



Good Things *from* Small Packages:

Finding Common Ground for Workforce Development in Rhode Island

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Table of Contents

- Executive Summary iii

- I. Addressing the Economic Imperative** 1
 - A. Introduction 1
 - B. Rhode Island’s Challenge..... 2
 - C. The Listening Process..... 3

- II. Adopting Strategies that Support High Performance**..... 4
 - A. Defining Policy Goals of the Workforce Development System 4
 - 1. Promising Rhode Island Policy Models..... 4
 - 2. Prospective Strategies to Define Policy Goals 5
 - B. Organizing Service Delivery 5
 - 1. Promising Rhode Island Models for Organizing Service Delivery..... 6
 - 2. Prospective Strategies for Organizing Service Delivery 6
 - C. Promoting Accountability and Sustainability 7
 - 1. Promising Rhode Island Models to Promote Accountability and Sustainability 7
 - 2. Prospective Strategies to Promote Accountability and Sustainability..... 8

- III. Achieving a High Performance System for Rhode Island**..... 9
 - A. More to be Done..... 9
 - B. Steps Toward a High Performance System for Rhode Island 9

- IV. Appendices**
- Stakeholder Observations on Rhode Island’s Workforce Development System..... 11
- List of Participants in Listening Process..... 14
- The Workforce Partnership Model..... 15

- Endnotes 16

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Finding Common Ground for Workforce Development in Rhode Island

Executive Summary

I. Addressing the Economic Imperative

Rhode Island's economy is changing rapidly. Global economic trends have decreased the importance of low-skilled manufacturing as an economic engine for the state. The Rhode Island economy faces twin challenges of a worker gap among employers and a skills gap among workers, which in combination are fueling a squeeze on workers and businesses. Job growth in this most recent economic expansion has been seriously bifurcated, with the greatest growth occurring in occupations requiring lower skills and paying lower wages, and smaller but not insignificant growth in jobs requiring the highest levels of skills and paying higher wages. Yet there is little debate about the increasing relationship between high levels of skill and education with family-supporting wages and business competitiveness.

Rhode Island is not well equipped to supply employers with workers having high technical skills. Nearly a fifth of Rhode Island's adults lack a high school diploma, and many immigrants, who were responsible for all of the state's population growth over the past decade, have even lower educational attainment levels than the general population.¹ Locally, the infrastructure that provides employees and employers with the education and skills services they need is also struggling to cope with diminishing federal investment in adult training, despite state efforts to address this shortfall.

On the other hand, several new initiatives have been launched by state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and local and national foundations to upgrade the quality of services and to foster collaboration across state agencies involved in workforce development. These include efforts to improve outcomes for foreign-educated immigrants, connect economic development projects to economic vitality in low-income neighborhoods, link adult education more strongly to postsecondary education and

employment, and seed the capacity of dual-customer workforce partnerships focused on career advancement.

With all of these efforts to improve the workforce system, the potential exists for lack of coordination in terms of goals, strategies and projected outcomes. The Governor's Workforce Board's "unified strategic planning" process provides an exciting opportunity to address Rhode Island's economic imperative in a comprehensive, coordinated manner. Yet workforce development is broader than the publicly funded system. It includes philanthropically supported programs, employer training, and public and private postsecondary education. And it is deeply influenced by economic development, transportation infrastructure, and human services. All these components must be included in the unified plan.

With that in mind, the United Way's Building Adult and Neighborhood Independence Steering Committee has conducted a listening process with policymakers, funders, employers, advocates, and nonprofit organizations to identify common ground and potential strategies to align resources and actions around a set of shared core values for a high-performing workforce development system in Rhode Island. These different constituencies demonstrated remarkable consistency about the key issues they perceived as presenting barriers to such a system: the fragmentation of populations, service delivery, and resources; the need for a unifying vision on the goals and outcomes of the system and leadership at the highest levels for collaboration to attain these goals; and the need for models and capacity building to achieve system goals. They also reinforced the idea that Rhode Island has a significant base of accomplishment upon which to build to address the issues raised by the stakeholders in the listening sessions. While many of these programs are disconnected from one another, the state's unified strategic planning process presents an opportunity to advance beyond innovative yet isolated programs to the development of a high-performing workforce development system.

II. Adopting Strategies that Support High Performance

Across the country, high-performing workforce development systems share a recognition that regional economic competitiveness increases as communities cultivate a workforce that has both technical skills in demand by local employers and the ability to problem solve and learn rapidly. Based on the observations of outstanding programs across the country, a set of seven “high-leverage principles” have been identified that might guide the workforce development system in defining its policy goals, organizing its service strategy, and promoting accountability and sustainability.²

Defining Policy Goals of the Workforce Development System

- The system provides dual customer services that meet the needs of employers and of job seekers and incumbent workers.
- The system focuses on jobs and industry sectors that offer pathways to career advancement and economically self-sustaining wages.

Organizing Service Delivery

- The system aligns investments from multiple public and private sources to provide a continuum of education, training, and support services that meet the large-scale needs of employers and residents.
- The system supports the functions of workforce intermediaries that organize complex initiatives by convening stakeholders, aligning resources, and brokering or providing services to meet the workforce needs of employers and residents.

Promoting Accountability and Sustainability

- The system focuses on accountability and measurable, positive outcomes for employers and for individuals.
- The system invests its resources in building capacity and professional development to strengthen its ability to reach its goals.
- The system implements policies and investment strategies to sustain improved employer, institutional, and agency practices.
- The stakeholders in the listening sessions identified several strategies for how the state can further align its system with these high-leverage principles, building on the promising models and approaches already being implemented in Rhode Island.

Strategies for Further Alignment with High Leverage Principles

Defining the Policy Goals of the Workforce Development System

1. *Provide Dual Customer Services*

Empower the Industry Partnerships to use their employer needs analysis to review the course offerings and degree programs at CCRI, Rhode Island College, and the University of Rhode Island. Prioritize the development of high end educational resources in industries and occupations that are significant to Rhode Island’s economic future by helping local employers to grow their highly skilled, professional workforce.

2. *Emphasize Career Advancement Leading to Economically Self-Sustaining Wages*

Focus public investment on workforce development for industries and employers with both a high demand for labor and opportunities for career advancement. Require service providers to demonstrate how their proposed services advance low-skilled adults towards family sustaining wages in these industries, including how they are linked to feeder programs and to readying participants for the next step along a career pathway. Commit to scaling up effective programs and systematically adopting proven practices that help low-skilled adults to advance to family sustaining incomes and that address the workforce needs of industries and employers of economic significance to the state.

