

THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF RHODE ISLAND

# REAL JOBS RHODE ISLAND CASE STUDY:

## Rhode Island Urban Apprenticeship Program

Prepared for:

### Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training

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# **Rhode Island Urban Apprenticeship Program**

## **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 Urban Apprenticeship Program (RIUAP) was formed by Local 51 Plumbers and Pipefitters and the Mayforth Group to address the longstanding underrepresentation of women and minorities in the plumbing and pipefitting industry and to develop a long-term solution - an apprenticeship pipeline - to respond to the anticipated need for fresh talent in the industry to replace the currently aging and retiring workforce. The plumbing and pipefitting industry had for many years relied on the families of current workers as a pipeline for talent, but that recruitment strategy was no longer addressing the industry's skills needs nor was it addressing the longstanding underrepresentation of women and minorities employed by the industry. RIUAP, therefore, targeted limited income and under- or unemployed workers for a good paying industry where the mean annual wage is \$53,920. The Rhode Island DLT has identified plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters as a set of high demand jobs and the United States Department of Labor has projected the industry to grow 21 percent from 2012 to 2022. Despite the anticipated growth of the industry, studies have shown that skills gaps remain and a critical need exists for talented minorities with both technical and professional skills.

### **II. Grant History**

Local 51 Plumbers and Pipefitters is a Rhode Island trade union that offers apprenticeship programs in plumbing, pipefitting, and refrigeration. It is also an organization that tends to avoid workforce training programs because of restrictions that are typically tied to public grant funding. With very few restrictions in place as a condition of receiving state funding, the RJRI program became an attractive funding source for it. While Local 51 does not have a history of partnering with the State of Rhode Island, the convenor, the Mayforth Group, has extensive experience coordinating workforce development programs with Governor's Workforce Board grants. RIUAP represents the first time that Local 51 has reached out to urban communities to

place candidates in a pre-apprenticeship program.

### **III. Goals and Objectives**

The overall objective of RIUAP was to produce a talent pipeline to meet the immediate employment requirements in the professional trades by preparing talent for an already existing five-year paid apprenticeship program. To do that, RIUAP planned to connect people of color and under- or unemployed individuals in urban cities with high skill, high demand, and high wage jobs in the plumbing, pipefitter, and steamfitter trades where the current workforce is aging and retiring at a rapid pace. RIUAP did this through a pre-apprenticeship program which was designed to prepare training participants for placement in the career pathway of an apprenticeship. Specifically, the partnership set out to:

1. Recruit 210 participants and place 10 to 15 of those participants into a pre-apprenticeship program.

### **IV. Partnerships**

In 2013, the Rhode Island Black Business Association sponsored a summit on urban and community economic development that focused on connecting urban youth to workforce training programs. After this summit was held, New Commons, Mayforth Group, and Urban Ventures formed RIUAP and began identifying ways to fill skills gaps in jobs that require more than a high school diploma but less than a bachelor's degree. RIUAP applied for grant funding because it knew that doing so would allow it to reach out to communities that are underrepresented in the trades. To RIUAP partners, it simply made sense to build a partnership among urban communities and the unions, and with the economy improving, the need for an urban-based workforce development strategy was becoming even more evident. Some partners knew about funding opportunities because of participation in past programs and having held positions on the Governor's Workforce Board.

**Table 1: Partnership Members and Responsibilities**

Local 51 Plumbers and Pipefitters	Lead Applicant: Responsible for providing training at its 20,400 square foot training facility and directing a pipeline of apprentices to private industry trade partners; acting as fiscal agent; program management; delivering status reports; establishing target industry participation.
Mayforth Group	Convenor and project manager responsible for overseeing team coordination, program design process, and program implementation.
New Commons	Responsible for working directly with community partners and Local 51 to design and implement a case management system to provide support services to participants during training.
Progreso Latino	Responsible for providing support services to participants during pre-apprenticeship phase; targeting community engagement and outreach; recruitment; pre-screening and assessment.
Urban Ventures	Responsible for providing support services to participants during pre-apprenticeship phase; targeting community engagement and outreach; recruitment; pre-screening and assessment.

## **V. Implementation Activities and Processes**

Meetings of community stakeholder organizations were convened to brief them about the initiative and develop a recruitment pool. The Mayforth Group then executed a recruitment plan where an orientation meeting was held with the first group of recruits. Upon implementation of the recruitment plan, support services, including Adult Basic Education and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) were delivered by Progreso Latino to program participants. Potential applicants were also offered math instruction, soft skill instruction, and industry exposure before beginning the application process.

Prior to being placed in the pre-apprenticeship program, participants needed to successfully pass a math test at the sixth-grade level. Applicants successfully passing the test participated in an interview that determined if they were prepared for the pre-apprenticeship program. After successfully completing the interview process, participants were trained in the six week pre-apprenticeship program by Local 51. Those finishing the program were then placed into five year paid apprenticeships with partner organizations.

