




**Governor's Workforce Board**  
 RHODE ISLAND  
*train for success · connect for growth*

# FY2022-23 Biennial Employment and Training Plan





## Executive Summary

When the last Biennial Plan was issued two years ago, Rhode Island's economy was on the upswing. The state unemployment rate was under 4% and many employers struggled to find and retain the talent they needed to keep up with unprecedented growth amid a tight labor market. The Workforce Board's priority at that time was to respond to that demand while building pathways to opportunity for all Rhode Islanders.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 and its impact on the state, national, and global economy; the context of our work has changed dramatically. As of the writing of this plan, Rhode Island's unemployment rate stands at 10.5% and hundreds of small businesses have temporarily, or permanently reduced staff or closed their doors outright. This new context only reinforces the importance of having a responsive, resilient state workforce development network that is able to quickly and effectively locate employment opportunities and return Rhode Islanders to work as fast as possible.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the workforce development network to adapt service delivery models and try new and innovative training methods. It also brought to light the substantial 'digital divide' that exists throughout the community. To avoid major long-term displacements, Rhode Island will need to focus on closing this technological skills gap for current and future workers, while quickly retraining and redeploying displaced workers. At the same time, the state needs to continue to partner with employers on identifying their evolving talent needs and executing bold strategies to employ, train and transition new and existing workers to meet this demand. Lastly, we need to be mindful of the legacy opportunity gaps that existed pre-COVID which have only been exacerbated by the pandemic. Any workforce development efforts must prioritize these underrepresented communities and help close these long-term inequalities.

Established by Executive Order in 2005 and in statute in 2014 the Governor's Workforce Board is charged with the development of strategic, statewide employment-and-training plan for all state and federal workforce development programs. We hope this plan provides a blueprint for how the workforce development network can meet and overcome the economic challenges of COVID-19.



## Key Facts – Economic Trends

- **Emerging Demand.** To assess the emerging demand industry sectors, the Labor Market Information division of the Department of Labor and Training provides 10-year projection (2016-2026) of the highest expected growth sectors. The five sectors with the largest gains in total projected employment are:
  - Accommodation and Food Services
  - Health Care and Social Assistance
  - Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services
  - Retail Trade
  - Administrative & Support & Waste Management & Remediation Services
- **Economic Opportunity.** The state’s economic development strategy (“Rhode Island Innovates”) identified specific subsectors which reflect Rhode Island’s native strengths, project high grow, and are likely to offer good paying jobs in specialized occupations. These subsectors and concentrations include:
  - 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
  - The Blue Economy
  - Offshore Wind
  - ‘Back Office’ Operations



## Key Facts – Economic Trends (cont'd)

- **Increased Skill Needs.** A 2014 Georgetown University Study found that as much as 70% of new jobs in Rhode Island would require some form of education past high school. Yet according to analysis by the Lumina foundation, in 2018 only 46.4% of Rhode Islanders held some form a post-secondary credential. Nearly half of all job openings over the next ten years attributable to growth alone require education above a high school.
- **Accelerated Adoption of Technology.** COVID-19 saw the rapid adoption of technology-enabled tele/distance-work and virtual conferencing; innovations that may last long after the pandemic subsides. At the same time, past experience tells us that recessions often result in the accelerated use of automation and related technologies. In nearly all industries and occupations, digital literacy is now as essential a skill as basic literacy and numeracy.
- **Note:** Much of the economic analysis that informed this Biennial Plan was completed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the long-term economic impact of the pandemic remains to be seen, the Workforce Board believes it is appropriate to use the most recently available economic data to guide our efforts while keeping our strategy fluid and flexible to adapt to changes in the market, and take advantage of opportunities as they arise.



## Key Facts – Labor Market Trends

- **Increasing Diversity.** In 2018, the share of the state population identifying as ‘white non-Hispanic’ was 72.5%, down from 76.4% in 2010, and 81.9% in 2000. The share of state’s population identifying as Black or African American was 8.2% in 2018, up from 5.7% in 2010 and 4.5% in 2000. Some of the state’s largest growth has been in its Hispanic or Latino population which represented 15.5% of the state’s population in 2018, as compared to 12.4% in 2010 and 8.7% in 2000.
- **An Aging Population.** When it comes to working age citizens, in 2019 Rhode Islander’s aged 15-59 constituted 60% of Rhode Island’s population; down from 62% in 2010 and 2000. Persons aged 60 and older made up 25% of the state’s population in 2019, up from 20% in 2010 and 18.2% in 2000. Children 14 years of younger represent 16% of the state’s population in 2019, down from 17.3% in 2010 and nearly 20% in 2000. The continued aging of the state’s population, and related shrinking of the working age population, is a critical factor influencing the labor market for the foreseeable future.
- **Unequal Educational Attainment.** According to 2017 US Census estimates, 33% of Rhode Islanders held a bachelor’s degree, with 13.1% holding a degree beyond a Bachelors; ranking 13<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> on these respective measures. Yet, despite this comparatively high attainment of advanced degrees; the state workforce remains somewhat bifurcated; with Rhode Island ranking 34<sup>th</sup> in the nation for the percent of the population with a high school degree at 87.3%, tied with the national average.
- **Increasing Immigration.** In the year 2000, the percentage of foreign-born residents within the state population was 11.4%. In 2010 it rose further increased to 12.9%. By 2018, 13.7% of the state population was foreign-born. This increase has a significant consequence for the state’s labor market, as well as the structure and organization of the state workforce development system.