Organizing Service Delivery

3. *Align Funding in Support of a Continuum of Services*

Explore underutilized financing approaches to expand the resources available to pay for education and training. Underutilized financing approaches may include Food Stamp Employment and Training 50/50 matching grants; employer-matched Lifelong Learning Accounts; Section 127 tax incentives for employer-paid training; and bond financing authority for the community college and Workforce Investment boards, among others.

Expand the Youth Forum model to the adult workforce development system. Promote policies at the state level that align resources. Conduct a scan of all workforce development-related funding sources (including General Assembly funds), the current infrastructure that manages these resources at local and state levels, the program/missions they support, the services they provide, their outcomes, and what changes might help improve alignment.

Convene a working group of state agency policymakers to analyze the scan for gaps and disconnects in the “pipeline” as supported by multiple programs and funding sources. Develop specific recommendations to close the gaps, reduce duplication in program designs and outcome standards, and build a continuum of career advancement resources in which entry and exit standards match at transition points. Include guidelines on implementing these recommendations in each agency’s plans and program RFP specifications.

Award planning grants to seed the development of new programs and services that expand the number of seats in training for high demand skills in occupations of significance to the state’s economy.

4. Support the Core Functions of Workforce Partnerships

Allocate resources from a flexible funding source, such as the Job Development Fund, to form new workforce intermediaries and to sustain the core functions of successful intermediaries. Core functions are those “value adds” that enhance the direct provision of education, training, job matching and support services.

Encourage public funders to specifically seek service providers that function as intermediaries, or that partner with other organizations that provide the intermediary functions of convening stakeholders, aggregating dual customer needs, planning and organizing a response, aligning funding, and brokering or providing services.

Develop the Industry Partnerships into full-fledged workforce intermediaries that aggregate industry sector and individual employer-level workforce development needs and connect them to the curriculum content, outcome standards, and program offerings of educational institutions and training providers throughout the workforce development system, including postsecondary institutions, adult literacy providers, and the Network RI system.

Use the data aggregated by the Industry Partnerships to create career maps based on industry and employer demand. Develop these maps into career pathways (including basic skills development and support services) that are clearly and realistically articulated and easily communicated to jobseekers and incumbent workers.

Promoting Accountability and Sustainability

5. Ensure Accountability for Measurable Outcomes

Develop high-level systems outcomes that every part of the system adopts. Each agency (e.g., DLT, DHS) or stakeholder group (e.g., employers, funders) can identify how

their individual missions further the overall state goals and intended impact.

Identify performance measures and develop an integrated data system, accessed by multiple agencies and programs, to track them. Build on the Providence Plan Data Integration Project to access UI wage data to track the long term success of participants from multiple programs.

Conduct research and evaluation on effectiveness at the systems level in terms of impact, return on investment, and best practices.

Develop a public process to communicate results and promote accountability, such as a state report card.

6. Strengthen the System through Capacity Building

Expand the reach of RIDE’s Professional Development Center by using its infrastructure to also build the program development and instructional competence of staff in the workforce development, offender re-entry, welfare-to-work, and related agencies.

Encourage public funders to conduct an assessment of the professional development needs of their service provider networks. Assess not only the competencies of service delivery staff, but also the management competencies to respond to changing economic conditions, address new policy priorities, and strengthen organizational capacities.

Encourage public funders to allocate resources from every funding source to professional development, and to require service providers to budget for professional development in their grant applications.

Adopt innovative approaches to delivering professional development services, such as Web-based curricula, distance learning, interactive software, and virtual learning communities for professional networking.

Build the capacity of the public One-Stop system and address the barriers to greater effectiveness.

Develop a communications and marketing strategy to teach employers the value of investing in frontline workers. Develop a marketing campaign that features the economic benefits of positive employer practices such as providing release time for training, work-based learning, or strong internal career ladders.

7. Promote Policy to Sustain Successful Practices

Create a funders group of public and private funders to foster greater communication, add clout and credibility to the work, maximize opportunities for systems change, and enhance the possibilities for co-investment.

Create a forum to discuss key policy issues arising from the work. The state can use available resources and capacity to convene such a forum, such as the Workforce Alliance or the Economic Policy Center. Incentives can also be provided to support this convening function.

Focus on communicating successes to sustain focus and momentum beyond the development of the strategic plan.

III. Achieving a High Performance System for Rhode Island

Building on what it has in place, Rhode Island has the opportunity to develop a high performing workforce development system that meets the needs of employers and workers resulting in increased economic competitiveness, improved business productivity, and a higher quality of life. The high-leverage principles and strategies above provide some guidance for how Rhode Island can do this. Below, we offer some specific recommendations for applying these principles based on input offered during the listening process.

To achieve a high performance workforce development system, **the Governor’s Workforce Board can:**

Use the high-leverage principles as a lens. The Governor’s Workforce Board can use these principles as a “screen” or set of benchmarks for evaluating its strategic plan. This will help ensure a focus on high performance at the strategy level. This screen can also be used to assess implementation plans to ensure high performance in service delivery and ultimately in outcomes.

Articulate a concise workforce development goal for the state that unifies the contributions of individual programs, agencies, and funding sources. The Governors’ Workforce Board can articulate a vision for the state in a manner that speaks to employers and residents. The unified state plan can lay out how each program, agency, and funding source contributes to that vision, in addition to meeting its individual regulatory goals.

Create a clear, cohesive workforce development agenda early in the planning process. The GWB can identify three to five high-level issues to focus on, and then communicate these to key stakeholders even before the final strategic plan has been completed. Even while tactics for addressing these high-level issues are being developed, advocates can use the the issues to rally key stakeholders, including public and private funders and the private sector, around the agenda.

Place a high priority on public investment in building the skills of low-skilled adults. Compared to low-skilled and often low-income adults, higher-skilled adults often have access to greater personal and professional resources to facilitate their skill development and career advancement. Given the proportion of low-skilled adults in Rhode Island compared to other states, the state’s competitiveness will be correspondingly higher based on success in addressing the needs of this population.

Provide high-level leadership and visibility in the strategic planning process. This will make key stakeholders and the public at large aware that the process is underway, communicate its significance to the state, encourage greater participation and support, and build a constituency base that can promote greater accountability to high performance.

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I. Addressing the Economic Imperative

A. Introduction

The state of Rhode Island is about to undertake a year-long strategic planning process to develop a unified plan for workforce development. This ambitious process of the Governor's Workforce Board comes at a propitious moment for the state. Several new initiatives have been launched to upgrade the quality of services and to foster collaboration across state agencies involved in workforce development, such as:

- The Governor's Workforce Board has charged several task forces with researching promising practices that improve outcomes for special target groups such as foreign-educated immigrants and ex-offenders re-entering the community.
- The Governor's Workforce Board has conducted a management analysis of the Workforce Investment Board and One Stop Career Centers, resulting in a set of recommendations to align procurement and data tracking practices and to upgrade the technology capacity of the Workforce Investment Act delivery system.
- The Economic Policy Council led a drive to bring the National Work Readiness Credential to the state.
- Neighborhood economic development projects such as Making Connections are focusing on building economic vitality in low-income communities.
- The Adult Education department is revamping its service strategy to increase the focus on outcomes and links to postsecondary education and employment.
- National funders, such as the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, have selected Rhode Island programs for workforce development grants.
- The United Way of Rhode Island is sponsoring Skill Up Rhode Island, a multi-year initiative to seed the capacity

of dual customer, career advancement, workforce partnerships, that has become a member of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions.

