined process, as well as complaints from external stakeholders on the timing of the responses.

The project is intended to implement an internal communication plan for the remediation section that will provide staff the resources and guidance needed to respond to stakeholder inquiries and reduce the response time by 50 percent. The project is being conducted in four-phases: Needs Assessment, Draft Implementation Plan, Implementation Pilot and Implementation and Maintenance.

As part of the first phase of the project, a needs assessment survey of remediation staff was conducted. Survey results indicated that there are inconsistencies in communication and documentation, but response times were better than suspected. Currently, simple inquiries are typically answered in less than a day but sometimes can take upwards of 2 weeks depending on levels of management involvement required. Sometimes simple inquiries can turn complex. Complex inquiries typically take less than 7 days but sometimes can take up to 30 days.

Over the prior year, the DNREC team identified that a large risk to the overall project is employee turnover. Due to bandwidth, limited staff, new staff and ongoing department level process changes/improvements this project remains in phase 2. However, work within this phase has been ongoing and has been able to establish subprocesses improvements that directly impact the overall success of this project. With new staff on board and an ombudsman now a part of the project team, DNREC anticipates having this project moving into the implementation phase in December 2024.

By phase four, the section anticipates having a consistent turnaround time for responding to external stakeholder inquiries, within 24 hours when feasible, but not longer than 7 days and the elimination of duplicative work resulting in a 50 percent reduction of staff time. The section is on track to accomplish final project closeout during the first quarter of 2025.

Department of State (DOS)

Delaware Communities of Excellence (DECOE) – Year 4

Literacy is the ability to functionally read, write, and speak in English, as well as compute and solve problems, on the job, interpersonally, and in society. Forty-one percent of Delaware children read below grade level, and 20 percent of Delaware adults read below a third grade reading level. Children with lower literacy skills struggle in school and to graduate. Adults with low literacy skills are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed, lack resources for housing, transportation, and other essentials, and disproportionately rely on social safety nets including government subsidies.

Delaware Communities of Excellence's (DECOE) goal is *equity through literacy*. DECOE is building the Delaware Literacy Alliance, a collaborative of State agencies and non-profits to produce a statewide literacy ecosystem. This ecosystem will provide literacy services that are easier to access, equitable, cost effective, and create measurable, impactful results to improve literacy in Delaware across residents' lifespans. The DECOE employs a collective impact approach within the Baldrige Framework, because large-scale social change requires broad, cross-sector coordination. DECOE is committed to improving literacy levels for all through a 2-pronged approach:

1. Bringing leaders together to collaboratively build systems and capacity.
2. Aligning, linking, and expanding programs and services to replicate successes in communities throughout the state.

DECOE collaboratively builds systems and capacity by:

- Creating equitable literacy systems with the goal of replicating successful systems in other communities throughout the state.
- Identifying literacy services across geographic areas, as well as gaps and duplications.
- Aligning, integrating, and expanding these services into scalable systems.

- Creating a literacy dashboard of services across the lifespan of Delawareans among all partners and identifying appropriate performance measures and indicators.

The DECOE Advisory Council is chaired by the Delaware Division of Libraries and Literacy Delaware and was rebranded as the Delaware Literacy Alliance in the spring of 2023. Members involved in this initiative to date include:

- ChristianaCare
- Delaware Association of Nonprofit Agencies
- Delaware Community Foundation
- Delaware Department of Education
- Delaware Department of Natural Resources & Environmental Control
- Delaware Readiness Teams
- Delaware State University
- Delaware Workforce Development Board
- Energize Delaware
- First Chance Delaware
- First State Educate
- Highmark
- International Literacy Association
- Laffey McHugh Foundation
- Philanthropy Delaware
- Read Aloud Delaware
- Reading Assist
- United Way of Delaware
- University of Delaware

In Fiscal Year 2024 the Delaware Literacy Alliance released its report, *The State of Literacy in Delaware*, and accompanying strategic plan. Examples of recent solutions with statewide impact include:

- A program for birth to 5 years old:
 - Delaware Libraries provide free books to every Delaware child under 5 through Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library. In summer 2024, Delaware joined 6 other states offering free bilingual books to families each month as an option to the existing English language ones. More than 32,000 children were enrolled in July 2024, and almost 17,000 have graduated since 2020.
- Programs for kindergarten through grade 12:
 - Free year-round access to eBooks for children is available jointly through Delaware Libraries’ Overdrive and Delaware Department of Education Sora student mobile device app.
 - School libraries are now joining the Delaware Library Catalog and consortium with Division of Libraries’ technology and infrastructure support to complete the “last mile” to ensure every child has equitable access even if they are not taken to their public library.
- A program for adults:
 - The Northstar Digital Literacy program provides free digital literacy training to all Delaware residents with assistance from Literacy Delaware.

The DECOE and the Delaware Literacy Alliance continue to grow in members and impact; however, all participants recognize that this is a multi-year effort to improve the lives of Delawareans.

Build Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) Infrastructure in Delaware Public Libraries

Checking books in and out and performing inventories at Delaware's libraries are time and resource intensive activities. Starting in 2022 with public libraries, and continuing with school libraries, a library vendor placed radio frequency identification (RFID) tags in most public library and participating school library collections and installed scanning and self-check-out equipment. The project's goal was to create a system where libraries' collections items are RFID-tagged, staff are trained to effectively use the scanning equipment, and self-checkout is available to the public and students. These efforts are expected to reduce the time staff use to check items in and perform inventories, as well as for staff, the public and students to check items out. Reducing the time required by these activities should free up library staff to work on other priorities, such as assisting the public and students with inquiries, instructing the public through programs and community outreach, and increase overall productivity.

Recent results for public libraries show staff and patrons adopting the new circulation and inventory processes. For example, in Fiscal Year 2024, Dover Public Library patrons used the self-checkout option more than 20 percent of the time, up from 13 percent in the prior fiscal year. Milford Public Library patrons used self-checkout about 16 percent of the time in Fiscal Year 2024, up from single digit use the year before. One benchmark for fully adopted self-checkout use comes from Seaford Public Library which purchased its own self-checkout units many years ago. Its Fiscal Year 2024 circulation statistics indicate that about 60 percent of their patrons use self-checkout regularly. Self-checkout means that staff can focus on other priority activities, along with their regular circulation duties. Anecdotally, many patrons seem impressed by the speed of the new service.

