

THE
UNIVERSITY
OF RHODE ISLAND

REAL JOBS RHODE ISLAND CASE STUDY:

Residential Construction Partnership

Prepared for:

Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training

Center General Complex
1511 Pontiac Avenue,
Cranston, RI 02920

APRIL 2018 REPORT

Faculty:

Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz, *Principal Investigator*
Skye Leedah
Aaron Ley

Student Researchers:

Bridget Hall
Kristin Sodhi
Marissa DeOliveira

URI Social Science Institute for Research,
Education, and Policy.

The University of Rhode Island
Social Science Institute for
Research, Education and Policy
University of Rhode Island
Kingston, RI 02881

uri.edu/ssirep

Residential Construction Partnership

Real Jobs Rhode Island (RJRI)

In 2015, The Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training (DLT) awarded funding to workforce development collaborations throughout the state. Funding was provided through development grants to create sector-based partnerships and create a plan to provide workforce training aimed at sector needs. Implementation funding was then provided for these partnerships to develop training materials and train workers in Rhode Island in targeted industries including healthcare, technology, marine trades, and the arts. Sector partnerships were developed through public-private partnerships that included industry, workforce intermediaries, and educational institutions to address the economic needs of the state.

I. Sector Need

The Rhode Island Builders Association (RIBA) seeks to educate, inform, and advocate on behalf of the residential housing industry and its consumers. As part of its planning grant, RIBA reached out to over 3,000 industry contacts through surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews to learn about the training and employment needs of its industry partners. As a result of the survey, RIBA learned that:

- Workers in residential housing construction are growing older. The economic recession also caused many construction workers to leave Rhode Island. Thus, as the economy improves, the construction industry will require new employees to fill positions. The partnership planned to fill these positions by focusing specifically on younger workers and the Latino community.
- Incumbent workers do not have training programs that help them learn the project management skills needed to advance their careers within the sector.
- The partnership found that its employers' largest need was employees trained in carpentry.
- A high percentage of workers in the residential building industry lacked sufficient English language skills to work with customers or receive industry certifications.

II. Grant History

RIBA has a long history of working in collaboration with the state of Rhode Island through its involvement in educational reform, permitting reform, and consulting on issues relating to environmental protection. When the state required continuing education for contractors, RIBA instituted a statewide program to make educational offerings available so that contractors could meet those mandates. Yet, this is the first time that RIBA has been involved as a partner with the state on executing a grant, and the trainings associated with this grant differ from previous trainings in that they are larger and offer more specific technical training.

III. Goals and Objectives

The overall goal of the Residential Construction Partnership's (RCP) training program was to promote and create lifelong opportunities for those entering the residential construction industry while at the same time restoring the aging workforce and solving short and long-term labor shortages through better recruitment and training. The RCP sought to help fill training centers by increasing recruitment and using promotional strategies; providing real world experiences for participants of existing training centers; aligning curriculum with industry needs by including employer feedback into training curricula; and assisting training program graduates with job placement. The RCP also hoped its training would allow incumbent workers to earn additional skills and certifications to enhance their employability. The RCP targeted younger workers and the Latino community for this training and had three primary goals in delivering it:

1. Provide residential construction training opportunities to participants in Career and Technical Education (CTE) schools and encourage the standardization of CTE school curriculum.
 - After the RCP established a relationship with CTE schools, the RCP planned to institute an outreach strategy that supported industry career fairs, public project initiatives for students, more job-site internships, and the rebranding of industry careers.
2. Help connect workers with jobs in the residential construction industry.
3. Create an online jobs bank that will allow workers and employers to connect with one another.

IV. Partnership

RIBA was already a formal organization representing the residential construction industry prior to being funded by RJRI and so it was in a unique position to easily bring together its industry partners. Even though the formal organization had been together for some time, there had been very few collaborative efforts until RIBA began executing a planning grant. When RIBA solicited feedback from industry employers and became aware of workforce needs it reached out through its existing member relationships to learn more about responding to industry demands, and the RCP formed shortly thereafter. The partners who were most involved were Arnold Lumber, Andersen Windows, RI Lumber Building Materials Dealers Association, and the RCP's education partners.

