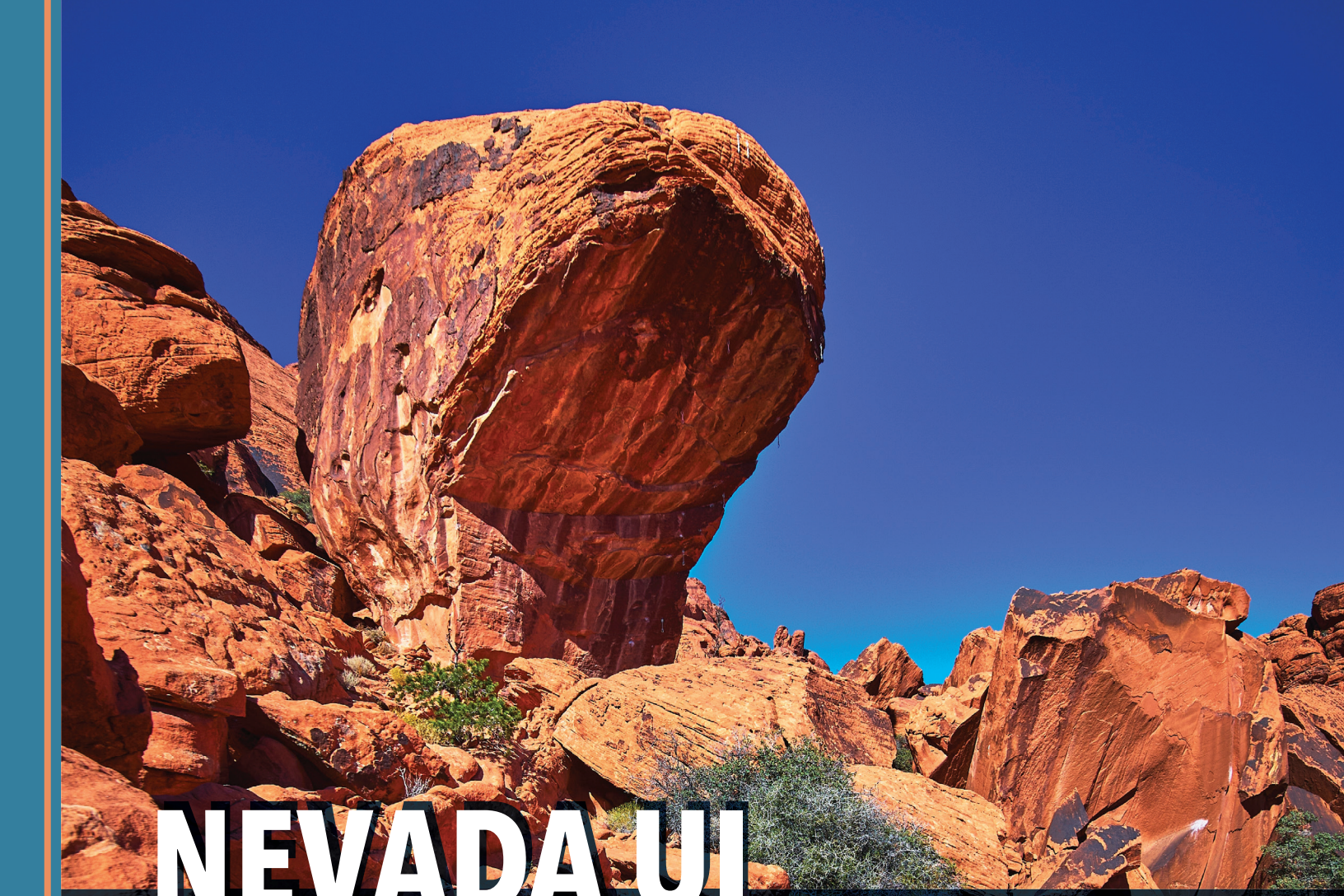




NEVADA UI

Project Highlight

“When the chips are down, you can count on your fellow Nevadans. We supported Nevadans the best we could, but the old system struggled. With this new system, we don’t have to worry about technology, and we can serve our constituents a lot better.”