With all of these efforts to improve the workforce system, there could be potential for separate projects to each take on a life of its own without regard for the goals, strategies and projected outcomes of the others. The Governor's Workforce Board's unified strategic planning process is an exciting step to address statewide issues in a comprehensive manner. But, as suggested in the above list, workforce development is much broader than the publicly funded system. It includes philanthropically supported programs, employer training, and public and private postsecondary education. And it is deeply influenced by economic development, transportation infrastructure, and human services. All these components must be included in the unified plan.

With that in mind, the United Way's Building Adult and Neighborhood Independence Steering Committee has conducted a listening process with policymakers, funders, employers, and advocates to identify common ground and potential strategies to align resources and actions around a set of shared core values for a high performing workforce development system in Rhode Island.

This listening process is intended to help set the stage for the state's unified workforce planning process by providing a forum in which to explore overlapping goals, challenges in aligning actions, and potential strategies to improve alignment around shared core values. The United Way hired Jobs for the Future to facilitate the process and to prepare this white paper of recommendations on how Rhode Island might integrate "high leverage" principles into its workforce development system.

This report outlines our findings and recommendations for the Governor's Workforce Board and other key stakeholders to continue Rhode Island's progress toward a high-performing workforce development system. The remainder of this section summarizes the economic and other challenges that are the driving force in the need to

reform the workforce development system. It also gives an overview of the listening process that formed the basis for the content and recommendations in this report. Section II discusses seven principles for high-performing workforce development systems, some promising models currently being implemented in Rhode Island, and some potential action steps to strengthen and expand promising models. Finally, Section III raises a key question and proposes a set of recommendations to help develop a high-performing workforce development system for Rhode Island.

B. Rhode Island's Challenge

As is the case with the rest of the country, Rhode Island's economy is changing rapidly. Many of the trends that characterize the national economy have had an especially strong impact on Rhode Island. Since long before the Second World War, Rhode Island's economic engine has been manufacturing, primarily low-skilled manufacturing in jewelry, textiles, and related industries. But in the first half of this decade, employment in these industries has continued its downward trend, falling by 15 percent in Rhode Island. Workers, both blue and white collar, feel the insecurity of offshoring as developing nations rapidly increase their educational and skill levels and compete for low- and high-skilled jobs. Employers feel the pressure as well, struggling to reduce costs to compete globally, adopting new technology that requires unparalleled worker skills.

The Rhode Island economy faces twin challenges of a worker gap and a skills gap, which in combination are fueling a squeeze on workers and businesses. Job growth in this most recent economic expansion has been seriously bifurcated, with the greatest growth taking place in occupations requiring lower skills and paying lower wages, and smaller but not insignificant growth in jobs requiring the highest level of skills and paying higher wages. In Rhode Island from 2001 to 2004, jobs were created in low-paying industries such as hospitality and retail at twice the rate as in high-paying industries such as financial services and electronic product manufacturing (William Collins, "Economic and Social Trends Affecting Rhode Island" p.6, Providence 2005).

Nationally over the last 25 years, real wages for adult men without a high school diploma have fallen by 18 percent, while wages for adult men with a college degree have risen by 21 percent (State of America, Economic Policy Institute, Washington DC, 2005 tables 2.18, 2.19). The phenomenon that some have referred to as "the disappearing middle" is very real; well-paying jobs requiring

less than postsecondary education are rapidly disappearing and driving an unprecedented and growing wage and wealth gap.

There is little debate about the increasing relationship between higher levels of skill and education with wages and business competitiveness. Individual workers and employers both feel the effects of this trend. Yet Rhode Island is not particularly well equipped to supply employers with workers having high technical skills and the ability to gain new skills. Nearly 18% of Rhode Island's adults lack a high school diploma, ranking the state 38th nationally—and last in the Northeast (Collins, p.6).

Furthermore, the population growth in working-age native-born workers that supported the economic expansion of the eighties and nineties is essentially over, with current growth in Rhode Island's labor force coming primarily from immigrants. Census Bureau data for 1990 to 2000 indicate that immigrants were responsible for all of the state's population growth. Yet immigrants in Rhode Island have even lower educational attainment than the general population: 50 percent of Hispanic adults (the state's largest immigrant group) in Rhode Island have a high school diploma.

At the local level, the infrastructure that provides employees and employers with the education and skills services they need is also struggling to cope with the diminishing federal investment in adult training. Though the state has stepped in to fill this vacuum with Industry Partnerships, adult literacy, and the Job Development Fund, demand for these services far outstrips the available capacity. In the field of higher education, the community college faces the demands of multiple missions, and struggles to effectively serve working adults who are not academically prepared for the college level training they need to obtain jobs with family sustaining wages. In 2006, Community College of Rhode Island graduated only 10.4 percent of the full-time students who had enrolled three years before.

Few communities anywhere have figured out how to effectively knit together the often separately funded and administered education, training, and support services that adults and employers need into anything closely approximating an efficient "system." The task of aligning funding sources, sorting out eligibility criteria, and figuring out how to fill the gaps among multiple program outcome standards often falls on under-resourced community-based agencies. These agencies are the frontlines of workforce preparation for low-income residents, but they are often removed from the strategic thinking, planning, and goal setting that state agencies conduct.

C. The Listening Process

Understanding these conditions, and wanting to learn more about how they are affecting workers, employers and practitioners in the workforce development field, the United Way of Rhode Island over the last year has conducted a series of meetings to hear people's experiences with, and attitudes toward, the workforce development system of the state. The United Way is a major funder of workforce services in Rhode Island and is committed to supporting the state's efforts to improve the economic well being of low-income adults and neighborhoods.

A little over a year ago, United Way of Rhode Island launched an initiative called Skill Up RI to seed capacity and advocate for policies that focus on achieving ambitious outcomes for employers and low-income residents. Skill Up RI is led by a community-based steering committee that includes senior level officials from DLT, RIDE, RIPTA, RI Vocational Rehabilitation, as well as executives from leading businesses and community agencies. This steering committee serves as a neutral forum to rethink the way workforce development is done in the state.