School libraries that are members of the Delaware Library Consortium and Catalog are much heavier users of self-checkout units than public libraries. In School Year 2023-2024, monthly self-checkout use at some of those libraries was frequently 50 percent or higher. Self-checkout enables busy school librarians to focus on instructing students rather than handling materials and gives students a sense of empowerment. It is important to note however, that self-checkout units do not replace the need for professionally trained school librarians as part of school instruction teams.

School Libraries Join the Delaware Library Catalog and Consortium

School age children need access to current books and other materials to support literacy and learning. School libraries struggle to keep their collections up to date and relevant. A successful pilot project started in 2016 between Colonial School District and the Delaware Division of Libraries to analyze their school libraries' collection and processes, as well as install new radio frequency identification (RFID) and self-check technologies. As a result, the average publication year of materials in Colonial School District's collections has improved from the collection of resources being dated around 1994 to 2018. This large improvement occurred through the district's significant investments, making their libraries important learning hubs where students want to be. This project addresses one of the recommendations from 2016 Delaware School Libraries Master Plan.

Fiscal Year 2023 and 2024 funding received by the Delaware Division of Libraries enables school districts to join the catalog and Consortium with no upfront costs, along with a great deal of support and training to adapt their processes. Participating and planned schools as of August 1, 2024, include:

- Pilot and previously enrolled schools: Sussex Technical High School, Sussex Academy, Salesianum High School, Thomas Edison Charter School, and Las Americas ASPIRA Academy.
- Cohort 1 (September 2022 – January 2023): Sussex Central High School, Woodbridge High School, and St. Georges Technical High School.
- Cohort 2 (February 2023 – June 2023): Delcastle Technical High School, Hodgson Vocational Technical High School, Howard High School of Technology, POLYTECH High School, Great Oaks Charter School, Kuumba Academy Charter School, and High Road School of Delaware through the Community Education Building library.
- Cohort 3 (June 2023 – January 2024): Academia Antonia Alonso, Dover Middle School Campus, and Dover High School.

- Cohort 4 (February 2024 – June 2024): All Capital School District elementary schools.
- Cohort 5 (August 2024 – December 2024): Christina School District pilot project schools.
- Additional cohorts will be determined as discussions continue with interested schools and districts.

The Delaware Division of Libraries has focused on the following activities as part of this project: coordination with school administrators and librarians to understand their needs, planning the transition, analyzing and organizing the collection, assisting with weeding the collection, integrating the collection into the statewide catalog in a way that accommodates the school's individual policies in accordance with existing consortium policies, re-barcoding and RFID tagging all library materials, training staff on new circulation and cataloging systems, and providing ongoing support to school librarians.

After a 6-month settling-in period, school libraries may begin to circulate their materials and receive materials from other consortium libraries through the statewide library transit system if the school desires to participate.

Sharing resources with other consortium libraries provides both students and staff with a much larger set of learning resources than any individual school library can support. The Delaware Division of Libraries will continue to work with the participating school librarians to help them maximize the opportunity in support of improved literacy and learning for students in the coming years.

[Innovate Social Services in Delaware Libraries](#)

The Delaware Division of Libraries (DDL) has a long history of leveraging technology and innovative services to meet the evolving needs of our community. Supported by Delaware officials and a robust partnership network, DDL has pioneered the use of library spaces for workforce, health, and legal services, demonstrating a responsive and progressive approach to community service. Recognizing the barriers faced by residents, especially in rural areas with limited broadband, libraries are critical access points for health consultations, employment help, and legal advice.

Workforce development and employment assistance are currently provided in 15 public libraries by trained specialists. Delawareans can find help with job and benefits applications, basic needs referrals as well as entrepreneurship assistance for those wishing to start their own businesses. Help is available in-person, as well as by phone, email, and text. Library specialists had 1,360 interactions on these topics in Fiscal Year 2024.

DDL's teleservices project began as a pilot in 2020 with the installation of soundproof booths equipped with UV sanitation and HEPA filtration, and iPads preloaded with healthcare apps at the Seaford, Laurel, and Milford public libraries. Currently, soundproof rooms or booths in a total of 13 public libraries across the state enable Delawareans to conduct private meetings with doctors, immigration lawyers, therapists, and other professionals. Trained specialists are available to assist users with technology and follow-up items. These specialists assisted users 2,277 times during Fiscal Year 2024.

DDL's approach not only addresses immediate employment, health and legal needs but also fosters long-term community resilience and ensures that all Delawareans have access to crucial resources. DDL's Social Innovation team meets Delawareans in times of need and is well positioned to help bridge gaps in state-provided services as well as to recognize where systems may be broken.

[Department of Services for Children Youth and Their Families \(DSCYF\)](#)

[Provide a Statewide Community Resource Directory and Contracted Services Dashboards](#)

In October 2023, the Department of Services for Children Youth and Their Families launched a community resource directory dashboard to serve as a centralized location for information about community resources, services, and programs in Delaware to be searched and filtered by all Delawareans. Filters include county, type of service, organization name and service description. This dashboard is the combination of over 3 years' worth of information that was collected by the Family Informed Resource Support Team (FIRST) on an excel spreadsheet which became tedious to navigate with over 1,300 rows of data. This updated user-friendly format is accessible by going to DSCYF's public-facing website and since going live, it had over 1,537 views. This dashboard is updated quarterly and accessible in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole.

In March 2024, DSCYF launched a second dashboard to serve a similar purpose for DSCYF staff which includes information on all active contracted services in the department. This is an easy to navigate dashboard for staff to search contracts by county, service setting, service type and provider to assist them in case planning with a family and determining who to contact for additional information about a program or referral process. This dashboard is updated daily using our case management system as the data source and within the first 4 months of its launch it has had over 186 views.

The content included in these dashboards helps to quickly inform someone of what is available and reduces the amount of time it takes the public and DSCYF staff to find the information they are seeking.

Strengthen PCard Uniform Guidelines & Repayment

In Calendar Year 2023, DSCYF processed over 11,000 PCard (the State's purchasing credit card) transactions. The Fiscal Accounting Services (FAS) unit must reconcile each of these transactions within 30 days of the Department of Finance, Division of Accounting (DOA) reconciliation date. There are 3 ways a transaction is reconciled – either with an itemized receipt, an approved Affidavit for Missing and Non-Itemized Receipts, or with repayment to the State of Delaware by check, money order, or payroll deduction.

