

The theme of our Annual Meeting is investing in the future

That's what we are doing at GWB, and we are making a difference!

When more than 200 RI employers – public, private, and non-profit – step forward to offer a summer work experience to over 1,100 economically disadvantaged youth – we are investing in the future, and making a difference.

When we invest in Innovative Partnership grants that provide work-readiness, occupational skills training, and hands-on work experiences for nearly 350 unemployed workers, out-of-school youth, returning veterans, ex-offenders, TANF recipients, recent immigrants and others who are trying to make a better life for themselves and their families, we are investing in the future and making a difference.

When over 150 college students and unemployed adults are given the chance to gain meaningful, paid work experience at more than 80 RI businesses, with support from the new RI Work Immersion Program, we are investing in the future and making a difference.

When RI manufacturers come together to develop a new apprenticeship program to address the challenges of an aging workforce, they are investing in the future.

When we leverage private sector training dollars with more than \$1.5 million in matching grants to 146 RI companies to upgrade the skills of nearly 6,800 current employees, we are investing in the future.

And, you know, a couple of months ago, the GWB came under fire for some of those matching grants to RI businesses. A former major league baseball pitcher (no, not that one) issued a report claiming that the GWB was awarding frivolous training grants to undeserving companies. Well, the two companies that were highlighted, are typical, hard-working, highly motivated RI small businesses – one a small, artisan jewelry designer, and the other a beauty salon. The jewelry designer was not only training her own employees in on-line marketing, but she rounded up several other small businesses to share in her training activities. *And*, she opened up the same training opportunity to inner-city youth from her local youth center. She was partnering with the GWB to invest in the future. The beauty salon – well the GWB provided them with a matching training grant to, among other things, teach tattoo skills to some of their employees, for which we were criticized. But what our critic didn't know was that the tattoo skills that were being learned were to provide cosmetic tattoo work to women who had been severely scarred or disfigured by surgery or injury. What's more, this small business also provided an internship for a youth as part of their training grant. They, too, were investing in the future and making a real difference.

And when the GWB supports adult learners who are struggling to complete their high school degree, learn English, or improve their math and writing skills so that they can pursue further education or a better job, we – and they – are investing in the future.

Of course the GWB doesn't do any of this alone. In fact, we have partnered with many of you here in this room, and many more who are not. To be effective, workforce development must be a public-private partnership that recognizes that neither private industry nor government can do it alone. We need the knowledge and resources of both. That is why the GWB Biennial Employment and Training Plan for RI calls for Employer Partnerships as one of its priorities for workforce development. The workforce system needs employer partners to help inform education and training providers of where the jobs are, where they will be, and what education skills are needed by workers and employers alike. And employers need the education and training system to be adaptable and responsive to evolving and growing skills gaps. The workforce system seeks employer partners to invest in training, to provide experiential learning opportunities, and to take a chance on hiring someone who may have little experience, but lots of enthusiasm. And employers are looking for a workforce system with user-friendly policies and practices that enable them to participate in government programs *and still be able to run their businesses*.

We at the GWB are extremely proud of the hundreds of RI businesses that are actively engaged in a wide variety of workforce development activities that are supported by our investments. In your packet is an impressive, but probably still incomplete, list of many of those GWB employer partners. While some of these businesses have received grants from the GWB, many more have simply helped out – perhaps serving on the GWB Employer Advisory Group where they have offered constructive feedback about work-readiness, Career & Technical Education, strategies for finding and retaining talent, or conducting mock interviews with adult ed students. Many others have participated in one of the GWB's nine Industry Partnerships – contributing to skills gap studies, career days, curriculum development, labor market forecasts, worksite tours, internships, training programs, and jobs.

The GWB is investing in the future in other ways as well. Our Career Pathways work, in partnership with the multi-agency Workforce On-Ramps project, is producing new, on-line resources that will enable job seekers and others to learn about the many career opportunities that exist in healthcare, hospitality, manufacturing, and information technology sectors, as well as the education and training pathways that lead to career advancement.

In the coming year, these efforts will be expanded to other key sectors of the state's economy, and we will enlist high schools, colleges, and other post-secondary education programs to work together to develop articulated pathways from one school or training program to another – giving credit for prior coursework or credentials – to assist workers and businesses with the education and skills that they need to be successful.

Of course, it takes more than training to get someone a job. Currently, there are at least 2.5 unemployed RIs for every job vacancy in RI, so even if we addressed every skills gap and filled every job, there would still be many thousands of unemployed RIs. In other words, we not only have a skills gap challenge in RI, but we also have a jobs gap challenge.

So, we are also investing in the future by increasing the alignment of workforce development and economic development. We know that businesses won't be successful if they can't find skilled workers, and education & training won't be successful if there are no jobs for our graduates.

At the GWB's Board retreat last fall, the GWB took the unprecedented step of inviting CommerceRI board members to join us, and they responded with enthusiasm. Together, board members and staff from both agencies discussed ways to join forces, and this collaboration has been maintained and expanded since the Retreat.

We have seen this increased alignment in our collaboration with the RhodeMapRI planning process, in our Industry Partnership strategies, in our Innovative Partnership grants, and in the development of several Federal funding proposals that seek to strengthen the connections between workforce and economic development in such critically important sectors of the State's economy manufacturing, defense, information technology, and health care.

Finally, this year's Innovation Award recipient is a great example of collaboration between workforce and economic development that has led to hundreds of new jobs for unemployed and under-employed Rhode Islanders. They, too, have invested in the future and are making a difference. We will hear more about this shortly.

But before we do, I am very pleased to present to you our newest GWB video, appropriately titled *Investing in the Future*, which features Rhode Island businesses, training providers, workers and youth who have participated in various GWB-funded initiatives. After you see it, I think you will agree that the Governor's Workforce Board, and our many partners, are truly making a difference!

[Show video]

Acknowl Jim Karpeichik, Ocean State video

Acknowl people in the video (or associated with the organizations featured in the video)