Table 1: Partnership Members and Responsibilities

Rhode Island Builders Association	Lead Applicant: Responsible for working with CTE schools to standardize curriculum; coordinating the creation of the RCP Job Bank database.
Coventry CTE, Cranston CTE, East Providence CTE, New England Institute of Technology (NEIT), Newport CTE, Providence Career & Technical Academy, Cariho CTE, Warwick CTE, Woonsocket CTE, Youth Build, Davies CTE, MTTI	Primary training providers; responsible for recruiting and training students in the residential construction industry.
Rhode Island Lumber Building Materials Dealers Association (RILBMDA)	Responsible for providing insight into industry needs; helping modify training curriculum to fit industry needs; advertising open positions on the RCP Job Bank database.
Milenio Latino Institute	Responsible for providing insight into industry needs; helping modify training curriculum to fit industry needs; advertising open positions on the Job Bank database.
RI Building Officials Association	Responsible for providing insight into industry needs; helping modify training curriculum to fit industry needs; advertising open positions on the Job Bank database.
Providence Revolving Fund	Responsible for providing insight into industry needs; helping modify training curriculum to fit industry needs; advertising open positions on the Job Bank database.

V. Implementation Activities and Processes

To execute its workforce development plan, the RCP proposed to create five new positions that were overseen by RIBA's Executive Director. These positions included a project manager to oversee grant implementation; one employee in charge of working with the training centers to deliver industry-driven curricula; one employee in charge of working with employers; a job placement specialist; and a full-time coordinator that is responsible for ensuring that construction workers who lack sufficient English language skills have access to training programs and targeted educational programs (e.g., ESL courses, Spanish OSHA, etc.). These positions were later not funded, and the RCP's plan was scaled back to include the creation of an industry job bank, the standardization of CTE curricula, and the placement of workers into internships and employment.

Creation of an industry job bank

The RCP worked to create an industry job bank. The RCP's goal was to create a website that stored information about job seekers and employers and connected hiring employers to job seekers. The RCP also planned for this platform to be user-friendly for industry members and easily facilitate the advertisement of job listings in the state's residential construction industry. With these goals in mind, the RCP launched the job bank in 2016 with a domain name of RCWPJobs.com. The job bank uses data from all partners to create a databank where employers can view profiles of interested workers and workers can view job postings in the residential construction industry. It includes tools like an announcement feature alerting participants of opportunities for internships, a resume builder, a calendar of events, a dedicated email address for each participant, and access to information from the Department of Labor and Training, RJRI, RIBA, the National Association of Homebuilders, and other industry partners. The site also has resources regarding training, certifications, registrations, licensure, wage statistics, and testimonials.

Building a pipeline

This phase of the RCP's training efforts involved working with CTE schools to tailor NCCER-based certification so that it is standardized across CTE schools and tailored for the Rhode Island construction industry. The NCCER (National Center for Construction Education and Research) curriculum was designed by national industry professionals to fit industry needs and offers standardized training and credentialing instruction. By working with CTE schools, the RCP envisioned adjusting course offerings and tailoring the training so that it filled the skills needs of industry employers. The RCP identified employers who were hiring and matched those employers with the participants completing CTE training programs. The RCP also used a two-part tree house display, a collaborative effort among over 20 CTE schools and over 280 students, during the 2016 Rhode Island Home Show to generate excitement and enthusiasm among employers about the student talent at the CTE schools. Participants and employers would also have access to the online jobs bank.

Direct employment placements and internships

The RCP worked with employers in the residential construction industry to help place CTE graduates and job seekers into open jobs in the industry. These graduates and job seekers were recruited through CTE schools, the Rhode Island Home Show, the job bank website, and interpersonal meetings with members of the RCP. Once the RCP identified the job seeker, the RCP acted as an intermediary between the job seeker and industry employers to help the job seeker obtain an open position in the industry. The RCP also acted as an intermediary between CTE students and industry employers to set up internships for interested students on an individual basis.

VI. Achievements

Partnerships

Solid early vision

The RCP had a clear vision of what type of training it wanted to offer and how it wanted to implement that training from the start of the partnership. Because of this clear vision, the RCP brought in partners who shared its dedication and goals.

Effective promotion

The RCP was very effective in spreading awareness about its program. Through presentations and collaborations with CTE partner schools, the RCP believes that it increased program awareness and interest in an unusually effective way for a new program.

Robust pre-existing industry connections

RIBA had long standing connections with members of the industry, which helped it unite the RCP quickly and easily. It also helped the partnership connect with the most involved and influential members of the industry at the start of the RCP without having to spend time figuring out who the most influential companies were.

Recruitment

Home show recruitment

The RCP was able to use the Rhode Island Home Show as an effective recruitment venue for its training programs. The Home Show also acted as a venue for the CTE students associated with the RCP to demonstrate projects and training to potential new program recruits. One of the most lauded projects was the tree house display, which was a collaboration among CTE schools that required components constructed at each of the CTE sites to be brought together as a whole project at the Rhode Island Home Show.

Trainee Barriers

The RCP did not discuss any achievements with trainee barriers.

Training

Enrollment and Completion in CTE Program

The RCP achieved high enrollment and graduation from its CTE programs. The RCP had hoped to achieve a twenty percent increase in enrollment and graduation from the programs, and while percent increases were not quantifiable after the completion of the 2016 implementation period, 138 students enrolled in one of the RCP's high school programs and 281 students graduated from a program.