In 2023, DSCYF's reconciliation rate ranged quarterly from 90.05 percent to 98.63 percent, ending with an average of 94.81 percent. This means DSCYF had almost 600 PCard transactions that were not reconciled timely. In the 1st quarter of 2024, the reconciliation rate dipped to 91.65 percent. It became clear that DSCYF needed to change the trajectory of PCard reconciliations.

The fiscal team identified a need for a uniform set of instructions to be written, shared, and enforced across divisions. In addition to the need for standardized instructions, it was also apparent that some divisions within DSCYF were more strictly enforcing the repayment of undocumented or unsubstantiated charges. Uniformity was required to be fair to all divisions and all PCard holders.

This project blossomed from establishing a short document of simple instructions into an exhaustive set of PCard Guidelines which are being converted into a mandatory Delaware Learning Center (DLC) training and policy acknowledgement. The DLC training and policy acknowledgement, currently in the final stage of development and nearing completion, will be required to keep an existing PCard or obtain a new one. Additionally, and arguably the greatest new tool for reconciliation, will be a PCard Repayment form drafted by one of DSCYF's deputy attorney generals and approved by the Payroll Compliance Group. This new form, which will also be required to keep an existing PCard or obtain a new one, will practically guarantee repayment to the State by payroll deduction when and if all other avenues to reconciliation have been exhausted. This repayment mechanism is imperative, considering that both the State's Budget and Accounting Manual (BAM) and the DSCYF PCard policy require repayment of unauthorized transactions.

Once all aspects are finalized and in-place prior to year-end, the measurable outcome should be a vastly improved PCard reconciliation rate. Additionally, the foreknowledge of a payroll deduction may preemptively deter an employee from improper use or faulty documentation. This new initiative will guarantee that every PCard charge is either authorized, allowable and substantiated, or repaid to the State of Delaware. This will result in both reduced costs and process improvement.

Automate PHRST Data Extractions

The Department of Services for Children Youth and Their Families Management Information Systems (MIS) team worked with PHRST (the State's payroll and human resources enterprise resource planning system/organization) to obtain a daily file of all information relating to DSCYF staff. DSCYF previously identified duplicate data across department platforms and oftentimes the data was not consistent. To remedy this, DSCYF MIS worked with PHRST to identify a file that can be transferred to DSCYF daily. Through additional work of MIS Technologists, the file is used to auto-populate the Microsoft Outlook address book when discrepancies are found. In these instances, the automated scripts will also send an email to the FOCUS liaison team to notify them of user updates.

To date, the file is being used to update job title/classification, division, and reports to information. In the future this file will be used to auto-disable or freeze Outlook accounts for users that are no longer on the report. This will reduce the amount of time it takes when employees terminate their roles in DSCYF or transfer to another department, and ensures the appropriate people are notified to disable an Outlook account. The file will be used to identify the user's work location and ensure they are on the correct distribution list relating to location specific information.

The measurable outcomes of this initiative include reduced costs and process improvement by automating functionality. A third measurable outcome will be heightened security measures by exponentially decreasing the amount of time needed to remove certain system accesses from prior employees who are no longer with the department.

Update the Division of Prevention and Behavioral Health Services' (PBH) Records Retention Schedule

The Department of Services for Children, Youth, and their Families Division of Management Support Services (DMSS) Records unit discovered that DSCYF's retention schedules included excessively long retention periods for agency records. Representatives from the unit built a business case focusing on the Division of Prevention and Behavioral Health's (PBH) records as those within the scope of the first phase of a long-term project. Throughout the project life cycle, the unit diligently collaborated with key internal stakeholders, DSCYF's Deputy Attorney General, and Delaware Public Archives to create a more appropriate retention schedule.

These efforts culminated in a crucial update to the PBH retention schedule, to align with the needs of the department and division, and significantly reduced required record storage time. Thanks to their hard work, 900 boxes of records were identified for removal from storage, as they have met the new retention criteria. This project will create significant return on investment as each box costs approximately \$50.00 per month to store. This amounts to \$45,000 per month and totals \$540,000 a year. To date, Delaware Public Archives has destroyed 334 of the boxes targeted for destruction, resulting in realized year-to-date savings.

By taking the initiative to review and execute this division's update, the Departmental Records Unit achieved the targeted benefit, exemplified the principles of Lean thinking, and demonstrated exceptional stewardship of State resources. During this phase of the project, the team developed a project framework which has also been applied to the review of the retention schedules for the Division of Youth Rehabilitative Services and will be applied to a future review of the retention schedules for the Division of Family Services and Division of Management Support Services.

Streamline Case Review Processes and Practices

DSCYF implemented a department-wide administrative case review process to support continuous quality improvement efforts and strategic plan goals. The process was established to assess cross-divisional practices and identify opportunities for improvement and consistency in support of a trauma-informed system of care (SOC) approach to service delivery and family engagement. SOC is a coordinated effort to build meaningful partnerships with families and youth informed by their cultural and linguistic needs to help them function better at home, school, in the community, and throughout life. The department's goal is to increase positive outcomes for youth and families. The comprehensive review process includes quantitative and qualitative data collection to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement.

Full implementation of the process was realized in 2023. This included implementation of protocol for sampling, timeframes, and procedural expectations; implementation of the review tool that assesses case management practices and service delivery quality; development of a reference guidebook to ensure inter-rater reliability; training of staff in the administration of the tool and process; and completion of one full year of department-wide implementation. Jerrica Boyer and Tina Selby Ware were recognized for their leadership in implementing this project as 2023 GEAR Trailblazer Award recipients, having been nominated by DSCYF Deputy Cabinet Secretary Alison McGonigal.

Enhance, Organize, and Support the DSCYF Network Infrastructure

Network Switch Replacement Project

The Department of Services for Children Youth and Their Families Management Information Systems team successfully completed the network switch replacement project. Over the past year, the DSCYF MIS team has diligently replaced all outdated switches across the agency. The completion of this project has greatly improved overall network performance and reliability. The new switches offer faster data transfer rates and reduced latency. This enhanced reliability ensures minimal downtime for DSCYF, allowing the department to work seamlessly without interruptions. Along with these new switches comes enhanced security features, including better access controls, virtual local area network (VLAN) segmentation, and encryption. Protecting sensitive data and preventing unauthorized access is now more robust than ever.