—Bryce Leinan, Database and Interface Supervisor

When the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered Nevada’s tourism-driven economy, nearly a third of the state’s workers were suddenly unemployed—leading to a surge of unemployment insurance (UI) claims. The Nevada Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation (DETR) felt the impact immediately. DETR’s staff worked day and night to respond to the surge of claims, but their outdated UI system couldn’t keep up with the demand. “The system was a huge hodgepodge of tools from everywhere,” said Laxmi Bokka, IT Chief. With information and processes spread across multiple tools—and few services available online—routine customer transactions required significant manual processing and staff intervention. “The delays during the pandemic were astronomical. It was very frustrating, especially not being able to serve Nevadans. That was the hardest part,” said Director Chris Sewell. DETR needed an integrated UI system that would streamline operations and make customer service more efficient and convenient. Database and Interface Supervisor Bryce Leinan noted, “The pandemic proved that we had to modernize.”



Left to right: Troy Jordan, Patricia Allander, Chris Sewell, Josh Marhevka, Kristine Nelson



NUI DELIVERS AN INTUITIVE UI EXPERIENCE

The Nevada Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation's (DETR) mainframe system offered limited online services, and customers frequently needed staff assistance to complete even basic tasks. "They'd call and we would ask them questions and type in their answers because they couldn't do it themselves—it was just that difficult," said Karen Davis, Employment Security Division (ESD) Manager. What should have been simple transactions often became manual processes for agency staff, increasing staff workload and making it difficult to deliver services as efficiently as DETR wanted. "In the old system, staff had to be very hands-on with each customer. A lot of things were not automatic that should have been," said Chris Sewell, Director. DETR knew it needed to fundamentally change how customers interacted with the agency.

In January 2023, DETR partnered with Fast Enterprises (FAST) for the Nevada Unemployment Insurance (NUI) project, which modernized their unemployment insurance (UI) tax and benefits systems. A key goal of the project was to make it easier for claimants and employers to access services on their own. The NUI project introduced new claimant and

employer portals, which included mobile access and expanded self-service capabilities. As DETR staff incorporated their business processes into the new portals, they also focused on designing an intuitive user experience. Staff evaluated each

step customers would take when filing claims, managing accounts, and completing other UI transactions, and looked for ways to make each interaction easier. "The new portals are much more user-friendly for customers," said Amy Sweeting, Field Audit Supervisor. By simplifying processes and giving customers direct access to information and services, DETR reduced many of the barriers that had previously driven customers to call the agency.

Today, the majority of customer interactions take place online. "A claimant

or employer can do pretty much everything in the portals. If they have questions, 9 times out of 10, they can find the answer in the system without having to call," Karen said. The shift has led to faster service and reduced the burden on staff. ESD Manager Sheree Dean said, "Our call times are lower because less explanation is needed. There are not as many questions asking, 'What does this mean?' That's definitely one of the big advantages the system brought us."



The team worked really hard to make sure the system was user-friendly, and we've received a lot of positive feedback on that.

**—CHRIS SEWELL,
Director**



IMPROVEMENTS

“We’re responding to customers immediately now instead of saying ‘I’m sorry, I can’t give you a time frame.’ There’s less stress on our team and less tension on behalf of the employers and third parties.”

—Katie Krueger, ESD Manager

“Our new data validation tools are game-changing. If I were talking to someone in another state, I’d say this is something you should have—anyone that doesn’t is losing out.”

—David Schmidt, Chief Economist

“The biggest benefit for our internal users is a system that is intuitive and less archaic. Staff can do things they couldn’t do before.”

—Sherri Powell, Project Manager

“There’s a lot of automation, and the system keeps track of everything. The reporting and access to information are wonderful.”

—Kelly Castellanos, Supervisor, IT Business Analyst

“The fact-finding process moved from phone calls to online. As a result, we are meeting timeliness measures a lot easier than we were before.”

—Zach Furlong, ESD Program Specialist

“NUI is more scalable and configurable. We can easily add new programs without developing a whole new system.”

—Sharan Jose, Contributions Support Team Lead

“We are seeing less identity theft. I think everything is more secure than it was before.”

—Sheree Dean, ESD Manager



Todd McMillen and Bob Shores



BENNY BUILDS CUSTOMER CONFIDENCE

“DETR had a really bad reputation after the pandemic, and we had to mend that,” said Patricia Allander, Deputy Administrator for UI. To restore confidence in DETR and raise awareness about the new system, the agency launched a statewide outreach campaign—centered around the NUI project mascot, Benny the Bighorn. “Benny was like the theme of the entire project and he became the hit of our communications campaign,” Patricia said. Benny appeared on billboards, posters, targeted web ads, and social media posts highlighting the new online portals. “The outreach campaign gave us an opportunity to rebrand and build trust again with our constituents,” said Scott Bennett, Benefits Operations Manager. Benny also starred in multilingual instructional videos designed to guide customers through common tasks. “These resources went beyond explaining what to do—we wanted to provide contextual information to help people understand why they were being asked to take certain actions,” Scott said. As more people successfully discovered and used the new online services, positive customer experiences helped reshape the agency’s reputation. Patricia noted, “We don’t

hear from customers as much and we don’t get contacted by the media anymore—it’s amazing. DETR’s reputation improved overnight.”