# Key Strategies

## I. Demand-Driven Investments

Implement a demand-driven, sector-based strategy, based on the state's economic development priorities, to meet employer demand and establish a pipeline of skilled workers for future demand.



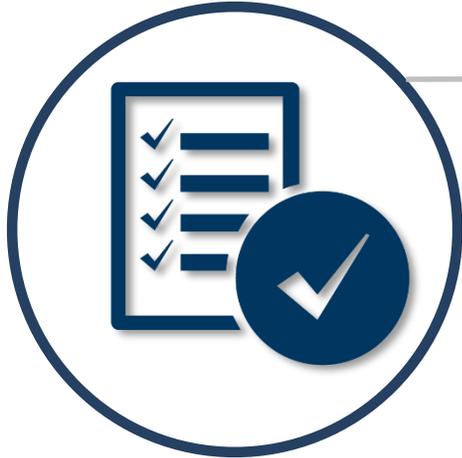
## II. Career Pathways

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.



## III. Aligned Policy

Align policy and leverage existing government structures and resources so that government is "networked" and coordinated to achieve efficiencies and effectiveness throughout the workforce system.



## IV. Data and Performance

Use data to inform policy-making decisions, guide investments and evaluate performance to measure return on investments.





**Strategy I. Implement a demand-driven, sector-based strategy, based on the state's economic development priorities, to meet employer demand and establish a pipeline of skilled workers for future demand.**

**Action Step 1.1** - Continue to invest and support growing industry and sector partnerships through the Rel Jobs RI program, with a focus on supporting and enabling the growth areas as identified by the 'Rhode Island Innovates' report.

**Action Step 1.2** – Better integrate federal training funds into sector partnership activities, and providing access to employer-driven activities to a greater share of workforce development clients.

**Action Step 1.3** – Enhance the alignment of business services across all partner programs and develop a unified 'voice' for branding, outreach, and awareness.

**Action Step 1.4** – Work with sector intermediary partners to promote/encourage the adoption of competency-based hiring, education, and training to maximize opportunities for untapped talent to succeed in the labor force.



**Strategy II. 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.**

**Action Step 2.1** - Increase state investments in the community-based Real Pathways RI program, enhancing its statewide reach and focus on populations with barriers to employment.

**Action Step 2.2** - Continue to develop and expand the use of integrated education and occupation skills training models such as apprenticeships and the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program (I-BEST).

**Action Step 2.3** - Increase state investments in the PrepareRI initiative, with a particular focus on underserved populations; increasing the total number of youth and employer participants.

**Action Step 2.4** – In collaboration with workforce development partner programs, review policies and definitions around the provision of support services (childcare, transportation, work-related clothing, etc.) to maximize the depth and breadth of these services.

**Action Step 2.5** - Collaborate across partner programs on a systemwide Community of Practice to work with providers, clients, employers, and advocates to jointly establish uniform statewide definitions and standards of quality for the workforce network.

**Action Step 2.6** - Implement continuous (and, whenever possible, joint) professional development and customer service training for staff from all partner programs to elevate internal expertise and professionalism and to build a growing and shared knowledge base across programs

**Action Step 2.7** - Promote the inclusion of digital literacy as an essential element throughout all public training and education programming.



**Strategy III. Align policy and leverage existing government structures and resources so that government is “networked” and coordinated to achieve efficiencies and effectiveness throughout the workforce system.**

**Action Step 3.1** - Develop a uniform definition of ‘credentials of value’ that align with industry demands and promote economic opportunity

**Action Step 3.2** – Increase community engagement and outreach including, but not limited to, partnering with community-based organizations, community leaders, and others to increase the awareness and availability of workforce development services within the community.

**Action Step 3.3** – Conduct a comprehensive review of the physical appearance and layout of Rhode Island’s One Stop Career Centers using customer/human-centered design principles.

**Action Step 3.4** - Establish a statewide common assessment policy for foundational skills like basic literacy and numeracy.

**Action Step 3.5** - Work with relevant state agency partners to provide clear and uniform guidance regarding the impact of service-related income and earnings on public assistance programs and increase the level of interagency communication regarding the impact of employment and earnings on individual’s client eligibility and benefit levels.

**Action Step 3.6** - Explore the creation of a statewide electronic client referral system.



**Strategy IV. Use data to inform policy-making decisions, guide investments and evaluate performance to measure return on investments.**

**Action Step 4.1** - Continue to build up the data and performance tracking capabilities of the workforce network in a comprehensive and uniform way.

**Action Step 4.2** - Wherever possible, transition program and performance reports into user-friendly online dashboards for the public to access.

**Action Step 4.3** - Continue to integrate state workforce outcomes for non-GWB programs (Adult Education, DHS, etc.) into regular Strategic Investment Committee meetings for performance review and analysis to determine gaps, duplication, etc.

**Action Step 4.4** - Adopt system-wide outcome metrics to portray an accurate depiction of the workforce system, which will be used for planning and implementation of system services

**Action Step 4.5** - Explore additional ways to capture the Return on Investment (ROI) of the workforce system in order to promote the value of the system and all programs within it.