Other benefits of this now completed project is the department's ability to accommodate future growth and increased network demands. DSCYF is now well-prepared for expanding operations without network limitations. These new

switches also align with the department’s commitment to sustainability as they are designed with energy-saving features helping reduce power consumption.

Network Connection Redundancy Project

Installing a redundant network connection for the DSCYF administration campus significantly enhances network reliability and uptime. By having a backup connection in place, the campus can avoid disruptions caused by single points of failure, such as hardware malfunctions or cable cuts. This ensures that critical administrative functions and services remain accessible, even during unexpected outages. Consequently, this leads to improved productivity and operational continuity, as staff can continue their work without interruption.

Additionally, a redundant network connection supports better load balancing and performance. With multiple connections, the network can distribute traffic more efficiently, reducing congestion and improving overall speed and responsiveness. This is particularly beneficial during peak usage times or when handling large amounts of data. Moreover, redundancy can enhance network security by providing alternative pathways for data transmission, making it harder for potential threats to disrupt the entire network. Overall, these benefits contribute to a more robust, efficient, and secure network infrastructure for the administration campus. This critical project would not have been possible without the support of DSCYF senior leadership and the Governor.

Network Closet Renovation Project

Cleaning up DSCYF’s network switch closets offered significant operational and strategic benefits. First, it enhanced the department’s network reliability and performance. A well-organized network closet reduces the risk of downtime caused by tangled cables, outdated equipment, or overheating due to poor ventilation. This ensures that the DSCYF network infrastructure operates smoothly, minimizing disruptions to business operations and improving overall productivity. Additionally, a clean and organized network closet simplifies troubleshooting and maintenance, allowing management information systems staff to quickly identify and resolve issues, which can lead to faster response times and reduced operational costs.

Second, maintaining a tidy network switch closet supports better resource management and future scalability. By removing obsolete equipment and properly labeling cables and devices, DSCYF can gain a clearer understanding of the current network setup and capacity. This clarity aids in planning for future upgrades or expansions, ensuring that new equipment can be integrated seamlessly without unnecessary complications. Moreover, a well-maintained network closet can extend the lifespan of network equipment by preventing damage from dust and overheating, ultimately protecting the organization’s investment in its IT infrastructure. Overall, these practices contribute to a more efficient, scalable, and cost-effective network management strategy. This initiative represents a process improvement and demonstrates the benefits of the Lean management 5S methodology – sort, set in order, shine, standardize, sustain.

[Department of Correction \(DOC\)](#)

[Enhance Employee Wellbeing, Recruitment and Retention through DOCares](#)

In September of 2023 the DOCares project focused on recruitment and retention due to the staffing shortages that DOC was experiencing during and after the COVID pandemic. The team understood that there were serious challenges that the Delaware Department of Correction employees were facing. Those challenges led some DOC employees to search for alternative career options which were less taxing on their mental and physical health, as well as their work life balance. In response to the critical staffing shortages, the DOCares team explored ideas for implementing a continuous improvement process to decrease the mass exit of employees that DOC was facing. As the DOCares project team were researching some of the possible root causes, it agreed to launch a “stay” survey to all DOC employees with a goal of obtaining their feedback on what the project team determined could be the reasons associated with why employees were quitting. The “stay” survey included questions related to childcare challenges, stress management, and staff scheduling (work/life balance).

The survey was launched and remained open for employee feedback for 3 months. Upon closing the survey, the results were compiled, and the data revealed that DOC employees had no significant concerns related to childcare challenges, though the main concerns expressed were related to DOC’s current culture, scheduling, mental health supports and work life balance. As a result of this revelation, the DOCares team decided to take a deeper dive into the identified 3 root causes in DOC’s attempt to decrease the current retention challenges that were revealed. The DOCares project team in collaboration

with the Human Resources Director developed and sent a second “stay” survey on March 20, 2024, to all of DOC’s employees with a strong focus on feedback related to the current culture, Employee Mental Health/ Work Life Balance, and Scheduling.

The second survey remained open for employee feedback for 3 months with a goal to gain a better perspective from employees on their reported concerns related to work-life balance and the overall morale. Of the approximate 2,300 DOC employees, a total of 585 completed the second survey, representing a response rate of 25.43percent. More than half of DOC employees expressed interest in alternative work schedules, wellness options, and positive interaction with leadership. Using the compiled data from the second survey, the DOCares team worked together to create improvement strategies to address the current deficiencies reported by employees.

Based on the results of the survey, the DOCares team established several strategies. The first strategy focused on training and development opportunities for DOC mid to senior level leaders. By establishing a training that focusses on improving upper management leadership engagement and effective communication with their subordinates, it will serve as the first step to address the deficiencies revealed in the “stay” survey. This training will provide key leaders with strategies related to improving staff morale, building stronger communication amongst leadership and line staff, exploring alternative shift options, exploring alternative staff freezing options with an end goal of improving work-life balance for staff which will result in improving employee retention.

The second strategy is to explore the purchase of an employee stress, mental health & wellbeing program geared towards law enforcement. By doing so, employees can use this program as a resource for dealing with any issues related to their mental health and wellbeing through this confidential resource.

On September 18, 2024, the DOCares team will meet with senior leadership to provide an overview of the results of the “stay” survey along with a high-level summary of the employee’s feedback that was captured. The proposed path forward offers tangible solutions compiled by the DOCares team that will also be shared.

It should be noted that since this DOCares project has been in effect, recruitment of new officers has increased. While this is very good news, it is important that DOC remain diligent in its efforts to retain those staff as well as current employees based on the data revealed during the 2 “stay” surveys.

The DOCares team will propose the roll out of the recommended training geared towards mid to senior level DOC leaders during the first quarter of 2025.

Department of Labor (DOL)

Modernize Core Unemployment Insurance Processes

The Department of Labor’s Division of Unemployment Insurance (UI) previously launched a business process mapping project to better streamline appeals and other processes, such as benefit payment control, while developing a modernized electronic system. Once the current state map was built for the appeals process it estimated that the process entailed 6 hours of work over 21 days across 26 steps.

There were multiple benefits in engaging UI staff in business process management, with additional visibility into the process allowing the team to take ownership of areas needing improvement. This approach also allowed the team members to ask questions about policies, procedures, inputs, and outputs of the process driving the timelines.