In the Fall of 2006 and through the winter of 2007, the United Way expanded its listening process to include focus groups with employers and feedback sessions with policymakers and advocates.

- In October 2006, United Way and Making Connections Providence invited state and local workforce development funders to meet with Robert P. Giloth, Program Officer of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, to discuss a national project called Investing in Workforce Intermediaries. This project supports states and regional workforce systems to align funding and policies around dual customer career advancement strategies for low-skilled adults. Within the context of this national project, these key stakeholders discussed the challenges and opportunities in further development of this approach to workforce development in Rhode Island.
- In January 2007, United Way invited a group of 20 state policymakers, educators, advocates, service providers and employers to brainstorm issues and challenges in operating as a high-performing workforce development system in Rhode Island.
- In January and February 2007, United Way facilitated two employer focus groups to elicit their experiences with the publicly funded workforce system in light of the skills and attributes they seek from their workforce.

- In March 2007, the United Way invited a group of public and private funders of workforce services to discuss ideas about sharing resources, exchanging information on successful programs, and considering additional avenues for collaboration on workforce development issues.

In addition to these listening events, we have consulted a number of analyses produced in the last ten years looking at the Rhode Island economy and the resources of the publicly funded workforce development system. These different constituencies demonstrated remarkable consistency about the key issues they perceived as presenting barriers to operating as a high-performing workforce development system:

- fragmentation of services for target populations, service delivery, and resources,
- the need for a unifying vision on the goals and outcomes of the system,
- leadership at the highest levels of state government to bring about increased collaboration to attain these goals, and
- the need to develop the models and capacity with which to achieve system goals. (*See Appendix A for a summary of stakeholder observations from the listening sessions.*)

In addition to describing challenges, the listening process uncovered a number of attributes that give Rhode Island an unusual opportunity to "get it right" with workforce development. A number of innovative programs and practices are underway that address some of the issues raised by stakeholders in the listening sessions. While many of these programs are disconnected from the goals, strategies, and projected outcomes of the others, the state's unified strategic planning process presents an opportunity to advance beyond innovative yet isolated programs to the development of a high-performing workforce development system.

Furthermore, the state's small geography makes it easy to convene groups. Consequently, stakeholders and policymakers from across the state and from different sectors are likely to know one another and can get together informally to work out solutions to problems. The state's economy is fairly well diversified, so that a downturn in a single industry is less likely to have devastating impact. Situated in the vibrant northeast economic corridor between Boston and New York, Rhode Island's inter-state transportation access and comparatively lower cost of living makes it an attractive destination for business expansion.

sion. The state is also home to several outstanding educational institutions, including Brown University, Rhode Island School of Design, Johnson and Wales, and the University of Rhode Island, among others.

II. Adopting Strategies that Support High Performance

On behalf of Skill Up Rhode Island, Jobs for the Future and Abt Associates, Skill Up's evaluation consultant, have identified a set of seven “**high-leverage principles**” that might guide the workforce development system in defining its policy goals, organizing its service delivery, and promoting accountability and sustainability.

Defining Policy Goals of the Workforce Development System

- The system provides dual customer services that meet the needs of employers and of job seekers and incumbent workers.
- The system focuses on jobs and industry sectors that offer pathways to career advancement and economically self-sustaining wages.

Organizing Service Delivery

- The system aligns investments from multiple public and private sources to provide a continuum of education, training, and support services that meet the large-scale needs of employers and residents.
- The system supports the functions of workforce intermediaries that organize complex initiatives by convening stakeholders, aggregating needs, aligning resources, and brokering or providing services to meet the workforce needs of employers and residents. *(See Appendix C for more information about a workforce partnership model.)*

Promoting Accountability and Sustainability

- The system focuses on accountability and measurable, positive outcomes for employers and for individuals.
- The system invests its resources in building capacity and professional development to strengthen its ability to reach its goals.
- The system implements policies and investment strategies to sustain improved employer, institutional, and agency practices.

We discuss each of these principles in turn, including a rationale for why they are needed, promising models already being implemented in Rhode Island to address the

key issues identified by the principles, and strategies for how the state can further align the system with these high leverage principles.

A. Defining Policy Goals for the Workforce Development System

Across the country, high-performing workforce development systems share a recognition that regional economic competitiveness increases as communities cultivate a workforce that has the technical skills in demand by local employers as well as the ability to problem solve and learn rapidly. To achieve this, states need to integrate workforce development resources from multiple sources with economic development strategies that address employer needs, increase student access to and success in postsecondary education, and build the capacity of workforce providers and postsecondary institutions to make these improvements.

Research shows that lower skilled adults need access to a broad range of services, including adult basic education, occupational training, career coaching, asset development, and support services to get firmly established on the first rungs of a career ladder, ready to advance. In the workforce development system, these services are often fragmented because they come under the purview of different agencies and funding streams.

Rhode Island needs a strong education and training system at both the high end and the low end, with connecting intermediate steps, to meet the skill needs of residents and of employers with the kind of well-paying jobs that fuel economic growth. At the high end, program development driven by employer and student demand can often generate sufficient revenue to be self-supporting. At the low end, however, student resources are usually insufficient to cover program costs, and employer interest in investment is limited. Resources at the low end of the skill-building spectrum need public investment to build a pipeline that feeds into higher end education and training programs. The finite resources of the workforce system are best able to contribute to economic growth when they are concentrated on preparing residents for jobs with advancement potential in growth industries that pay high wages.

1. Promising Rhode Island Policy Models

In 1992 the state of Rhode Island enacted an Unemployment Insurance tax diversion program, called the Job Development Fund, which provides flexible resources for a variety of programmatic applications that address employers' workforce development needs. This resource is attractive to the business community—particu-

larly small businesses that can find the costs of training to build employee skills onerous. Unfortunately, this resource has not been used to its fullest potential, either by service providers collaborating with employers to train their workers, or by employers to purchase skill development services (RI Small Business Development Center First Annual Economic Summit, January 5, 2007, found at www.risbdc.org/eco_summit07.htm).

The Governor's Workforce Board supports the formation and expansion of Industry Partnerships, multi-employer collaborations to address critical human resources needs, infrastructure requirements, and challenges to workforce growth or retention. The work of these Industry Partnerships is to analyze the workforce development requirements of employers producing similar products and sharing similar supply chains. Strictly speaking, Industry Partnerships do not have a *dual customer* orientation. Rather, they facilitate the dual customer orientation of state and local workforce agencies by aggregating employer demand and making employer requirements accessible to the state and local workforce development agencies.

The Governor's Workforce Board sponsored an integrated planning process for youth services, bringing together the Department of Children, Youth and Families with the Department of Labor and Training in a Youth Forum that has produced a unified vision for all youth, and a common service strategy supported by both agencies. This approach recently received a \$250,000 demonstration grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to assist in the implementation of the universal service strategy.

