

## Rhode Island's Workforce Development System for Adults An Overview

"No economy can succeed without a high-quality workforce, particularly in an age of globalization and technical change"

Ben Bernanke

### Overview

Workforce development is a necessity for both employees and businesses. For an individual, it means raising the income for their family. For a business, it means staying competitive. For the government, it grows or enhances economic development.

This paper describes the public workforce development system for adults in Rhode Island, as funded or coordinated by the Governor's Workforce Board ("the Board"). Under state law, the Board has responsibility and authority to plan, coordinate, fund and evaluate workforce development activities in the state.<sup>1</sup> It is responsible for overseeing workforce development policy and funding under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA)<sup>2</sup> as well.

The workforce development system serves two customers: employers seeking new employees or to increase the skills of their current workforce, and unemployed or underemployed Rhode Islanders who are looking for a job and/or the training needed to get a job and a pathway to work that pays a family sustaining wage.

This paper focuses on the workers, including an overview of how people know about and access the opportunities for jobs and skills training provided by the system. It also provides information about the state and local entities responsible for developing and monitoring workforce policy and investments, explaining how the public can engage in the policy-making process.



<sup>1</sup>RILG 42-102-1

<sup>2</sup> The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed into law on July 22, 2014. WIOA is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. Congress passed the Act by a wide bipartisan majority; it was the first legislative reform of the public workforce system in 15 years.

## Policy and Planning – Opportunity for Public Input

Under state law, the Board is required to develop a two-year “Strategic Statewide Employment and Training Plan” that outlines the goals and objectives of the workforce development system, the major priorities for the next two-year period and policies and requirements necessary to meet those priorities.<sup>3</sup> The Board is charged with developing and maintaining a comprehensive inventory and analysis of workforce development activities to support the biennial plan, including the populations being served across the different employment and training and adult education programs.

In 2019, the Board adopted a plan for FY2020-21 that describes progress on the FY2018-19 plan, lays out plans for the coming period, and maintains four key strategies:

- Implement a demand-driven, sector-based strategy based on Brookings Industry clusters<sup>4</sup>, to meet employer demand and establish a pipeline of skilled workers for future demand.
- Advance a career pathway strategy to provide employment, education, training, and support services for individuals, particularly those with barriers to employment, that will ensure an opportunity to develop their education and skills to prepare them for a job at various points in their life.
- Align policy and leverage existing government structures and resources so that government is “networked” and coordinated to achieve efficiencies and effectiveness through the workforce system.
- Use data to inform policy-making decisions, guide investments, and evaluate performance to measure return on investment.<sup>5</sup>

Under the federal WIOA law, the Board is charged with developing a four-year state plan outlining how the state will provide a comprehensive and streamlined workforce development system for the programs funded or coordinated under the federal law. The 2016-2020 plan<sup>6</sup>, the first plan developed after passage of WIOA, required the state to address the new WIOA requirements including: improving services to meet the needs of lower-skilled job seekers, increasing the use of sector partnerships and career pathway models, and implementing integrated education and training models. The 2016 – 2020 plan was updated in 2018. A new four year state plan needs to be submitted to the Federal Department of Labor by March, 2020. There will be opportunity for public input and comment.

Under the state law, the Board is composed of twenty-three members, including the commerce secretary (who serves as vice-chair); the director of the Department of Labor and Training (DLT); the commissioner of the RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE); a representative of a public higher education institution; a representative of vocational rehabilitative services; and 18 public members, 12 of whom represent businesses of different sizes (including the two chairs of the local workforce development boards), four from organized labor and two from community-based organizations that provide or promote workforce development services. The 18 public members must reflect the geographic diversity of the state, five must be women and at least four must be from minority communities and one must be a person with a disability.

The Board has four working committees. The Executive Committee is responsible for overall management, direction, and oversight of the Board, and for development of planning and policy. The Strategic Investments and Evaluation Committee is responsible for guiding workforce investments (federal, state and local), aligning/leveraging workforce funds and for overseeing and approving allocations from the Job Development Fund.