The current state models are currently being revamped for the future state to generate measurable outcomes through the reduction of errors and the additional time and money saved through process efficiency, which will be built into the new electronic system. The modernization of the UI system is a long-term large-scale project that will continue through 2026.

Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT)

Magnify Project Development by Migrating from Primavera P6 to Unifier Software

The Unifier migration team was created to ensure a coordinated and systematic conversion of project management tools and associated data. Unifier is a software that has aspects of cost management, document management, schedule, and fund management. The migration from the previous software system, known as Primavera P6, to Unifier was implemented in

2022, however, efforts are ongoing to create enhancements in Unifier to allow for improved efficiencies at DeIDOT in the project development and construction processes. DeIDOT had been utilizing Unifier software for managing construction processes since 2017, however pre-construction processes were managed in a separate software, Primavera P6, and through email and intensive written documentation. Since the migration to Unifier, there have been 31 new custom business processes created, each integrating an existing process into the single system. By incorporating these processes, DeIDOT has been able to move more of its capital projects into Unifier. DeIDOT is nearing integration of 100 percent of DeIDOT capital projects into Unifier, and they can be tracked from the conceptual stage through the completion of construction and financial closeout processes.

Users of Unifier have requested data reporting capabilities with more information being readily available throughout the life of a project. A Unifier change request business process has been developed within the system to allow users to easily request new reports or processes to be incorporated, or to request changes to existing processes or reports. In the 15 months since the Unifier change request process went live, there have been 171 total requests submitted, including 35 requesting new business processes, and 80 requests for updates to existing business processes. In that time, 98 requests have been completed and another 32 are currently in progress.

The team's work on this project helps to support the department's mission of excellence in transportation through the development of business practices to improve efficiencies and documentation for delivering projects. Prior to the implementation of this project, multiple programs were utilized throughout a project's lifecycle, requiring multiple maintenance and development teams, and requiring users to learn multiple interfaces. The goal was to use one product across the lifecycle of a project, helping to reduce the cost of application maintenance and allow data to be housed in a single program. Not only has the Department realized initial cost savings by shifting to a singular software application for managing a project through its lifetime, but this has allowed the department to dedicate more staffing to improve the Unifier workflow, continuously improve the individual business processes, and develop additional processes to improve efficiency through the life of a project. These efficiencies will allow the department to continue to extend Unifier capabilities to incorporate additional DeIDOT processes that are still tracked outside of Unifier and continue to improve our overall procedures.

Utility Permitting Regulation Process Improvement

As a prototype project associated with phase 1 of the Ready in 6 initiative, concerns and issues were presented as a result of the coordination between DeIDOT's utility team, external utility partners, and representatives of the business development community over several meetings. Based on feedback received during these meetings, DeIDOT has developed a revised series of utility regulations to be promulgated and adopted by early 2025. Below is high-level summary of the topics discussed and associated outcomes:

Exception Requests/Hardship Letters Recommendations:

- Utility companies requested to have regulations updated where possible, so they do not continually need to submit exception requests.
- Interpretation of when an exception needs to be submitted and what needs to be included is problematic.
- Utilities requested we create a template to be used on the exception side.

Outcome: DeIDOT will create a template to streamline the process and continue discussions to reduce the need for exception requests, where applicable.

Clear Zone Recommendation:

- Clearly defining the clear zone concepts and expectations to provide better guidance to the utility companies.

Outcome: DeIDOT has updated the language in the regulation and once adopted, should assist with the concerns of the development community and utility companies reducing the need for as many exception requests.

Aerial Services/Crossings Recommendation:

- Guidance regarding aerial utility services crossing the roadway varies, and the development community requested DeIDOT to re-consider the regulation language.

Outcome: DelDOT has updated the language in the regulation and once adopted, should assist with the concerns of the development community and utility companies.

Pole Spacing Recommendation:

- Companies requested flexibility to design their facilities to meet standards and the specific needs of their project and site conditions.

Outcome: DelDOT has updated the language in the regulation to remove the minimum pole spacing requirement and once adopted, should assist with the concerns of the development community and utility companies.

Relocation Recommendation:

- The development community requested that there be more language added in the utility regulation outlining when existing utilities are to be relocated if not impacted.

Outcome: DelDOT has updated the language in the regulation and once adopted, should assist with the concerns of the development community and utility companies.

In addition to the utility regulation changes, DelDOT has started a working group on Utility Coordination for Developer Projects. This working group is comprised of developers, contractors, engineering firms, utility companies, and DelDOT stakeholders. The meetings have primarily been used to identify and prioritize topics, and progress will be shared as the group continues to further improve processes and guidelines.

Department of Safety and Homeland Security (DSHS)

Reconstruct Carry Concealed Deadly Weapons (CCDW) Licensing

The elimination of several steps in the CCDW process will increase customer satisfaction and reduce workload (time and money) for the State. Digitizing the process will increase efficiency and ensure uninterrupted operations in emergency situations such as a pandemic. In turn this will eliminate the number of required personnel and complaints from stakeholders and applicants. Quicker response times to applicants, reduced backlogs for Department of Justice (DOJ) and DSHS, process reducing/elimination for courts. The goal is to provide a thorough review of current CCDW licensing processes and identify the feasibility of creating a new workflow and digital system that will best serve the needs of DOJ, Delaware State Police, DSHS, and the citizens collectively served. In addition, this project seeks to resolve timeliness issues while utilizing existing software wherever possible.

This has been an on-going joint initiative with the DOJ to improve the process. However, it has stalled numerous times due to the focus on Permit to Purchase legislation.

Improve the Criminal History Background Review Process

Persons needing a Criminal History background check for employment, or other regulatory requirements has become time consuming necessitating appointments and long waits for fingerprinting at the State Bureau of Identification (SBI). This is highly problematic as the needs for both health care workers and educators, are in high demand and extremely time sensitive. This has resulted in backlogs and complaints. Additionally, backgrounds cannot be transferred between agencies. The goal of this project is to improve efficiency in the application and delivery of criminal history information.

This project is proceeding rapidly with the onboarding of a vendor. Other paths are being explored to further advance the process.