The pre-apprenticeship training curriculum was designed to give training participants hands-on experience learning a skill set leading to a career pathway. The 110 hour (2.5 week) training curriculum involved a discussion of the extensive history of the pipe trades and how apprenticeships are used to provide training participants with the skills necessary to have a career in the trade. The initial segment, called Your Heritage and Future in the Pipe Trade, took place over eight hours and focused on history and background of the pipe trades, the purpose and function of union trades, benefits of membership to a union trade, and the benefits of an apprenticeship as a means of starting a successful career pathway. The next segment provided training in current safe work practices while using industry tools, tool selection, use, maintenance, and care. The training primarily focused on the use of hand tools, electrically powered tools, pneumatic power tools, and power actuated tools. Instruction for the segment was provided through classroom work, manufacturer demonstrations, and hands-on shop work. Participants then received OSHA 10 training, which focused on recognizing and preventing trade-specific safety hazards. The fourth training segment provided a review of basic mathematical concepts, instruction in taking measurements with industry tools, and in industry-specific math skills. Finally, the final segment of training covered the science of psychology and how to recognize and handle psychological issues that arise in the workplace. This portion of the program focused on topics such as job training, self-esteem, development of interpersonal skills, communication, teamwork, conflict resolution, ethics, diversity training, and stress management.

## **VI. Achievements**

### Partnerships

#### *Working with experienced partners*

Having a partner like Mayforth Group with extensive experience working with diverse communities was helpful because it had developed trust with people of color. Further, the Mayforth Group had extensive experience with grants and training programs. Finally, the

organization had a pre-existing plan to develop career training and exposure in urban areas, and this vision made it easier to collaborate and support the goals of the union's training program.

## Recruitment

### *Interest among target recruitment populations*

Another success identified was the number of women and people of color showing interest in the trades sector. A diverse group of people were given exposure to opportunities with the union and that was made possible due to the relationships RIUAP had with Progreso Latino and Urban Ventures.

### *Significant turnout at recruitment events*

RIUAP hosted two orientation sessions to raise awareness and recruits for its training program, and several hundred people attended the sessions. At these sessions, RIUAP dispelled concerns and confusion about the training program and the government's role in the training program. As a result of these sessions, RIUAP fulfilled its initial recruitment goals.

## Trainee Barriers

### *Achieving stated goals*

RIUAP designed this training program to encourage potential workers to overcome skill, experience, education, awareness, and training barriers to be active members of the plumbing and pipefitting industry. RIUAP members consider these goals to have been successfully fulfilled.

### *Transportation and daycare*

Some program participants struggled to arrange the daycare and transportation necessary for their participation in the training program. RIUAP addressed this problem with the help of Progreso Latino, which has extensive experience addressing similar issues and was able to arrange daycare and transportation services or reimbursement for those services for participants. Because of this connection, a substantial number of participants and prospective participants received transportation and daycare services from Progreso Latino. For some participants, Progreso Latino was also able to offer skills training and industry exposure that was aimed at improving the job prospects of prospective RIUAP trainees.

### *English as a second language and English for speakers of other languages*

Many of those interested in the training program, and some of the program participants, did not speak English as their first language. Others were in the process of learning English. RIUAP overcame this challenge by collaborating with Progreso Latino, which offered English classes for interested participants and encouraged class participants with the skills necessary to communicate in the workplace to apply for RIUAP's training programs.

## Training

### *Helping participants gain certifications and qualifications to improve their careers*

RIUAP felt that its program was very successful in helping participants improve their hireability into a career in the trades. A specific example was given of a refrigeration apprentice who worked two jobs to support his family both in the US and in Africa. He had skills and experience working on refrigeration in Africa and found work in the same field after arriving here. Yet, his skills were being underutilized because he did not have the necessary certifications to perform maintenance on equipment. RIUAP believes his participation in the training program will help him gain the industry legitimization he needs to advance his career.

### *Fulfilling initial recruitment goals*

Due to RIUAP's recruitment efforts and orientation sessions, there was substantial interest in its training program and the partnership experienced high recruitment numbers for the early phases of the application process. Of the 273 people officially inquiring about the program, 243 people used the initial support services offered by the partnership, 219 completed the application process, and 210 completed the math exam. However, out of these interested recruits, RIUAP only recruited thirteen participants into the Pre-Apprenticeship training. This low recruitment was intentional, however, as it prevented the industry from being oversaturated with unneeded workers.

## Transition from Training to Employment

### *Program graduate placement*

Despite the fact that program graduates were union trained, RIUAP succeeded in convincing its partner organizations to hire its trainees. This was due to RIUAP only including union contractors in its partnership because union contractors are obligated to hire union members.