<sup>3</sup> 42-102-6(a). The Board is also required to publish an annual “Unified Workforce Development System Report, that reports on activities, spending, and persons served through the programs in the “coordinated programs system.” 42-102-6(f). <https://gwb.ri.gov/data-and-performance>

<sup>4</sup> The Brookings Institute conducted an analysis of Rhode Island’s economy and released a report recommending that the state focus on seven “future oriented” industries that represent promising growth: Biomedical Innovation; IT-Software, Cyber Physical Systems and Data Analytics; Defense Shipbuilding and Maritime; Advanced Business Services; Design, Food and Custom Manufacturing; Transportation, Distribution and Logistics; Arts, Education, Hospitality and Tourism. Health care is not one of these industries, even though it is one of the largest sectors in the state. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/rhode-island-innovates-a-competitive-strategy-for-the-ocean-state/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://gwb.ri.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/FY202021BiennialPlan.pdf?189db0>

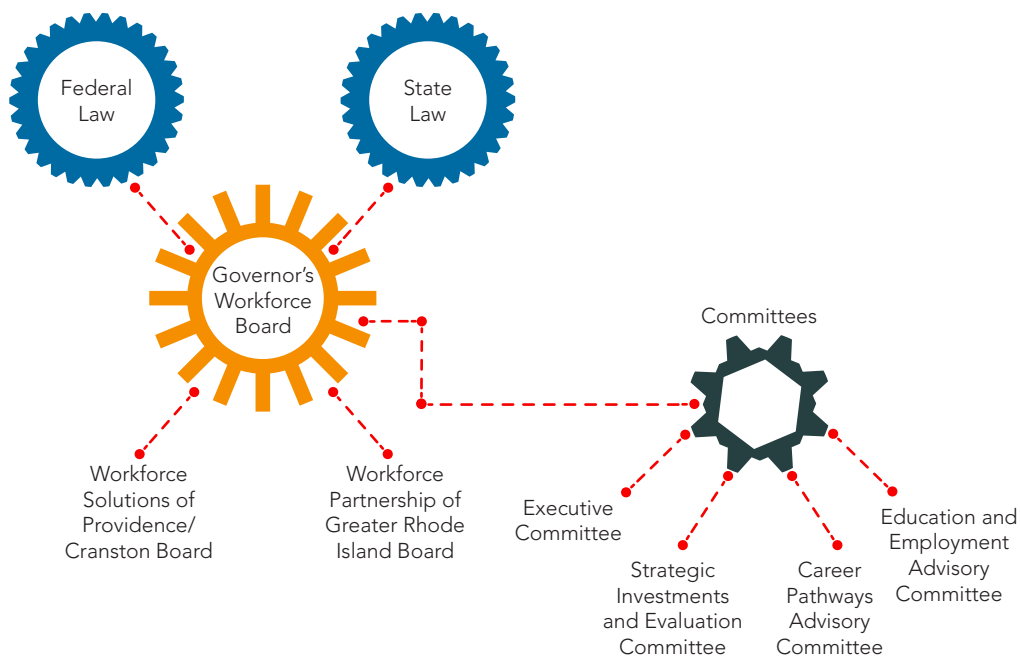
<sup>6</sup> <http://www.dlt.ri.gov/wio/pdfs/WIOAStatePlan2016.pdf>

The Education and Employment Advisory Committee is responsible for ensuring that adults and out-of-school youth in or near the workforce have opportunity to obtain industry and/or post-secondary credentials, career readiness, and jobs that provide a living wage. The committee is also responsible for advising the Board and other parties on issues related to education and employment investments (federal, state and local) pertaining to adults and out-of-school youth. RIDE is a key partner on this committee since it is the agency responsible for adult education under state law and Title II of the federal WIOA.

The Career Pathways Advisory Committee is responsible for the development and growth of career pathways. The Committee oversees the state's Prepare RI Action Plan to provide all youth (ages 6 through 24) with access to flexible, quality, career pathways programming through a high quality delivery model inclusive of and beyond Career and Technical Training. The Committee is also responsible for advising the Board and other parties on issues related to career pathways. RIDE, as the K-12 agency, is an integral part of this committee.

Both the Education/Employment Advisory Committee and the Career Pathways Committee include community members as well as Board members. All meetings of the Board and the Committee 'sare open to the public.<sup>7</sup>

## The Workforce Development System - Policy and Planning



In addition to the statewide board, as authorized under WIOA, there are two Local Workforce Development Boards, responsible for workforce development services that are responsive to the needs of businesses and residents in their respective regions. The boards, Workforce Solutions of Providence/Cranston<sup>8</sup> and the Workforce Partnership of Greater Rhode Island,<sup>9</sup> are responsible for allocating WIOA funds and for the operation of the netWORKri Career Centers in their areas, among other responsibilities.

Each local board must include a majority representation from business, including at least two members representing small business; two representatives from labor; a representative from a registered apprenticeship

<sup>7</sup> <https://gwb.ri.gov/board-and-policy#1496341722993-03c625d5-1a63>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.providenceri.gov/oeo/workforce-development-board/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.griworkforce.com/boardGRI.htm>

program; an adult education training provider; an institution of higher education that provides workforce investment activities; an economic or community development program; a representative of employment services; and a representative from vocational rehabilitation. Like the statewide board, the local boards are required to develop, with community input, WIOA plans that describe the labor market conditions in their areas, the worker and employer needs, how services will be delivered and how they will coordinate with other parts of the workforce development system. Meetings are open to the public.