Administer Permit to Purchase

In May 2024, Delaware Senate Bill 2 created an application process to obtain a handgun qualified purchaser card to authorize the purchase of a handgun. While an applicant will incur costs related to fingerprinting and required training, a fee will not be charged to obtain the permit. A holder of a valid concealed carry permit is not required to obtain or present a handgun qualified purchaser card. It requires licensed importers, manufacturers, or dealers, as well as unlicensed persons, to require an individual to present the individual's handgun qualified purchaser card before selling or transferring a firearm to an

individual and requires that an applicant complete a firearms training course within 5 years before the date of application, similar to what is required by Delaware's concealed carry permit law. An individual licensed to carry a concealed deadly weapon is exempt from this requirement because they must already complete a firearms training course to be licensed. It also, sends to law-enforcement information that is already collected at the time of sale and required under federal law to be made available to law-enforcement. This change assists law-enforcement in the criminal investigations they already conduct.

The Act requires the Delaware State Police's State Bureau of Identification to retain data about handgun purchases that is collected under the Act for no more than 6 months. It makes clear that § 904A of Title 24 is not intended to prohibit law-enforcement officials from keeping records of sales and transfers of firearms for longer than 6 months where relevant to an ongoing criminal investigation or prosecution. And it requires the Department of Safety and Homeland Security to develop and administer a free firearms safety course for low-income residents.

The Delaware State Police, State Bureau of Identification has an average workload of 55,000 applicants annually. In 2020, there were 42,941 handgun purchases. Upon enactment, e SBI projects that the average workload will increase to 113,000 applications (including fingerprinting and criminal histories) annually. There is also the potential that some individuals may want to purchase handguns throughout the year given that the card is valid for 180 days, which would require 2 criminal histories to be conducted annually. Additionally, it expands upon the duties and responsibilities of SBI. It estimates that it would require an expansion of 29.0 FTE civilian, and 10.0 FTE sworn personnel positions to implement and enforce this Act. Last, this Act would require the Delaware Criminal Justice Information System (DELJIS) to make significant programming and system modifications to the Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) to ensure compliance.

Upgrade to Project 25 (P25) Interoperable Land Mobile Radio Compliance

As a joint effort of the Association of Public Safety Communication Officials (APCO) and the National Association of State Technology Directors, Project 25 is a longstanding partnership between the public safety communications community, standard development organizations, and industry manufacturers. Each group's goal is to satisfy the complex and evolving mission-critical communication needs of users for interoperable Land Mobile Radio (LMR) equipment and systems.

After September 11th and the hurricane that hit New Orleans, first responders needed to come from surrounding municipalities, counties, and states to assist. Obviously, agencies responded with their own equipment, including LMR systems. They quickly found that the systems were incompatible and could not be programmed. This became a communications and control nightmare, requiring self-dispatching, redeploying resources to the same area, and, in some cases, rescuing the rescuers. This not only slowed response but may have also cost lives.

All LMR providers produce radios that are P25 compliant. Delaware's Motorola 800 MHz system will work with EF Johnson, Harris, or any other P25 radio. The same is true for the Department of Correction (DOC) radio system, which is also a P25 system. In this instance, although DOC uses a 700 MHz system, these radios come with dual-band capabilities so that end users can use either system.

Over the last 8 years, DSHS and Delaware public safety entities have been marching to the finish line of the NEW 800 MHz system. This system offers many enhancements and cost savings. It is anticipated that Delaware will start using the new P25 system by the end of 2024.

The outdated Data Encryption Standard (DES) has been known to have been hacked across the nation and was retired for many government agencies beginning in 2005. Once on the new P25 system, there will be a migration to the Advanced Encryption Standard (AES is the federally compliant encryption and widely used across the nation). This will not come without a cost. Over the last 4-5 years, DSHS has mandated that any radio needing encryption have both AES and DES encryption. DSHS has also stockpiled several licenses.

Time Division Multiple Access (TDMA) will enhance the talk path ability and help eliminate congestion (busy outs) in the system. New Castle County will go from 14 to 28 talk paths, and Kent and Sussex will go from 10 to 20 talk paths. Radio management will help to quickly read the radio and push the programming out to subscribers. This also provides inventory control and reprogramming on the fly. Console Subsystem Interface (CSSI) provides a link to the IP world, where anything is possible. It links 2 systems together, the 700 and the 800 systems, to allow users to talk across systems and integrate cellular devices to communicate over LMR systems.

The overall costs for this project are:

- Original contract: \$51 million.
- Enhancements and radio growth: \$10 million.
- Municipality radios: \$12 million.
- Six additional radio shelters: \$11 million.

Delaware is in very good shape with 95 to 99 percent of the first responder radios having been converted to P25 radios. Both the DOC 700 MHz and the Public Safety 800 MHz systems will be Phase Two P25 compliant.

Centralize Access Control to State Buildings and Video Systems

The State has multiple departments and divisions occupying many locations and buildings. It also employs several different security systems with many different vendors. These security systems include both video surveillance and building access. So, the programming of these systems is problematic with changing personnel and varying threat assessments.

Therefore, this becomes a problem for DSHS. Most prominently, the Capitol Police Department (CPD) as they are responsible for security for these departments and do not always have access to the buildings, offices, and/or video surveillance. This impedes rapid repose and with conducting investigations. However, CPD is not the only affected division. The others affected include the Office of Management and Budget's Division of Facilities Management, Delaware State Police, Office of the State Fire Marshal, and other departments and divisions required to respond to emergencies or complete investigations.

Employing multiple security systems operated by different vendors makes access control programming (doors, credentialing holders, holiday schedules, databases/servers, and IT infrastructure) complicated and time-consuming resulting in the interruption of emergency and investigative services. This is not efficient nor effective. Given the current limitations and lack of existing systems integration, DSHS is advocating for the contracting with a single vendor for access control to state occupied buildings and video systems. Currently, DSHS is contracting with a single vendor (that operates most of the security systems used by the State) and has turned over the responsibility for access control from the Capitol Police Department to this vendor. Further, DSHS is working with the Department of Technology and Information (DTI) to consolidate the contracts for security access to this one vendor and to make the payments made to this vendor pass through DTI.

Recruit and Retain Law Enforcement

The Delaware Association of Chiefs of Police (DACP) is currently requesting to acquire professional services to address recruitment and retention of law enforcement personnel. The ability to provide all citizens with the highest quality of staffed law enforcement services is the greatest responsibility any governing body can provide. However, the recruitment numbers for future police candidates are declining to critical levels.