## Other

### *Positive feedback from program graduates*

RIUAP received positive feedback on its programs from program graduates. Graduates indicated that they were very happy with the training, training outcomes, the training instructor, and the support they received from RIUAP while in the program. RIUAP also succeeded in reaching out to a large number of graduates from the pre-apprenticeship program to learn about ways to improve the program. This commitment to following-up with program participants helped RIUAP gain information on how to improve its services for future participants.

**Table 2: Performance Metrics for All Training Programs**

<b>IG-04 Rhode Island Urban Apprenticeship Program (Local 51)</b>	<b>Start Date of First Cohort</b>	<b>Proposed End Date for All Cohorts</b>	<b>Target Enrollment</b>	<b>Enrolled</b>	<b>Target Completed</b>	<b>Completed</b>
<b>Recruitment, Training, and Employment</b>						
Pre-Apprenticeship Training - 2016 (Job Seekers)	4/18/16	6/3/16	10	13	10	12
Total Participants placed in training related employment					10	7
<b>Other Objectives</b>						
Total Participants who received and completed supportive services through Progreso Latino					30+	27*
Interviews with participants who completed the Pre-Apprenticeship program to ask about the process. What worked? What didn't work?					5	12
*Plus math boot camp for those needing help and organized a group of 7 workers for a trip to NEIT and their advanced manufacturing program.						



## **VII. Challenges**

### Partnerships

The RIUAP did not discuss any challenges with partnerships.

### Recruitment

#### *Overcoming issues of trust within communities of color*

RIUAP was challenged to convince communities of color to have trust in the workforce development program. Many participants of color are unsure about government-sponsored programs and some did not understand the concept of an apprenticeship, which caused depressed recruitment among this population. However, the partnership's overall recruitment was intentionally low to avoid saturating the industry with unneeded workers.

### Trainee Barriers

#### *Lack of advancement due to English speaking skills, math skills, and soft skills*

A number of program recruits were non-native English speakers and as such lacked the proficiency in writing and speaking English needed for industry jobs. These individuals did not advance because of their lack of English proficiency and, as a result, the partnership plans to offer a ramped up ESL program before the math test and interview process to help future applicants.

### Training

#### *Unexpected skills gaps*

RIUAP learned that many of the pre-apprenticeship participants do not have experience managing personal finances and so the partnership built in a personal finance literacy training program as part of the pre-apprenticeship training.

#### *More investment in soft skills and other skill gaps*

RIUAP found the application process challenging due to having to turn away a number of otherwise qualified candidates who performed poorly during the interviews. The partnership was confident that several more participants would have been accepted if there had been more resources to improve soft skills.

### Transition from Training to Employment

#### *Gap between end of pre-apprenticeship training and start of apprenticeships*

Many graduates of the pre-apprenticeship training wanted to enter into industry apprenticeships after completing training, but faced a gap of two months between the end of pre-apprenticeship training and the start of apprenticeships. This created an awkward gap in employment for these program participants.

### Other

### *Developing unified goals*

The partners found that forming a partnership for the first time with groups that have no history of working together brings new challenges because each partner comes to the partnership with different mindsets. For instance, the partnership learned that there is a misconception about apprenticeships being a short-term “job” when it is really a long-term career choice. RIUAP overcame this challenge by having journeymen plumbers attend orientation and pre-apprenticeship training meetings to stress the apprenticeship program as a career.

### *Communicating the scope of training*

Another challenge RIUAP faced was communicating to participants that they were embarking on a career and not a short-term job. One way the RIUAP was able to overcome this challenge was to bring in journeymen and apprentices to stress that this a long-term career and not just a job.

## **VIII. Sustainability**

RIUAP expects the program to be sustainable if it can extend it to incorporate a training component for welders. The training facility has unused capacity to deliver welding training, but it would require establishing a relationship with an employer needing welders. RIUAP plans to work with Skills RI to develop this training. As a training partner, Skills RI will fund the training and work with program graduates to place them in training-related employment. Adding this training will help keep the program relevant to the industry.

## **IX. Lessons Learned**

The following lesson was learned by RIUAP in executing its training program:

- Non-native speakers recruited into the training program often did not possess the level of proficiency in writing and speaking English needed for industry jobs.

## **X. Best Practices**

These best practices were utilized by RIUAP:

- Offer support services such as math and English proficiency for participants recruited from underserved populations.
- Have an experienced grant coordinator act as partnership convenor.
- Work with an experienced community-based organization with the ability to assist underserved populations to address transportation and childcare issues.

## **XI. Recommendations**

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

- Offer program recruitment and orientation meetings in multiple locations around the state to bring awareness of training programs to different populations and make it easier for people to attend meetings.

- Offer a stipend or other paid training opportunities to pre-apprentices enrolled in the program.
- Provide additional services in English proficiency, math training, and soft skill training for program participants.