



Regional Coalition Announces ‘WNY Tech Skills Initiative’ to Accelerate Economic Recovery, Provide Community with Access to Technology Training

M&T engages global skills training expert General Assembly to serve as educational partner for Tech Academy

BUFFALO, N.Y., Dec.16, 2020—Western New Yorkers who have been economically impacted by the pandemic can now register for free tech and digital skills courses through the WNY Tech Skills Initiative.

Launched in response to persistent unemployment and underemployment exacerbated by the pandemic, the WNY Tech Skills Initiative will offer virtual training experiences that will connect community members with access to in-demand skills. The training will benefit people interested in careers in technology, as well as those who want to gain digital skills to make themselves more marketable when pursuing jobs in other fields.

“So many of our friends, family members and neighbors have experienced economic hardships amid the pandemic. We need to rally together as a community to provide opportunities that foster an inclusive recovery,” said **Mike Wisler, Chief Information Officer at M&T Bank**. “The WNY Tech Skills Initiative will help people gain new strengths in critical areas—from data analysis to coding to digital marketing—which many companies urgently need right now. These skills will bolster individual resumes and strengthen our regional workforce. We’re building a broad coalition to be a part of this program to ensure it serves the people who need it most and reaches communities across Western New York.”

M&T Bank also announced today it has engaged General Assembly, a globally known pioneer in career transformation, as the educational partner for its Tech Academy, the program that will oversee the WNY Tech Skills Initiative. With input from Western New York regional stakeholders, General Assembly will lead the development and administration of the Tech Academy’s skills training and instructional programming.

The WNY Tech Skills Initiative will be guided and informed by a regional coalition that includes M&T, Empire State Development, TechBuffalo, Buffalo Urban League, Goodwill of Western New York, Rich Products, the University at Buffalo Regional Institute, Lighthouse Technology Services, the City of Buffalo, the Buffalo Employment & Training Center, and the Erie County Department of Social Services. The initiative’s free courses and workshops will be provided by General Assembly.

“TechBuffalo is excited to be a part of leading an effort that aligns so well with our mission to attract, retain and develop tech talent in WNY. This coalition isn’t just growing the technology ecosystem, but we are helping spark the regional economy,” said **TechBuffalo Executive Director James Partsch, Jr.** “A skilled technology workforce is key to unlocking possibilities for startups, legacy businesses, and organizations of all sizes. This is one of many efforts that will transform the traditional workforce into a tech-forward one. Most importantly, the emerging opportunities will be accessible to all, reaching underrepresented people, individuals impacted by the pandemic, and those already part of the ecosystem.”

The WNY Tech Skills Initiative coalition plans to engage community organizations throughout the region to help identify and support potential students for the program, with a focus on people experiencing job losses or a reduction in hours due to COVID-19 and underrepresented groups in technology, such as women, people of color and veterans. These community partners will play a crucial role in making sure the potential benefits of this program are realized by community members who have the greatest need.

The virtual training programs will be free for residents of Western New York (Erie, Niagara, Allegany, Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties).

The WNY Tech Skills Initiative will include three learning phases:

- **Open access, self-led skills training:** Virtual, project-based learning pathways that will introduce participants to various technology and digital skill areas, such as data analysis, digital marketing, UX design and software engineering.
- **Virtual tech skill workshops:** One-hour to day-long courses that allow for tech career path exploration through foundational training.
- **Virtual upskilling programs:** Part-time, instructor-led courses that offer advanced training designed to enhance participants’ readiness for careers in tech.

Initially, the open-access, self-led skills training will be available for up to 3,000 people, with subsequent training phases made available soon after students complete a portion of phase one training. Candidates for the virtual upskilling programs will be reviewed by General Assembly for eligibility based on participation in the first two phases and proficiency in applicable technology skills.

“The urgent need to reskill and upskill workers for in-demand tech and digital roles has only been exacerbated by the pandemic-induced shutdowns and economic hardship communities across the country are experiencing,” said **Liz Simon, Co-Chief Operating Officer at General Assembly.** “To keep pace with these changes and help communities recover faster, it’s more important than ever that we equip workers with the digital skills needed to succeed in the future of work. The WNY Tech Skills Initiative is doing just that: bringing together local leaders, educators, and businesses to help those who need it most. We are thrilled to contribute to this amazing coalition committed to opening up new, resilient career pathways for Western New Yorkers.”

Empire State Development Acting Commissioner and President and CEO-designate Eric Gertler said, “The pandemic has created unprecedented challenges, especially for Western New Yorkers who are unemployed, underemployed or facing a job loss. We hope they’ll take advantage of the WNY Tech Skills Initiative to learn new skills, advance their existing skills and to help themselves, and the region, build back better.”

The launch of the WNY Tech Skills Initiative follows M&T's recent announcement of its Z Development Program (ZDP), a tech apprenticeship that creates a pathway to a career as a technologist who supports mission-critical banking functions that run on the IBM Z platform. The WNY Tech Skills Initiative will provide access to a broader range of technology skills and can serve as a first step toward several different career paths across industries.

With the Tech Academy's first two initiatives now launched, M&T will continue to partner with TechBuffalo, General Assembly and other partners to develop future training opportunities to cultivate new tech talent from non-traditional backgrounds and underrepresented communities in Western New York. TechBuffalo will lead community and employer engagement efforts, connect students with other tech-related continuous learning opportunities and provide resources to support their transition into tech careers.

For more information or to enroll in the WNY Tech Skills Initiative, visit techbuffalo.org/wny-tech-skills-initiative or text SKILLS to 716-710-6901.

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