



WORK IMMERSION PROGRAM GUIDELINES

August 1, 2017 – June 30, 2018

Governor's Workforce Board RI

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An equal opportunity employer program. Auxiliary aids and devices are available upon request to individuals with disabilities



1. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Whether they are hiring for entry-level workers or for more advanced positions, employers strongly prefer to hire applicants with demonstrated work experience. For recent high school or college graduates, it can be difficult to build such experience from scratch once they enter the job market. While for out-of-work job seekers; lengthy periods of unemployment and gaps in their work history may cause an employer to hesitate in hiring. Work Immersion is designed to boost the employment prospects of new and returning workers while opening hiring channels and reducing hiring risk for employers.

A 2014 study by Brigham Young University found that, on average, only 30% of graduating college seniors have job offers before graduation; however, after completing an internship, that figure rises to 58%. The same study found that interns received, on average, \$2,240 more than non-interns for starting salary.

The National Bureau of Economic Research found that long-term unemployed fare worse in the labor market than the short-term unemployed. Paid work experiences such as those provided through the work immersion program help avoid gaps in work history and provide the opportunity for either immediate employment, or valuable experience that can keep a job seeker's resume "fresh".

For students, the intent of the Work Immersion program is to gain valuable work experience. For unemployed adults, the intent is to obtain employment.

2. STATUTORY CITATION

The Work Immersion program has been established pursuant to Rhode Island General Law § 42-102-11.

3. GENERAL PROGRAM GUIDELINES AND ELIGIBILITY

Note: Individual employers are limited to no more than 10 Work Immersion participants within a fiscal year. Any employer interested in hosting more than 10 participants in a fiscal year should contact the program manager. Such requests are subject to the GWB Executive Director's discretion and are considered on a case-by-case basis.

WORK IMMERSION FOR STUDENTS

The Work Immersion for Students Program is designed to provide **work experiences** to college students and Career and Technical Education (CTE) high school students to build career-relevant skills and give them real world work experiences which can boost their resume and increase both the employability and value to employers. Consistent with these Program Guidelines; the Work Immersion for Students program:

- Provides a 50% wage reimbursement for wages from the state minimum wage up to \$20.00 an hour.
- Allows for work experiences for up to 20 weeks and between 45 - 400 total hours
- Must be related to the student's field of study
- Must provide a meaningful learning opportunity

To be eligible for work immersion as a **high school CTE student**, an individual must:

- Be at least 16 years of age;
- Have not previously completed 400 hours of the Work Immersion program;
- Attend (or have graduated within the previous six months) a RIDE-approved CTE program which is aligned to a GWB priority industry;
- Participate in a work experience related to the CTE field of study;
- Be at least in their Junior year of high school; and
- Have a 'C' or grade point average of 2.0 or above

To be eligible for work immersion as a **college student**, an individual must:

- Be at least 18 years of age;
- Have not previously completed 400 hours of the Work Immersion program; and
- Be a student or recent graduate (within 6 months) at a RI-based college or university; or
- Be a Rhode Island resident student or recent graduate (within 6 months) at an out-of-state college or university

WORK IMMERSION FOR UNEMPLOYED ADULTS

The Work Immersion for Unemployed Adults Program is designed to provide **employment opportunities** to Unemployment Insurance recipients or individuals who have otherwise been without wages for the previous six weeks. The program seeks to encourage employers to consider hiring an individual from the ranks of the unemployed. Even if the candidate is not hired, they now have recent work experience on their resume and a potential reference for future job applications. Consistent with these Program Guidelines; the Work Immersion for Unemployed Adults program:

- Provides a tiered wage reimbursement:
 - 35% for wages from the state minimum up to the state entry-level average wage¹
 - 50% for wages ranging from the state entry-level average wage up to \$20.00 an hour
- Provides a hiring incentive of an additional 25% if the candidate is retained
- Allows for work experiences for up to 20 weeks and between 60 - 400 total hours
- Must provide a meaningful learning opportunity

To be eligible for work immersion as an **unemployed adult**, an individual must:

- Be at least 18 years of age;
- Have not previously completed 400 hours of the Work Immersion program; and
- Be unemployed (either collecting Unemployment Insurance benefits OR has received no wages for at least six weeks prior to applying to participate in the Work Immersion Program)

¹ For Program Year 7/1/2017 through 6/30/2018, the program will define the Average Entry Level wage as **\$12.36** per the Department of Labor and Training- Labor Market Information division
<http://www.dlt.ri.gov/lmi/pdf/wagebrochure.pdf>

4. WORK EXPERIENCES

Meaningful Learning Opportunity

All work experiences should provide a *meaningful learning opportunity* defined as a work experience which is:

- *Rigorous*: allows the participant to gain and/or improve upon their technical and professional skills and demonstrate mastery of those skills
- *Relevant*: connected to the participant’s interests and to the real world of work
- *Reflective*: engages the participant in meaningful evaluations from supervisors and industry professionals
- *Interactive*: provides multiple and extended opportunities for participants to interact with and learn from industry professionals
- *Integrated*: in the case of a student participant only, related to the student’s field of study

Internships that have been approved for academic credit by the student or recent graduate’s college or university should automatically qualify as a “meaningful learning opportunity.”

Time Limitations

All work experiences cannot be more than 20 weeks and are subject to the following hour limitations:

Program	Minimum	Maximum
Students (College and CTE)	45	400
Unemployed Adults	60	400

Wage Requirements

Work experiences are subject to the following hourly wage requirements.

