

Governor's Workforce Board

Rhode Island

Strategic Workforce Plan 2009-14

Executive Summary



“In every era, in every generation, Rhode Islanders have matched their ingenuity to a changing world and done whatever was necessary to prosper. History is testing us again. Do not mistake our present economic difficulties for a minor setback or a passing inconvenience. A sea of change is washing over us, a period of profound transformation. The decisions that we make and the actions that we take will determine our direction well into this century.”

- Governor Donald L. Carcieri
January 7, 2009

There exists no greater threat to our collective prosperity in Rhode Island – and no greater opportunity – than our ability to raise the skill level and improve the competitiveness of our workers. A seismic shift is underway in our state, one that promises to forever alter the nature of how we work, what we produce and the markets in which we compete. The economy is in the throes of revolutionary change, characterized by rapidly-evolving technology, exponential growth in the flow of information and capital, and ever-intensifying global competitiveness and connectivity. The attendant disruption has been the catalyst for both tremendous growth, and as we are unfortunately seeing today, for amazingly rapid economic contraction.

The talent, ingenuity and work ethic of the people of Rhode Island have traditionally been our greatest competitive advantage. This must remain true if we are to successfully emerge from these recessionary times. Not since the industrial revolution began on the Pawtucket riverbanks has the workforce confronted such a dramatic change in the type of skills and training necessary to successfully participate and thrive in the economy. At that time, Rhode Island was at the vanguard of training. Cutting-edge skills were developed at such new and innovative institutions as the Rhode Island School of Design, originally chartered to train the industrial trades, and contributed to the creation of one of the most competitive and productive workforces ever employed anywhere in history.

Today, Rhode Island struggles to match this earlier effort. The jobs that are created today require increasingly more sophisticated training and education, at all levels. Conversely, our workforce is not keeping pace, and in fact, may be becoming relatively less-educated. This is exacerbated by several significant trends:

- The approaching retirement of the baby boom generation, the largest and most educated generation in American history;
- The smaller size of the post boomer generations and their relatively lower rates of college completion and work readiness;
- The impact of low literacy in-migration;
- The “brain drain” – college graduates that leave the state for more desirable jobs elsewhere.

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These factors have conspired to produce a troubling skills gap that, if left unaddressed, will push Rhode Island to the edge of a precarious fault – a tipping point. Do we stand still and risk the erosion of our standard of living or step decisively, leaving no worker behind, towards acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in tomorrow's economy today?

The plan presented here is the Governor's Workforce Board of Rhode Island's (GWBRI), bold response. It is based on a fundamental assumption – that an aligned workforce system empowered to identify and eliminate the obstacles inhibiting the development and delivery of demand-driven training will be better positioned to create the opportunities for individuals to obtain the transferable skills they need. Each of plan's four primary goals is tied to a series of specific objectives that support its real-world application. These goals include:

Goal 1: The Public System Grows, Retains, and Attracts

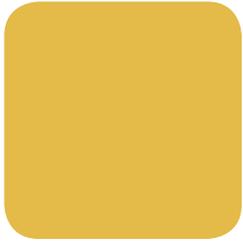
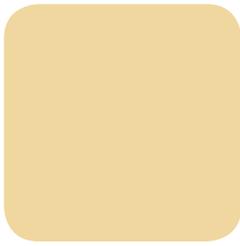
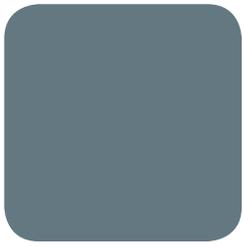
Talent. Rhode Island will maximize the capacity of the workforce development system to align, unify, and flexibly address the skill demands of all employers and job seekers.

Goal 2: Employers Attract and Retain a Highly Skilled

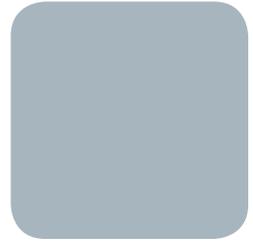
Workforce. Rhode Island employers will attract, employ and retain a skilled and educated workforce committed to lifelong learning, thus ensuring growth and prosperity.

Goal 3: The Adult Workforce is Skilled and Agile. Adults will have the knowledge and skills needed to meet changing economic demand – for their own and the state's economic prosperity.

Goal 4: Youth are Ready for Work and Lifelong Learning. Youth will become more aware of skill development opportunities in order to take better advantage of those which enable them to meet changing workforce demand – for their own and for the state's future prosperity.



The Strategic Workforce Plan challenges the public workforce system to support a culture of lifelong learning; to increase its efficiency, effectiveness and capacity; create greater value-add to employers and individuals; to align its policies and resources across its partners; and to eliminate the barriers to skill development.



For employers it calls for increasing investment training and increasing the number of both self-sustaining jobs and high-wage jobs. It calls on firms within an industry to partner and align to reduce skill gaps, to augment the number of transferable skill credentials available to their workers, and to expand the potential pool of qualified workers.

For individuals, the plan supports an increase in the attainment of skill credentials; an increase in workforce attachment; and an increase in the employment rate of special populations. It calls for greater participation in adult education, and occupational skills training accompanied with basic skill training.

Finally, for youth – Rhode Island’s emerging workforce – the plan demands that the system increase access to work-preparedness activities, including participation in apprenticeships; increase the number of youth that attain a workforce credentials, including a high-school diploma and skill certifications; decrease post-secondary remediation rates; and increase educator understanding of the labor market.

Already, the very process of developing the plan has produced positive results. Through its broad-ranging involvement of stakeholders, the planning process has created an unprecedented degree of alignment among Rhode Island businesses; government agencies; labor organizations; community and faith-based organizations; public and private elementary/secondary and higher educational institutions in a shared vision that supports the plan’s four goals. It has also offered Rhode Island the opportunity to dismantle the silos that have long-divided the workforce system while leveraging and coordinating resources between public and private sectors.

As the plan moves forward, a Plan Management Team, under the auspices of the state’s Workforce Cabinet and the Governor’s Workforce Board, will continue to develop work plans based on this framework and the strategies and tactics outlined within. The team will provide a mechanism to ensure the plan’s accountability and that it remains actionable, measurable and relevant.