Skill Up Rhode Island is a community impact initiative that invests in the development and enhancement of workforce partnerships to meet the needs of low-skilled adult Rhode Islanders and the employers who hire them. A project of the United Way of Rhode Island, the initiative supports the development of highly networked public and community partnerships among employers, education, training, and support services providers to facilitate the creation of career opportunities and a stable workforce. The initiative has the potential to serve as a model for dual customer, career advancement workforce development that encourages workforce partnerships to align resources from multiple funding sources to meet individuals and employers workforce needs. Skill Up RI is a small demonstration that shows promising ability to attract co-investment by other funders.

2. Prospective Strategies to Define Policy Goals

Provide Dual Customer Services

Empower the Industry Partnerships to use their employer needs analysis to review the course offerings and degree programs at CCRI, Rhode Island College, and the University of Rhode Island. Prioritize the development of high end educational resources in industries and occupations that are significant to Rhode Island's economic future by helping local employers to grow their highly skilled, professional workforce.

Emphasize Career Advancement Leading to Economically Self-Sustaining Wages

Focus public investment on workforce development for industries and employers with both a high demand for labor and opportunities for career advancement. Require service providers to demonstrate how their proposed services advance low-skilled adults towards family sustaining wages in these industries, including how they are linked to feeder programs and to readying participants for the next step along a career pathway. Commit to scaling up effective programs and systematically adopting proven practices that help low-skilled adults to advance to family sustaining incomes and that address the workforce needs of industries and employers of economic significance to the state.

B. Organizing Service Delivery

The workforce system must expand its capacity to deliver training and education in occupations of economic importance to the state, such as allied health, advanced manufacturing, or marine trades. This capacity building involves developing new curricula in conjunction with employers, recruiting and retaining faculty with the right skills, and supporting adult and developmental education programs that help lower skilled adults earn post-secondary credentials.

Even when a workforce system has aligned its investments to provide a continuum of career advancement resources, residents and employers find the system challenging to navigate. The dual customers need help in knowing where to find the right array of services to meet their needs. Workforce intermediaries are entrepreneurial labor market institutions (e.g., community-based organizations, community colleges, Workforce Investment Boards, employer associations, or coalitions of these actors) that have thorough understanding of the needs of both customers, and know how to pull together the system's resources to meet those needs. Intermediaries provide

three essential functions over and above the delivery of services:

- They bring together employers, workers, and service providers to analyze needs and plan a service strategy;
- They align funding and other resources into a coherent, coordinated delivery strategy; and
- They broker or directly provide a comprehensive array of services.

Workforce intermediaries increase the operating efficiency of the workforce system by aggregating the workforce requirements of employers and low-skilled adults. But the core functions of the intermediary are not covered by the budgets of most training programs. A high-performing workforce development system recognizes that these core functions—convening, planning and aligning, and brokering—improve quality and make the system more user friendly. It provides financial support to these workforce intermediary core functions, especially when they are organized around industry sectors.

1. Promising Rhode Island Models for Organizing the Service Delivery

Five state agencies have agreed to align their procurement processes for adult literacy services. For FY 2008, RIDE has re-vamped the procurement process for adult literacy services from multiple funding streams into a single RFP that integrates funds from the Department of Human Services, the Department of Corrections, the Governor’s Workforce Board Job Development Fund, and the Workforce Investment Act. RIDE assumes the responsibility for fiscal and outcome reporting to each of the state agencies. Vendors provide RIDE with a single, integrated report.

The Department of Labor and Training and the Department of Education have pooled funds for a demonstration program that integrates adult literacy with occupational training in a high-demand, skilled occupation on Aquidneck Island.

Skill Up Rhode Island is reaching out to private foundations and public funders to align grantmaking for workforce partnerships that build career advancement pipelines to prepare low-skilled adults for jobs with employers confronting skill shortages in well-paying occupations. Skill Up Rhode Island workforce partnerships are aligning grants from the United Way of Rhode Island, the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Making Connections Providence, the Rhode Island Foundation, the Governor’s Workforce Board Industry Partnership fund, and RIDE.

Workforce partnerships are expected to leverage employer resources to train incumbent workers, and to align local resources to meet employers and low-skilled adults’ needs.

2. Prospective Strategies for Organizing Service Delivery

Align Funding in Support of a Continuum of Services

Explore underutilized financing approaches to expand the resources available to pay for education and training. Underutilized financing approaches may include Food Stamp Employment and Training 50/50 matching grants; employer-matched Lifelong Learning Accounts; Section 127 tax incentives for employer-paid training; and bond financing authority for the community college and Workforce Investment boards, among others.

Expand the Youth Forum model to the adult workforce development system. Promote policies at the state level that align resources. Conduct a scan of all workforce development-related funding sources (including General Assembly funds), the current infrastructure that manages these resources at local and state levels, the program/missions they support, the services they provide, their outcomes, and what changes might help improve alignment. Convene a working group of state agency policymakers to analyze the scan for gaps and disconnects in the “pipeline” as supported by multiple programs and funding sources. Develop specific recommendations to close the gaps, reduce duplication in program designs and outcome standards, and build a continuum of career advancement resources in which entry and exit standards match at transition points. Include guidelines on implementing these recommendations in each agency’s plans and program RFP specifications.

Award planning grants to seed the development of new programs and services that expand the number of seats in training for high-demand skills in occupations of significance to the state’s economy.

Support the Core Functions of Workforce Partnerships

Allocate resources from a flexible funding source, such as the Job Development Fund, to form new workforce intermediaries and to sustain the core functions of successful intermediaries. Core functions are those “value adds” that enhance the direct provision of education, training, job matching, and support services.

Encourage public funders to specifically seek service providers that function as intermediaries, or that partner with other organizations that provide the intermediary functions of convening stakeholders, aggregating dual

customer needs, planning and organizing a response, aligning funding, and brokering or providing services.

Develop the Industry Partnerships into full-fledged workforce intermediaries that aggregate industry sector and individual employer-level workforce development needs and connect them to the curriculum content, outcome standards, and program offerings of educational institutions and training providers throughout the workforce development system, including postsecondary institutions, adult literacy providers, and the Network RI system.

Use the data aggregated by the Industry Partnerships to create career maps based on industry and employer demand. Develop these maps into career pathways (including basic skills development and support services) that are clearly and realistically articulated and easily communicated to jobseekers and incumbent workers.

C. Promoting Accountability and Sustainability

The mission of the workforce development system is to assure that job seekers and workers have access to the resources and supports they need to be successful in the workplace, and that employers have access to the resources they need to find and train workers with the skills that employers need to thrive.