Hi! I’m Benny
the Bighorn.



DETR staff chose Benny the Bighorn as the NUI project mascot, inspired by Nevada’s state animal. What began as an internal symbol of optimism and resilience soon became one of the most recognizable elements of NUI. Benny’s friendly demeanor became the face of agency communications and the virtual assistant on NUI’s online portals.



MODERNIZATION PAYS OFF

Within 90 days of launching the new unemployment insurance (UI) tax system, DETR collected more unpaid UI taxes than it had during the previous three years combined. Those gains were driven by a complete transformation of how collections are managed. Employment Security Division Administrator Kristine Nelson said, “Our collections capabilities in the system have significantly increased. That paid for the system itself within the first year.” Before modernization, staff relied heavily on spreadsheets and manual reconciliation outside the system, sometimes spending up to a year reconciling balances before collection activities could begin. Now, collections are integrated into NUI, providing visibility into outstanding balances and automating much of the collection process. Staff can now identify and pursue debts more efficiently, ensuring they are recovered before statutory limits prevent collection activity. “All that money was just rolling off accounts before. We would have lost those contributions because, by statute, we can’t collect it past a certain time,” explained Jennifer Carroll, Tax Chief for Contributions. NUI also provided employers with easier access to outstanding balances and new payment options. “More times than not, the employer just didn’t know they owed the debt. Most were surprised to see that they owed and made an effort to pay,” said Bob Shores, Senior IT Business Process Analyst.



NUI increased collections from \$7.9 million in 2023 to **\$61.7 million** in NUI’s first 12 months using new collection tools and automated workflows.



Project Name

Nevada Unemployment Insurance (NUI)

Project Type

UI Tax and Benefits

Project Dates

January 2023-July 2025

Agency Name

Nevada Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation (DETR)

Population

3.1 Million

Capital

Carson City

State Nickname

The Silver State

Fun Fact

Nevada’s state animal, the Desert Bighorn Sheep, is known for resilience and adaptability.





SILVER STATE, GOLD-STANDARD DEDICATION



Left to right: Isis Martinez-Sanchez, Amy Sweeting, Sheree Dean, Ken Cruz, Teresa Rice, Karen Manaois, Brayn Gamino, Zach Furlong, Maria Ortiz-Huey



Left to right: Sherri Powell, Leonard Lee, Kalysta Branco, Timothy Wilcox, Patricia Allander, Rachel Lenhares



Left to right: Ryan Percivalle, Erin Fitzgerald, Katie Krueger, MJ Johnson, Kai Liao, Kelly Castellanos, Tawyna Ward, Noel Santiago, Jennifer Carroll, Bob Shores



Left to right: Brinda Venkatesh, Bryce Leinan, Sonali Bandyopadhyay, Shakthy Ranganathan, Laxmi Bokka, Joel Peters, Isaac Abraham, Amanda Thurber, Tejas Oulkar, Sharan Jose, Ken Johnson, Abinash Konersman



THE SKY'S THE LIMIT FOR NUI

Since completing the NUI project in July 2025, the Nevada Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation (DETR) staff are looking to the future with more confidence.

“The project was successful and ultimately is going to lead us into better serving our constituents and being a more productive, more efficient team,” said Maria Ortiz-Huey, Benefit Payment Control Unit Supervisor. That confidence is fueled by a system that can adapt as the agency’s needs evolve. DETR plans to continue expanding automation, strengthening fraud prevention, and finding new ways

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The continuing improvements and the ability to change the system pretty much any way that we’d like is a huge advantage and will help us stay cutting edge.

**—PATRICIA ALLANDER,
Deputy Administrator for
Unemployment Insurance**

to take advantage of NUI’s capabilities. “The future of NUI is optimizing it to be better and better—it’s ever evolving,” said Bob Shores, Senior IT Business Process Analyst. As DETR staff continue to explore NUI, they see even more opportunities ahead. Scott Bennett, Benefits Operations Manager, said, “It’s rarely a case of ‘We can’t do that.’ It’s more a case of, ‘How can we achieve that?’ The sky’s the limit with the new system.”