Transition from Training to Employment

The RCP did not discuss any achievements with the transition from training to employment.

Other

Program expansion

The RCP is pleased with the success of its high school programs, and is planning to start expanding its outreach into middle schools. The partnership hopes that such expansion raises awareness about career and technical education and increases enrollment in its training programs in those schools. Additional CTE programs have expressed interest in joining the training programs, and the RCP is seeking to expand its efforts to include these schools.

Home Show CTE showcase

The Home Show CTE student showcase was one of the most successful aspects of the RCP's programs. All students who participated learned valuable lessons about planning and cooperation, and were able to apply their lessons to a hands-on project, and received positive feedback on their work from the community. Further, the project engendered a strong sense of motivation and pride in the students about their work, and helped to boost their confidence and connection to their construction work.

VII. Challenges

Partnerships

Difficulties communicating between the RCP and the industry

The RCP had firm goals for its training programs and firm ideas about what the residential construction industry needed to improve. However, these ideas did not always match up with the goals of industry employers, and there was difficulty communicating and finding common ground among these differing ideas. As a result, some employers submitted individual training plans to the DLT to meet the needs they saw in the residential construction industry instead of relying on the existing industry partnership.

Recruitment

The RCP did not discuss any challenges with recruitment.

Trainee Barriers

Lack of transportation

The RCP found that many of the recent graduates from its training at CTE schools lacked a means of transportation. This made it harder for the RCP to secure job placements for participants after graduation. The RCP is addressing this issue by covering the costs of transportation for these students until they can secure a permanent job.

Training

Starting the first round of training in the middle of the school year

The first round of the RCP's work with its CTE partners began in the middle of the school year instead of the beginning. This made it difficult to fully engage with the students.

Transition from Training to Employment

Soft skills deficiencies in industry recruits

The RCP found that many of the young people recruited into the construction industry lacked the discipline and skills needed in the industry. The RCP was especially troubled by the inability of many young people to show up on time for class, work full days, and stay off cell phones for an entire work day.

Other

Usage of the job bank website

The RCP successfully created the job bank, but has not seen dramatic changes in the industry's hiring practices as a result of the website. A core reason for website's lack of impact is a lack of internet literacy or a desire to use the internet as a recruitment tool among industry employers.

Table 2: Performance Metrics for All Training Programs

IG-03 Residential Construction Workforce Partnership (RI Builders)	Start Date of First Cohort	Proposed End Date for All Cohorts	Target Enrollment	Enrolled	Target Completed	Completed
Recruitment, Training, and Employment						
Adult Direct Placements - 2016 (Job Seekers)	3/1/16	12/31/16	40	20	40	20
Student Internship Placements - 2016	3/1/16	12/31/16	20	10	20	10
Adults Employed					40	20
Other Objectives						
Number of employers registering with the job bank					800	Ongoing
Website Views					TBD	Ongoing
Job/Internship connections made through the job bank website					TBD	Ongoing
Students recruited into construction CTE program					20% increase	138*
Students graduating from construction CTE programs					20% increase	281*
*Percent increase was not possible to track, but 138 CTE students enrolled and 281 CTE students graduated.						

VIII. Sustainability

The RCP expected that grant funding would be required for a number of years before the program could reach a level of sustainability independent of DLT funding. The RCP expected to rely less on DLT funding after each successive year of funding. The RCP's online jobs bank was considered as one potential revenue source to meet program funding needs, but the RCP also recognized elements of its program that will continue without DLT funding. For instance, the RCP expected that once a workforce pipeline had been generated through the CTE schools that funding would no longer be needed and that the CTE schools would continue to promote without funding.

IX. Lessons Learned

The following lessons were learned by RCP in executing its training program:

- Many students who participate in CTE programs intend to go to college or pursue other jobs outside of the curriculum presented in CTE schools. It may be worthwhile to make sure to target those who are truly interested in a construction career.

X. Best Practices

The following best practice was utilized by the RCP:

- Utilize the prior experiences of partnership leadership to provide insight into industry norms and needs as well as connections with industry partners.

XI. Recommendations

Based on the successes and challenges of the RCP, the following recommendations are suggested:

- Embed a module in the CTE schools about workplace etiquette and soft skills that utilizes testimonials from members of the industry.
- Incorporate training about appropriate workplace cell phone use into the soft skills training curriculum.
- Arrange access to public transportation, carpools, or other transportation assistance to students who do not have access to transportation.
- Conduct conversations about workplace expectations between trainees and hiring employers to ensure newly hired employees are satisfied in the industry and industry employers are satisfied with their employees.