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) conducted a survey focusing on recruitment declines and identified that there is no single root cause, but multiple categories that need to be collectively taken into consideration. These categories include "social, political, and economic forces" (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2023) that are establishing the deficiencies in police recruitment. Although these categories are mostly influenced by political opinions and viewpoints, there are local actions that may be implemented to attract or welcome potential applicants to the law enforcement profession. This will be done by establishing a targeted applicant pool, reaching out to them through various platforms, and continuing the demonstration of core values by the departments. The president of the DACP, has worked with their leadership to identify the key components of what services they are seeking from a recruitment and retention vendor. The research they have conducted indicates an estimated cost of \$1.2 million.

DSHS will work with the DACP to construct a plan to recruit and retain future law enforcement personnel for the State of Delaware.

Align the Delaware Integrated Data System (DIDS)

The Delaware Integrated Data System (DIDS) platform will integrate data from multiple DSHS law enforcement sources and provide a complete, accurate, and up-to-date dataset for business intelligence and data analysis. In addition to strategic planning and tactical resource deployment, the data will be used for budget planning, identifying crime trends, proactive policing, supporting the violence reduction strategy, criminal analysis, and performance measurement.

The initial use case for the DSHS DIDS is budget planning and operations analytics. Detailed business requirements for the operational dashboard have been completed along with the identification of the initial data that will be pulled into the DIDS. The vendor will integrate only the data from the DSHS divisions in support of an operational dashboard. The data will be first loaded into a data lake where it will be prepped. The data will then be loaded into an analytical schema specific for the operational dashboard. Automated jobs will refresh the data in the DIDS based upon the production data availability (i.e. – daily, quarterly, annually).

The operational dashboard will be made available to approved DSHS users. All users will be able to view the entire dashboard. There is no requirement to secure portions of the dashboard to selected users. No personally identifiable information (PII) data is used for the dashboard.

Draft and Review Regulations Efficiently

Title 29 State Government, Chapter 101 Administrative Procedures, provides the present guidelines for the drafting, approving, adopting, amending, and repealing of agency regulations. Although, the process is not as extensive as a legislative proposal, it has been cumbersome, challenging, and lacking uniformity. This department will provide a liaison to interact with the Registrar of Regulations Office surrounding the adoption of regulations. This liaison will provide future communications about training, our “go-live” plans, and how the agency can be prepared for this transition. The goal is to make regulation additions, deletions, and changes more efficient.

Department of Insurance (DOI)

Support Data Access and Use in Primary Care

The Delaware Office of Value-Based Health Care Delivery (OVBHCD) within the Department of Insurance (DOI) was created via unfunded legislative mandate in 2019. The primary goal of the OVBHCD is to reduce health care costs by increasing the availability of high quality, cost-efficient healthcare. Increasing the investment in primary care aims to preserve patient access and build a stronger and more robust primary care system. After working to open the legislatively created office using DOI funds, hiring a contractor, reclassifying a position to hire a dedicated Director for the OVBHCD, and implementing the mandates of Senate Substitute 1 for Senate Bill 120 (2021), 2 issues were encountered which this project aimed to address. First, the contractor was responsible for designing and collecting the health insurer data, and responsible for data analyses. The primary care spending analysis requires skills of an analyst that the OVBHCD did not have and therefore, many consultant hours were incurred. Although the Director position was approved in the budget process and is paid for by DOI, the analyst positions needed were not approved, despite fiscal notes indicating they were essential to fulfill the statutory requirements of various pieces of legislation. Secondly, because the DOI does not receive any annual General Funds in the State’s budget and its’ own income sources have declined, increased expenses including this mandate had depleted all reserves. The DOI’s ensuing budget constraints resulted in the need to limit contractor hours, though the need for data collection, analyses, and analytics related to report and presentation development in compliance with the law was still present.

After the initial full year of implementation of the primary care spending requirements of Senate Substitute 1 for Senate Bill 120 (2021), OVBHCD identified opportunities to improve the data collection and data analysis processes while also reducing contractor costs and reliance. The data collected from the health insurers was being manually populated into the analytic software, and any analysis requested from the OVBHCD had to be performed using contractor hours.

Outcome goals for the project included:

- Cost reduction
- Reduced consultant hours to analyze data for meetings and presentations

- Reduced consultant hours by automating the data import function
- Improved efficiencies
- Office capability to review compliance data “on-demand” and collaborate with health insurers to begin corrective action planning without incurring contractor hours
- Office capability to perform data analytics to create presentation material for the DOI Leadership and the Primary Care Reform Collaborative (PCRC)

The original data extract, transform, and load (ETL) process had been manual, creating delays and costs. Furthermore, any data analysis had to be requested from the contractor which also added to the costs. Improving the ETL process would improve the efficiency of data ingestion for the 2 data reporting sets submitting by health insurers: (1) Progress Report, and (2) Annual Data Submissions. All contractor hours associated with this project remained within the existing budget.

Results are measured in cost savings after implementing the new ETL process.

	Estimated Hours Saved with new ETL	Blended Contractor Rate of \$215/hour
Progress Report Data Submission, twice annually	150	\$32,250
Annual Data Submission	275	\$59,125
TOTAL Hours Saved	425	\$91,375

Additional savings of approximately 100 hours (or \$21,500) can be accounted for in savings and related to not needing to use contractor hours for all data analyses and presentation materials. These had been frequent expenses, especially during legislative session, and in relation to the meetings of key groups such as the Delaware Health Care Commission (DHCC) and the Primary Care Reform Collaborative (PCRC). Therefore, the ETL efficiency project resulted in an estimated \$113,000 savings, and an improved data analytics process since the OVBHCD can be more self-sufficient.

With the data analytics environment developed, the OVBHCD is better positioned to assist in the implementation of primary care efforts across a multi-payer environment, which has been hinted at by key legislators. For example, if OVBHCD was requested to expand data collection from additional payers (i.e., Medicaid and the State Group Health Insurance Plan), the infrastructure has been developed and could be leveraged to assess current state, options for future policy initiatives, or even compliance down the road. It is a model that can be scaled in simple fashion.