## State Agencies and Programs in the Workforce Development System

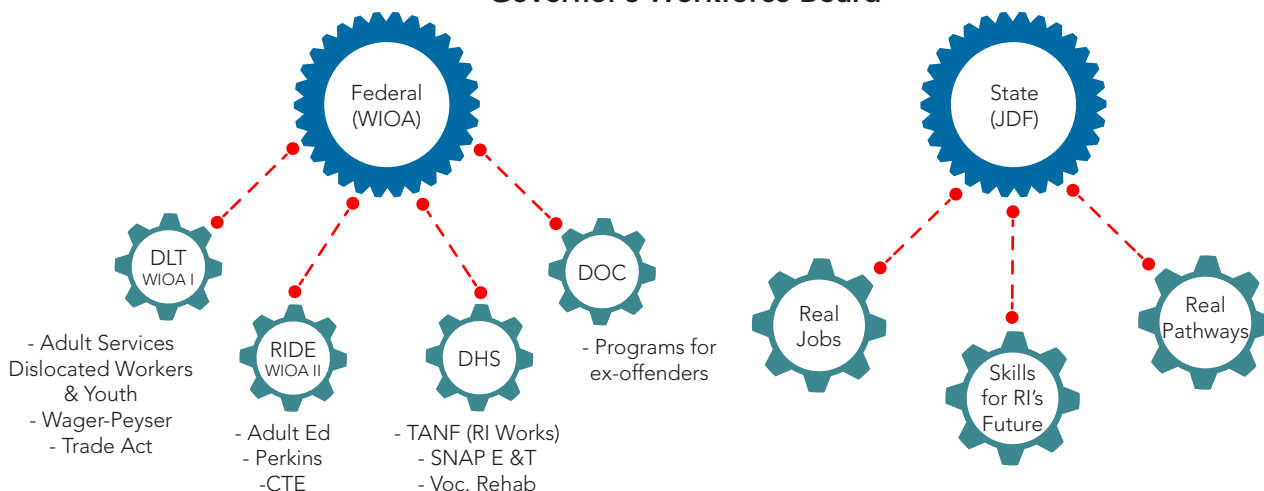
State law establishing the Governor’s Workforce Board defines a number of agencies and their workforce programs as part of the coordinated program system.<sup>10</sup> These include programs funded through WIOA and other federal sources including the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families block grant and the SNAP Employment and Training Program. Under the WIOA law, one way of coordinating services is to ensure that job seekers can access the services they need at the netWORKri Career Centers (called American Job Centers under the federal law.) WIOA mandates which agencies/programs must participate as partners at these sites.

The coordinated system also includes programs funded through the Job Development Fund (JDF) which is funded from a 0.21% assessment on businesses’ taxable payrolls. Unlike federal dollars that are restricted either to certain populations or certain uses, the JDF provides a significant source of flexible funding to provide workforce development services. JDF dollars help fund the Adult Education System that provides basic workforce readiness skills. Beginning in 2014, the Board used JDF and other funding to implement new strategies for providing workforce development services to create the Real Jobs, Skills for Rhode Island’s Future and Real Pathways programs.

The workforce development system is still working to become “a system” or at least a truly networked environment that ensures that Rhode Islanders have access to the program that best meets their needs and puts them on a pathway to a job that pays a living wage. An interagency workgroup comprised of representatives from the agencies in the coordinated program system, facilitated by the staff of the Board, meets “to plan, strategize and execute implementation of the WIOA as well as the strategic integration of state JDF resources when appropriate.”<sup>11</sup>

This section, as depicted below, describes the state agencies and programs that are part of WIOA and Real Jobs, Real Pathways and Skills for Rhode Island’s Future.

### Governor’s Workforce Board



<sup>10</sup> RILG 42-102-6 (b) (vii)

<sup>11</sup> <https://gwb.ri.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/FY2018AnnualWorkforceSystemReport.pdf?189db0>

## Department of Labor and Training (DLT)

DLT administers a number of programs that are designed to help unemployed residents connect or reconnect to the workforce or to increase their job skills. Services, provided at the netWORKri Career Centers, include assessment, counseling, job and training referrals, connection to industry and community partner training programs and referral for help meeting basic needs. Funding is also available for eligible residents to enroll in certain training programs. All unemployed and underemployed adults are eligible for basic services. Additional services are available for dislocated workers (individuals laid off or about to be laid off) and for individuals unemployed as a result of trade policy changes. DLT is also the primary funder of the state's industry-sector and community-based partnerships that offer training and other career services to meet the needs of the state's growing industries, and populations that face barriers to employment. DLT is responsible for administering programs under Title I of WIOA (Adult, Dislocated Workers, Youth), and the federal Wagner-Peyser and Trade Acts.