A high-performing workforce development system establishes outcome goals for the system in accordance with this mission, identifies interim benchmarks, and develops a data tracking capacity so that components of the system—such as adult literacy or welfare to work—can measure their contribution to the overall outcomes, regardless of the funding sources that paid for the services.

Each state and federal funding source has its own set of measures of program effectiveness. Many of these are defined in ways that make cross-program comparisons meaningless. Furthermore, most programs measure outputs only for job seekers, not for employers.

To assess the performance of the workforce system, a state must have the capacity to track adult learner access to, success in, and transitions across multiple education and workforce development systems and employment. Measuring labor market outcomes of employment, wages, and occupational status requires connecting education and training records to the Unemployment Insurance files, which means sharing data across state agencies.

As the state improves its ability to document the return on investment of a strong workforce development system that screens, assesses, and builds worker skills, it builds a case for employer support of the system and of their own

human resources practices that cultivate their frontline workers as well as their higher-paid workers. State leadership and policy can play a significant role in communicating to employers the economic value of cultivating the skills of their frontline workers.

To address the full range of quality improvements sought for the workforce development system, workforce development practitioners need to build their skills in providing high-quality curriculum design, adopting instructional approaches appropriate for adult learners, working effectively with employers, and collaborating with other parts of the workforce system.

The success of the system in implementing improved policies and program design hinges on the understanding and capacity of the frontline staff of service providers and state agencies responsible for carrying them out. In the workforce development field, there is high turnover among staff providing direct services, which drives a need for ongoing professional development investment to maintain understanding of roles and expected outcomes.

Through its focus on accountability and results, the workforce development system can encourage employers and practitioners to sustain improved practices. A high-performing workforce development system has a clear process for identifying and disseminating lessons, scaling up promising and effective practices, and using policy and financial resources to sustain successful practices.

1. Promising Rhode Island Models to Promote Accountability and Sustainability

The National Work Readiness Credential is a diagnostic tool that assesses the soft skill mastery of adults with literacy levels far below those needed for an academic credential. The Rhode Island Economic Policy Council, United Way, and the Rhode Island Foundation have supported Rhode Island's early engagement as a pilot state in using this credential. It can serve as a tool that helps provide a common vocabulary and standard outcome measures across programs with diverse missions, such as adult literacy, workforce training, and vocational rehabilitation.

The Providence Plan, with funding from the United Way and participation from RIDE and RIDLT, has been researching an approach to sharing outcome data across agencies. The Data Integration Project is developing terms for a Memorandum of Understanding between the two agencies to use UI data to track the labor market success of students in the adult literacy program. This approach could serve as a model to track the long-term impact on

participant outcomes of all workforce development programs.

The offices of Rehabilitation Services and Adult Education have developed a cooperative agreement to provide cross-agency training for professional staff to build a shared sense of the goals and roles of their respective agencies in addressing the multiple barriers faced by individuals seeking their services for help in finding employment.

With help from the Governor’s Workforce Board, the Rhode Island Foundation and the United Way of Rhode Island, RIDE is introducing a Professional Development Center that will build the skills of adult education program developers and practitioners in order to improve student outcomes. Managed by the Rhode Island College Foundation, this center will orient practitioners to the state’s adult literacy infrastructure and standards, and will provide curriculum content workshops that teach instructors how to integrate the “soft skills” that employers value—critical thinking, problem solving, writing, oral communications, use of technology—with reading, math and ESL instruction. A fundamental precept of the Professional Development Center is that literacy skills are closely linked to success in the workplace. The PDC also seeks to build practitioner skills regarding workforce preparation strategies, including learning how to work with employers to analyze their skill needs and to design programs in partnership with employers.

The Rhode Island Workforce Alliance is building community-based capacity for advocacy and policy research on workforce development. It provides a forum where business, labor, educators, advocates, and service providers learn about the workforce system, share ideas for system improvement, and build working relationships that can lead to training partnerships, resource sharing, and aligned advocacy efforts.

2. Prospective Strategies to Promote Accountability and Sustainability

Ensure Accountability for Measurable Outcomes

Develop high-level systems outcomes that every part of the system adopts. Each agency (e.g., DLT, DHS) or stakeholder group (e.g., employers, funders) can identify how their individual missions further the overall state goals and intended impact.

Identify performance measures and develop an integrated data system, accessed by multiple agencies and programs, to track them. Build on the Providence Plan Data

Integration Project to access UI wage data to track the long-term success of participants from multiple programs.

Conduct research and evaluation on effectiveness at the systems level in terms of impact, return on investment, and best practices.

Develop a public process to communicate results and promote accountability, such as a state report card.

Strengthen the System through Capacity Building

Expand the reach of RIDE’s Professional Development Center by using its infrastructure to also build the program development and instructional competence of staff in the workforce development, offender re-entry, welfare-to-work, and related agencies.

Encourage public funders to conduct an assessment of the professional development needs of their service provider networks. Assess not only the competencies of service delivery staff, but also the management competencies to respond to changing economic conditions, address new policy priorities, and strengthen organizational capacities.

Encourage public funders to allocate resources from every funding source to professional development, and to require service providers to budget for professional development in their grant applications.

Adopt innovative approaches to delivering professional development services, such as Web-based curricula, distance learning, interactive software, and virtual learning communities for professional networking.

Build the capacity of the public One-Stop system and address the barriers to greater effectiveness.

Develop a communications and marketing strategy to teach employers the value of investing in frontline workers. Develop a marketing campaign that features the economic benefits of positive employer practices such as providing release time for training, work-based learning, or strong internal career ladders.

Promote Policy to Sustain Successful Practices

Create a funders group of public and private funders to foster greater communication, add clout and credibility to the work, maximize opportunities for systems change, and enhance the possibilities for co-investment.

Create a forum to discuss key policy issues arising from the work. The state can use available resources and capacity to convene such a forum, such as the Workforce Alliance or the Economic Policy Center. Incentives can also be provided to support this convening function.

Focus on communicating successes to sustain focus and momentum beyond the development of the strategic plan.

III. Achieving a High Performance System for Rhode Island

A. More to be Done

In order to develop a vision for a unified approach to workforce development for the state of Rhode Island, some fundamental questions must be discussed and decided. One of the most compelling is “whom does the system serve?” There is by no means an obvious answer to this question. On the supply side, a multiplicity of federal and state programs are targeted towards groups with widely varying needs: welfare mothers, adults with low literacy skills, dislocated workers, unemployed individuals, ex-offenders, low-skilled, low-income residents, public housing residents, immigrants, people with disabilities, to name a few. The supply side also includes mainstream services designed for the population-at-large. These include degree and continuing education programs at the community college, Rhode Island College and the University of Rhode Island as well as proprietary schools and private colleges, which are key to meeting the state’s needs for a highly skilled workforce and to sustaining a high-quality standard of living.