Department of Justice (DOJ)

Establish the Delaware DOJ Data Lab (D3L) for Enhanced Data Management and Efficiency

The Delaware Office of the Attorney General is embarking on a transformative project to establish a state-of-the-art data lab. This initiative aims to modernize data management practices by unifying data collection between the 3 counties, and provide integration between law enforcement agencies, government databases, private entities, and publicly available information. This data lab will be equipped with advanced infrastructure, including new servers and software, and will feature both externally facing and internally facing dashboards to provide real-time insights and improve decision-making capabilities.

The current system managed solely by the Director of Research, Planning, and Special Projects using a combination of manually entered Excel spreadsheets, Teams trackers, open-source materials, and an outdated data warehouse will be replaced by this sophisticated setup and will employ a dedicated team of data professionals and graduate fellows.

While the initial setup costs, including personnel and infrastructure, will be significant, the investment is expected to yield substantial long-term benefits. Efficiency gains from automated processes, reduced errors, and enhanced data-driven decision-making will lead to notable cost savings and productivity improvements. Overall, the Delaware Department of Justice Data Lab will create a more effective and responsive organization, better equipped to serve the needs of the public and the justice system.

EDUCATION GEAR (EdGEAR)

EdGEAR was established in 2019 as a GEAR-equivalent program for the primary- and secondary-education (K-12) systems. The EdGEAR Board consists of 2 school district superintendents, 1 charter head of school, 4 school district Chief Financial Officers, GEAR representatives, and Department of Education staff. EdGEAR created a target list of initiatives including: (1) eliminating duplicative information systems, (2) optimizing procurement, (3) efficient distribution of surplus and the disposition of assets, and (4) capital project improvements. Due to the pandemic, work on these issues began in 2021. During its meetings in 2021, EdGEAR focused on several services provided through the Office of Management and Budget, Government Support Services unit to develop efficiencies in leveraging contractual opportunities, enhancing statewide surplus property use and disposal among school districts, and working collaboratively on technology acquisition, use and disposal in 2022 and into 2024, EdGEAR began focusing on efficiencies in the capital project processes across school districts.

Education Information Systems Replacements

Student Information System Replacement

The existing student information system, although it houses a compilation of data from various points of entry, it is not a standalone, single source of student information and data. Given that many branches and applications of the existing student information system, Delaware has experienced ongoing challenges throughout each school year related to the movement of data between the various components. Additionally, the existing legacy system was built and implemented over 25 years ago, meaning that Delaware has not had an opportunity to maximize efficiencies with electronic student data and records since its initial implementation.

The department worked closely with stakeholders from charter schools and school districts to ensure their inputs and feedback was built into the Request for Proposals, and it continued their engagement and involvement throughout the procurement process. Upon selection of the new student information system, the department has continued to work closely with staff and partners from charter schools and school districts, including accepting volunteers to participate in the first wave of implementation (school year 2024/2025). The new student information system is planned to be fully implemented over the next 2 years.

Upon full implementation, public education in Delaware will be utilizing a standalone, single source of student information and data, improving efficiencies of the system itself along with eliminating manual or workaround processes that have been in place for years with the outgoing legacy system.

School Finance System Replacement

The existing school finance system is not a standalone, single source of school funding data. The current system was developed in 2008 and has been modified to handle increasingly complex funding mechanisms that did not exist when the system was first developed. Currently, there are several charter school funding streams that must be handled outside of the system and the current system does not provide funding details for school districts. The new system will automate state funding allocations for both school districts and charter schools. The automation of state funding calculations will be an enhancement as the current process involves manual updates to various spreadsheets and is prone to human error. The new system will interface with the unit count system and will ensure accurate funding allocations across all charter schools and school districts.

The Department of Education has solicited stakeholder feedback from charter schools and school districts to ensure the new system meets their needs, as well as the department's. The Data Service Center has provided several demonstrations throughout the first 3 phases of development to gather feedback from the charter schools and school districts. The feedback has been used to make changes and enhancements to ensure the new system provides all necessary functionality. The department will continue to engage stakeholders throughout the development and implementation phases until full implementation has been achieved. This new system will create significant efficiencies in the allocation of public education funding statewide.

Upon full implementation, public education in Delaware will be utilizing a standalone, single source of state funding data, improving efficiencies of the system itself along with eliminating manual or workaround processes that have been in place for years with the outgoing legacy system.

Unit Count System Replacement

The legacy unit count system had reporting and capacity limitations. The new system allows for more robust features, including multiple new error detection reports. The legacy system required users to navigate through 2 totally different systems while the new application brings all the data to one system and interface. The legacy system was also only able to handle 2 counts per year. The new system can handle multiple, unlimited counts per year and provides reports that can compare multiple snapshots of data.

The department worked closely with stakeholders from charter schools and school districts to ensure their inputs and feedback was built into the new system and it continues to gather their feedback and requests now as part of preparations for future enhancements. It is a very involved user group.

The Data Service Center has also been involved in the interface development of education finance and the new student information system. The connection has allowed the department to leverage the knowledge gained during the development of the new system to ensure integration of multiple student information systems running concurrently and allowing the 2 separate systems to “talk” via the unit count application.

Comprehensive Review of Capital Project Processes

With public school districts expressing needs for minor and major facility investments and existing market pressures surpassing capital project allocations, the EdGEAR team began a comprehensive review of the capital projects processes within public education. The EdGEAR team quickly realized that this undertaking would likely require the engagement of a larger body and shifted focus to the minor capital funding process. Of concern is the sufficiency of the minor capital improvement and equipment (MCI) appropriation and the efficiency of how these funds are allocated across the school districts and charter schools. There is awareness that the major capital requests for new schools and renovations of existing schools are squeezing out the MCI funding. The enhanced MCI appropriation was an effective idea to provide additional MCI funds, but the requirement that all prior year MCI funds be expended/encumbered before requesting enhanced MCI funding ties the hands of the districts, particularly those needing to save up MCI allocations over multiple years to have enough funds to cover costly MCI projects.

How MCI funding is allocated among the school districts and charter schools needs to be examined (currently, the funding formula is based on student enrollment, not on characteristics of the school facilities, such as age of the facility or construction quality). The exploration of potential additional sources of MCI funds and an alternative allocation model based on facility characteristics was begun in 2023. This effort is expected to lead to recommendations that will result in (1) recommendations to ensure appropriate funding of minor capital projects needs statewide and (2) improvements to the allocation methodology and process.