- Wages for the student program are reimbursed at a 50% rate for wages from the state minimum wage (\$9.60 as of 7/1/2017) up to the \$20.00 maximum.
- Wages for the Unemployed Adult program are tiered: 35% for wages from the state minimum wage (\$9.60 as of 7/1/2017) up to the state entry-level average² and 50% for wages above the state entry-level average up to the \$20.00 maximum.

Program	Reimbursement Rate	Minimum	Maximum
Students (College and CTE)	50%	\$9.60	\$20.00
Unemployed Adults	35%	\$9.60	\$12.36
	50%	\$12.37	\$20.00

²Ibid.

Hiring Incentive Payment (UNEMPLOYED ADULT PROGRAM ONLY)

If an unemployed adult is retained for an additional 12 weeks beyond the original approved work experience and for the same wages and weekly hour commitment as the original approved work experience; the employer is eligible for an additional 25% reimbursement payment of the original wages paid (example: if a work experience paid \$1000 and the original reimbursement payment was \$500 – the employer is eligible for an additional \$250 if the unemployed adult is retained for 12 weeks beyond the original work experience – provided the wages and weekly hours are the same as the original work experience).

5. ELIGIBLE EMPLOYERS

Any employer who is for-profit, not-for-profit or public sector entity doing business in RI and has registered with the RI Secretary of State's Office is eligible for the work immersion program.

6. APPLICATION PROCESS

Before a work experience can begin, an application must be submitted and approved by GWB staff. Work Immersion applications are available online at <http://www.gwb.ri.gov> and are received on rolling basis. Applications may be completed directly by employers, or on the employer's behalf by a workforce system partner or school coordinator. Applications are typically processed within 2 weeks of receipt. Start dates of employment *cannot* take place prior to the application. **All applications must be accompanied by a copy of the employer's W9 Taxation form.**

Work Immersion applications are accepted online only. Paper based applications will no longer be accepted.

Each received submission is given an initial review by GWB staff to ensure:

- All sections of the application are complete
- A W9 for the company is attached

If any issues are identified in the application; it is sent back to the employer with requested changes. If the application passes the initial review, GWB issues an award letter to the employer and/or intermediary or school coordinator. All applications are reviewed for appropriate wages, total hours and start and end dates of the work experience/internship; these items are important as they are the points that develop the terms of the award.

7. AWARD PROCESS

Once an application is approved, due diligence checks are completed and the information is properly recorded; GWB staff produces an award letter which formally approves the work immersion experience and allows the state purchasing office to create a 'Purchase Order' for funding purposes. An employer must **acknowledge receipt of the Award Letter within one week**, otherwise a Work Immersion award may be rescinded.

8. REPORTING AND PAYMENT PROCESS

When an employer first receives their Award Letter they will also receive a **Work Immersion Evaluation Form**.

Once the work experience is complete, the employer is required to submit the **Work Immersion Evaluation Form** and return it to the GWB. The Work Immersion Evaluation Form includes:

- Final participant information, including their Social Security number
 - Social Security numbers are collected at the end of the internship through the Completion Form to ensure their security and confidentiality
 - Social Security numbers are required to confirm participant's pre- and post-work experience employment and wages
- An evaluation section for the employer to grade the participant on performance and improvement on professional skills such as teamwork, communication, critical thinking, and punctuality. The evaluation form will also ask the employer if the participant earned any industry-recognized credentials as a result of the Work Immersion experience.
- A section to indicate whether the employer intends to retain the participant for at least an additional 12 weeks, if applicable

The Work Immersion Evaluation Form **must** be submitted along with appropriate backup documents for the employer to be eligible for reimbursement.

(Unemployed Adults Only) If the employer indicates that they intend to retain the participant for at least an additional 12 weeks they are provided a **Work Experience Retention Form**. After the 12-week retention period the employer is required to complete the form and return it to the GWB. The Work Experience Retention Form includes:

- Hourly Wage and Weekly Hour information (which must be the same as during the original work experience)
- Date of permanent hire

The Work Experience Retention Form **must** be submitted along with appropriate backup documents for the employer to be eligible for an additional 25% reimbursement hiring incentive.

All payments in the Work Immersion program are made on a cost reimbursement basis in which the employer pays the costs up front and then requests reimbursement. After the work experience, a reimbursement request along with evidence of wages paid must be submitted to the GWB (see section 9: Acceptable Backup Documents).

All reimbursement requests must be submitted within 60 days of the Work Experience end date. Reimbursement requests received after the 60-day cutoff will not be processed. Payments will be issued within 30-45 days of receipt of adequate evidence of wages paid.

9. ACCEPTABLE BACKUP DOCUMENTS

Evidence of Wages paid	Proof of wages paid that identifies the company, the approved individual and the contract period; including <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Payroll Register• General ledger• Pay stubs for every week worked• Last pay stub with year to date totals• Quarterly tax report
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GWB *cannot* process a reimbursement request without sufficient backup documentation provided.

10. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

GWB Staff is available to provide technical assistance throughout the process-from the application stage throughout final reporting. Workforce network partners such as Adult Education providers, nonprofits, and One Stop Career Centers may, and are encouraged to, promote Work Immersion as a way to help place job seekers into positions and may assist businesses in the application process; however, that individual/organization may not be compensated with Work Immersion funds.