By the same token, the needs of the demand side are diverse. The health care industry, an increasingly significant driver in the state’s economy, has a serious skill shortage that requires a policy response to expand capacity in community college and four-year college programs. High technology firms, another significant sector in the state’s economy, also need the state’s higher education system to stay current with emerging technology. At the same time, retail and hospitality, employers of many of the state’s lower-skilled residents, need workers with good job readiness along with infrastructure supports ranging from reliable transportation to 2nd or 3rd shift child care.

With finite resources, it is difficult to fully meet the needs of all these customers. A system that provides high-quality skill development and educational resources that meet the needs of the majority of residents and employers is a baseline for economic competitiveness. Yet this system encounters a tension in balancing the desire for high outcome standards with the desire to be accessible to residents with education and skill deficits and other barriers to employment. The challenge is to provide access to the necessary remediation and supports without sustaining fragmentation from multiple funding sources.

Ideally, the workforce development system will offer a continuum of skills that starts with literacy and job readiness and seamlessly segues through entry-level occupational skills, postsecondary credentials, and specialized technical or professional education. Such a continuum is able to customize approaches to certain populations, allowing working adults the flexibility to obtain education or training, often while working full time. It also is flexible enough to allow working adults to periodically leave and re-enter education or training to attend to work and family issues, without suffering setbacks in their progress.

B. Steps toward a High Performance System for Rhode Island

Building on what it has in place, Rhode Island has the opportunity to develop a high-performing workforce development system that meets the needs of employers and workers, resulting in increased economic competitiveness, improved business productivity, and a higher quality of life. The high-leverage principles and strategies discussed above provide some guidance for how Rhode Island can do this. Below, we offer some specific recommendations for applying these principles based on input offered during the listening process.

To achieve a high performance workforce development system, **the Governor’s Workforce Board can:**

Use the high leverage principles as a lens. The Governor’s Workforce Board can use these principles as a “screen” or set of benchmarks for evaluating its strategic plan. This will help ensure a focus on high performance at the strategy level. This screen can also be used to assess implementation plans to ensure high performance in service delivery and ultimately in outcomes.

Articulate a concise workforce development goal for the state that unifies the contributions of individual programs, agencies, and funding sources. The Governor’s Workforce Board can articulate a vision for the state in a manner that speaks to employers and residents. The unified state plan can lay out how each program, agency, and funding source contributes to that vision, in addition to meeting its individual regulatory goals.

Create a clear, cohesive workforce development agenda early in the planning process. The GWB can identify three to five high-level issues to focus on, and then communicate these to key stakeholders even before the final strategic plan has been completed. Even while tactics for addressing these high-level issues are being developed, advocates can use the the issues to rally key stakeholders,

including public and private funders and the private sector, around the agenda.

Place a high priority on public investment in building the skills of low-skilled adults. Compared to low-skilled and often low-income adults, higher-skilled adults often have access to greater personal and professional resources to facilitate their skill development and career advancement. Given the proportion of low-skilled adults in Rhode Island compared to other states, the state's competitive-

ness will be correspondingly higher based on success in addressing the needs of this population.

Provide high-level leadership and visibility in the strategic planning process. This will make key stakeholders and the public at large aware that the process is underway, communicate its significance to the state, encourage greater participation and support, and build a constituency base that can promote greater accountability to high performance.

Appendix A

Stakeholder Observations on Rhode Island's Workforce Development System

Fragmentation

The fragmented workforce system in Rhode Island creates challenges in addressing the needs of both employers and workers. This means that:

Populations are segmented through service delivery. State departments and agencies have defined responsibilities for various populations and for the administration of a wide array of targeted grant programs with different missions. Workforce development professionals acknowledge that, in managing programs to meet their individual missions, often the differences between programs become more significant than their commonalities. As a whole, the system has not addressed differences in culture, race/ethnicity, and generations. Conflicting rules, regulations, and legislation exacerbate this fragmentation.

Employers should be encouraged to be engaged in influencing the policy direction and service delivery of the system. Most employers are focused on efforts to address their own particular workforce needs. Given the fragmentation, even employers who desire to become engaged on a more systemic level would find it challenging to know where or how to do so.

Capacity is limited. Both the public and private sector training organizations lack the capacity to meet the needs of employers and workers. Specifically, these sectors lack sufficient staff, and staff with the right skills, to serve both customers. For example, employers commented on the need to increase the capacity and resources of the Community College of Rhode Island so that it could hire faculty who could teach in occupational programs developed in response to employer needs.

Services should be integrated at the operational level. The lack of integration makes it difficult to access the right resources to serve employers and workers. Clients find it hard to flow from one “system” to another to get the service they need from multiple providers and funding sources. Instead of a comprehensive approach, adult education is disconnected from skills development, and

human services are disconnected from the employment system. All stakeholders expressed the need for a “holistic approach” and a continuum of services that includes support services such as day care and transportation along with mentoring and coaching. Employers also noted the need to address both the duplication of services in some areas and the lack of services in others. Funders mentioned the need to break down silos to address the training, support services, capacity building, staff development and employer engagement necessary to increase the skills of low-income adults.

Resources should be aligned at the policy/state agency level. Funding is assigned to silos, making it difficult to have enough money to address issues at the system level without efforts to align these resources. Flexible funding is needed to promote cooperation and reduce fragmentation. Collaboration amongst public and private funders is needed to promote greater effectiveness, reduce duplication, enhance the clout and credibility of workforce development efforts, and foster systems change. Beyond funding, not enough physical space is available to facilitate the co-location of services.

Need for a unifying vision

Rhode Island needs to develop a unified vision at the highest state policy levels of how the workforce system is organized and what its purpose is. This means that:

There should be clarity on the system's goals. All the agencies that comprise the system need to have a good understanding of the needs of its customers—and how those relate to the needs of customers served by other agencies in the system—to drive the development of goals, especially for low-skilled, entry-level workers.

There should be agreement on the system outcomes. Outcome measures are defined differently by different funding sources. Guidance is needed from the Governor's Workforce Board on what indicators of success to measure across the system. Agencies need to shift from measuring outputs to measuring outcomes. A unified data collec-

tion system accessed by all agencies and service providers could go far towards promoting accountability to system outcomes. Employers also expressed that the system should be able to measure its return on investment in terms of these outcomes.

The highest levels of state government should commit to work on the problem. Efforts to find common ground can be misconstrued as attempts to influence other agencies' goals and missions. It is important for senior management to set a tone of collaboration and problem solving that minimizes the tendency to protect one's turf, while duly recognizing the need to faithfully realize their own agency's mission and goals.