## RI Department of Human Services (DHS)

### RI Works (RIW)

Adults in families receiving RI Works cash assistance are entitled to employment-readiness services based on a comprehensive assessment of needs and interests. Funding is primarily from the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant. Employment plans may include job readiness, job search, vocational education, intensive literacy and/or English language services. Parents may receive services from community providers funded by DHS and/or those offered through the netWORKri Career Centers, Real Jobs, and Real Pathways. Transportation assistance (bus pass or mileage reimbursement) and child care assistance are provided at no cost to the participant.

### SNAP Employment and Training

Adults who receive SNAP benefits (but not RIW benefits) are offered the opportunity to participate in a SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) program that can help to prepare them for employment or to build skills and earn credentials to achieve career goals. Federal funding is provided through the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS).

Services include vocational training, remedial and basic education, apprenticeships, and job search as well as wrap around services to help individuals find success in employment through soft skills coaching and case management supports. E&T programs are free. Supplies, uniforms, certification exams and all other costs associated with training are covered by the program. The participant may receive transportation supports, and parents participating in SNAP E&T programs of up to 12 months duration may be eligible for Child Care assistance. SNAP E&T works in concert with netWORKri Career Centers, Real Jobs, Real Pathways, and adult education programs.

### Vocational Rehabilitation

Adults with disabilities may receive services to prepare for employment. Services include counseling and guidance to help plan vocational goals and services; rehabilitation technology services; assistive technology services; diagnostic evaluations; college or vocational training; job training and job supports; job development and placement services; vehicle modifications; housing modifications; and post-employment services. Federal Funding is authorized through Title IV of WIOA.

## RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE)

RIDE administers and funds the statewide network of 24 adult education programs. Funding for this network comes from both state (JDF and general revenue) and federal (Title II of WIOA and TANF through DHS) sources. Programs offer basic work-readiness skills (English language services, basic literacy and numeracy),



attainment of high school credential and industry certification, and transition to post-secondary education/training. Some programs participate in Real Jobs and/or Real Pathways programs. Some programs provide services at netWORKri Career Centers. All programs are available to receive referrals from other state agencies, as well as walk-ins from the community. RIDE also oversees the six GED testing centers around the state. RIDE is responsible for administering programs established under Title II of WIOA.

## Real Jobs, Real Pathways, Skills for Rhode Island's Future

Beginning in 2014, the Board allocated JDF and general revenue funds to develop Real Jobs RI, a "demand-driven, sector-based strategy to meet employer demand and establish a pipeline of skilled workers for future demand." Real Jobs connects employers with industry intermediaries such as trade associations, non-profits or universities that act as a facilitator bringing together smaller companies that have similar workforce challenges. As of 2019, there are 39 Real Jobs RI Partnerships.<sup>12</sup>

A recently funded Real Jobs partnership is one convened by Clinica Esperanza/Hope Clinic. The partnership will train bilingual and bicultural Community Health Workers (Navegantes) to be health coaches and medical interpreters through an Advanced Navegante Training Program.

In 2017, the Board established the Real Pathways RI program, focused on serving populations with traditional barriers to employment (long-term unemployed, people experiencing homelessness, English language learners, individuals without a high school degree, veterans) or focused on regions of the state with above average concentrations of poverty or unemployment. The partnerships include public, private and non-profit agencies that collaborate to provide career services, support services, training and job placement. As of 2019, there are 14 Real Pathways partnerships.<sup>13</sup>

One of the first funded Real Pathways programs is the Rhode Island Core Skills Partnership, a collaboration among community adult education programs that responds to employer demand for core skills training, including adult basic education and English language services for their employees. The partnership provides on-site educational services which can be contextualized to the needs of employer and employee.