There should be opportunities for collaboration across state agencies and their service providers. All stakeholders (workforce development professionals, policymakers, advocates, employers, and funders) expressed the need for greater collaboration across agencies and providers to solve common workforce problems. These organizations lack a common language to discuss individual program goals and find overlaps. A forum is needed where program managers can work on better service integration, such as a comprehensive assessment with referrals to the appropriate services. Long-term planning is difficult to do for both the public sector and employers. In addition, practitioners should have their own forum where they can develop strategies on how to deliver all the pieces of a full career pathway.

There is need for high-level leadership to drive towards a unified vision for the state. The Governor's Workforce Board, the key state-level coordinating body, should have a permanent staff director that could help this body be more effective. Housing the GWB at the Department of Labor and Training can reduce its appearance of impartiality to other state agencies. Historically, workforce development has not risen to a high priority for the governor, making it more difficult for the Governor's Workforce Board to play a central leadership role.

The system should pay more attention to communicating its successes. Members of the general public, employers, and other parts of the system do not know when and how the system is working well, and where it is working to improve. A number of innovative programs have been introduced to improve services to employers, to integrate literacy and occupational training, and to streamline state-level interagency administration. It is important to communicate these successes so that the public will have confidence that the system is able to meet their needs.

Need for demonstration projects

The workforce development system needs models and the capacity to organize itself to achieve its goals.

Demonstrate models to reduce fragmentation. A holistic approach to workforce development, which includes other supports (e.g., child care, transportation), should be the focus of the system. Demonstration projects are needed to promote increased public and private funding in workforce development system improvements. Funders noted the need to share lessons learned with all stakeholders in the system to facilitate improvements that better meet workers' and business needs. Employers affirmed the need to scale up effective programs to serve more workers and businesses.

Improve services for low-skilled workers. Service providers need a better understanding of how to make the system function in an aligned way to meet the comprehensive needs of low-income individuals so they can become financially independent members of the middle class. Service providers are under-resourced, scrambling "from hand to mouth" to survive. They are often more focused on meeting myriad funding requirements than on creating full career pathways for clients. They need stable, predictable funding that recognizes the costs of delivering comprehensive services and of managing high-quality programs.

Improve services for employers. The workforce system needs to improve its connections to employer career pathways. Functioning workforce intermediaries who understand employer culture and can translate this understanding to service providers are needed to address this problem. Employers are also challenged to understand the changing nature of the workforce, particularly limited English speakers, low-literate adults, and new entrants to workforce. They note, for instance, the need for more effective work-readiness/"soft-skills" training, language and literacy skill development, and computer training as well as greater cultural competence. Employers noted repeatedly the need to better train their managers and supervisors to work effectively with low-skilled workers and to make continuous education or skill development a part of company culture. The workforce development system needs to develop strategies to engage employers in training and education and build their capacity to successfully employ the changing workforce, so that innovations and change are occurring on both the supply and demand sides of the workforce development system.

The workforce development system should focus on career advancement. Several conditions contribute to making this opportunity difficult to achieve for Rhode Island workers. Many program regulations emphasize employment in any job as a first priority, and do not focus on advancement or opportunities for skill-building. Without alignment of resources, networking these “work first” programs to ongoing training is extraordinarily challenging for service providers, let alone for individuals. Many workers do not know what career advancement opportunities exist and how to access them. Training and skills development programs that prepare residents for advancement are under-funded, and they often are not connected to other supportive resources. Employers also need to provide more paid release time for training and allow tuition and other training resources to be used for workers at different skill levels.

The state should focus on recruiting and supporting businesses with career pathways and should promote the conditions necessary for their retention. Business development and economic development professionals need to pay more attention to workforce development issues and priorities. Increasingly, states and regions are recognizing the need to increase the skills and educational achievement of their population as a key factor in promoting their economic competitiveness and creating a favorable business climate.

Appendix B

Listening Process Participants

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Appendix C

The Workforce Partnership Model

Workforce skills matter in an increasingly global and competitive economic environment. Yet over a third of the American workforce lacks the skills needed to succeed in this environment. America's prosperity will continue to depend on the strength of its workforce. Some sectors and communities are already confronted by skill shortages, unfilled jobs, low productivity, threats to regional competitiveness, and increasing disparities between those with and without education and skills.

Few communities are prepared to meet these challenges. The need for skilled workers has outstripped the capacity of the existing public workforce system, which is underfunded, fragmented and constrained in its focus.

In recent years, workforce partnerships have shown promise in addressing these key challenges. In regions and states across the nation, a variety of organizations play the role of workforce intermediary, organizing the key stakeholders and local resources to help workers gain the skills they need and give employers access to the skilled labor they need. At their core, workforce partnerships tend to be results-driven, more entrepreneurial, and worthy of greater trust from both employers and workers. The key functions of workforce partnerships include:

- Pursuing a “dual customer approach,” serving businesses looking for qualified workers and job-seekers and workers looking to advance their careers;
- Organizing multiple institutions and funding streams around common goals;
- Providing or brokering services—training and support services—that help workers gain access to the initial rungs of the ladder to economic opportunity and advancement;

- Serving a variety of workers, but recognizing and addressing the special needs of lower-skilled, lower-wage workers and job seekers;
- Reducing turnover and increasing economic mobility of workers;
- Testing and adapting innovative approaches to workforce problems; and
- Catalyzing improvements in public systems and business employment practices.

Traditional Approach

Workforce Partnerships

- Focuses on increasing worker skills and job placement
- Focuses on solving problems faced by workers and businesses
- Transactional
- Relational
- Works within existing funding systems and business practices
- Works to change funding systems and business practices to enable a full array of solutions
- Sharp boundaries around fixed organizational roles and practices
- Catalyzes flexible partnerships to solve problems and enhance value
- Short-term focus
- Long-term orientation

Endnotes

- ¹ William Collins, 2005, “Economic and Social Trends Affecting Rhode Island,” p.6. Nearly 18% of Rhode Island’s adults lack a high school diploma, ranking the state 38th nationally and last in the Northeast. U.S. Census data, 1990-2000. Fifty percent of Hispanic adults in Rhode Island (the state’s largest immigrant group) have a high school diploma.
- ² These high-leverage principles were identified by Jobs for the Future and Abt Associates on behalf of Skill Up Rhode Island, a dual customer, career advancement initiative sponsored by the United Way of Rhode Island.

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GLORIA CROSS MWASE, a member of Jobs for the Future’s, Building Economic Opportunities Group, has over ten years of experience managing projects in the nonprofit sector. Her projects at JFF include the National Fund for Workforce Solutions and Breaking Through: Helping Low-Skilled Adults Enter and Succeed in College and Careers. Prior to coming to JFF, Dr. Mwase worked as a local representative for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, where she served on the Funders Group for SkillWorks, a workforce intermediary in Boston.

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