In 2014, the Board also funded Skills for Rhode Island's Future, a non-profit charged with matching businesses that have unmet hiring needs with qualified, unemployed and underemployed adults.<sup>14</sup> Skills for Rhode Island's Future focuses on the hiring needs of local employers, then recruits and screens unemployed and underemployed Rhode Island residents to fill those positions.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.dlt.ri.gov/realjobs/pdfs/IGPartnerships2019.pdf>. Note, this document shows the 12 new grantees in 2019. The list of grantees from the initial Real Jobs initiatives funded in 2015 and 2017 can be found here: <http://www.dlt.ri.gov/realjobs/Partnerships.htm>

<sup>13</sup> [https://gwb.ri.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2018-Real-Pathways-RI-Grant-Recipients\\_Public.pdf?189db0](https://gwb.ri.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2018-Real-Pathways-RI-Grant-Recipients_Public.pdf?189db0)

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.Skillsforri.com>

## How Do People Find Workforce Development Services?

People find workforce development services in many different ways. Some may connect to services through a targeted program provided through a state agency (RI Works, SNAP, Vocational Rehabilitation). Some may go to one of the netWORKri Career Centers. Others may engage through a community-based organization that is dedicated to workforce development (e.g., the network of adult education programs) or that includes job readiness as one of a number of services (e.g., programs for people who are experiencing homeless or justice-involved individuals). Many people learn about programs from family and friends. There are also online resources that help people find available programs.



The section below describes the place-based services at the netWORKri Career Centers and links to online resources.

### netWORKri Career Centers<sup>15</sup>

There are 4 netWORKri Career Centers around the state. One is operated by Workforce Solutions of Providence/Cranston located on the Providence/Cranston line, and three are operated by the Workforce Partnership of Greater Rhode Island, in Woonsocket, Wakefield, and West Warwick.

Under the WIOA law, these centers must include representation from and access to services from different federal workforce partners so that unemployed and underemployed people are able to access services appropriate to their diverse needs. The required partners and services at the Career Centers are:

- DLT: Adult Services, Dislocated Workers and Youth and Wagner-Peyser services
- RIDE: Adult Education and Literacy
- DHS: Vocational Rehabilitation and RI Works (per state election)

In addition to these core partners, other partners/programs that must be available through the netWORKri system are: Career and Technical Education, Title V Older Americans Act, Job Corps, Native American Programs, Migrant Seasonal Farmworkers, Veterans, Youth Build, Trade Act, Community Services Block Grant, Housing and Urban Development, Unemployment Compensation, and Second Chance Programs (for justice-involved individuals).

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.networkri.org/>

The Centers offer workshops, information about available jobs and training opportunities, and information about unemployment insurance on a walk-in basis.<sup>16</sup> English language and basic education services may be provided on site or through referral to one of the adult education programs. Customers may be connected to opportunities through Real Pathways as well as connections to Real Jobs and Skills for Rhode Island's Future.

To access individual career counseling, an individual must register through EmployRI, submit an application, provide documentation, and, unless exempt, take a Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE).

Since the implementation of WIOA, state and local partners and community members have been working to improve the responsiveness and availability of services at the Career Centers, including meeting the needs of English language learners and people with limited literacy.

## Online Resources

These are sites where individuals can find information about workforce development services:

- RI Resource Hub is a comprehensive directory of education and career resources, including links to adult education programs, Real Jobs, Real Pathways: <http://riaepdc.org/ri-resource-hub>
- Real Jobs hosts a site that includes flyers with information on current training opportunities. You can sign up to receive information about new opportunities: <http://www.dlt.ri.gov/realjobs/TrainingOpps.htm>
- Real Pathways hosts a site listing the current Real Pathways Partnerships. Contact the program directly: [https://gwb.ri.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2018-Real-Pathways-RI-Grant-Recipients\\_Public.pdf?189db0](https://gwb.ri.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2018-Real-Pathways-RI-Grant-Recipients_Public.pdf?189db0)
- Skills for Rhode Island's Future hosts a site with job openings and one can sign up to be notified about new opportunities: <https://skillsforri.com/job-seekers/the-skills-advantage>
- EmployRI is a job service database that contains links to thousands of job opportunities and enables users to post resumes and apply for jobs as well as research careers and find training: <https://www.employri.org/vosnet/Default.aspx>
- RIDE hosts a page listing the Adult Education Programs and GED testing sites. Contact the program for information about available classes: <https://www.ride.ri.gov/StudentsFamilies/EducationPrograms/AdultEducationGED/tabid/169/LiveAcclId/15831/Default.aspx>

Thank you to the Pawtucket Credit Union for funding this report!

<sup>16</sup> Under the federal WIOA law, the Centers must offer career services, including outreach, orientation, initial assessment, referrals to programs, information about unemployment insurance, financial aid information. The Center must also provide appropriate services for individuals to obtain or retain employment, including developing an Individual Employment Plan, career planning and counseling, comprehensive assessment, short-term pre-vocational services, internship and work experience, workforce preparation, English language acquisition and financial literacy.