

THE
UNIVERSITY
OF RHODE ISLAND

REAL JOBS RHODE ISLAND CASE STUDY:

Aquaculture Training Partnership

Prepared for:

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Aquaculture Training 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 Aquaculture Training Partnership (ATP) was created to train new workers to acquire the skills necessary to be successful employees in the aquaculture industry. The ATP was formed by The Education Exchange, and included numerous aquaculture industry partners, including the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association, Cedar Island Oysters, Behan Family Farms, East Beach Farms LLC, Matunuck Oyster Farm, Ocean State Shellfish Cooperative, American Mussels, Walrus & Carpenter, American Mussel Harvesters, Salt Pond Oysters, Jamestown Oyster Co., and Watch Hill Oysters. The ATP also included Roger Williams University, Chariho High School, the Coastal Institute at URI, Literacy Volunteers of Washington County, the Welcome House of South County, the Jonnycake Center of Peace Dale, the Jonnycake Center of Westerly, Families Learning Together Through Literacy of Westerly Public Schools, and the Town of South Kingstown. Specifically, the ATP was formed for the following reasons:

- The aquaculture industry had grown at a rapid pace and experienced 30 percent annual growth over a fifteen year period, adding new farms and jobs in Rhode Island. Yet, a lack of qualified and skilled candidates existed to fill the new positions that were created by the industry's expansion.
- The aquaculture industry demands high sanitation standards and strict adherence to health codes because of the raw seafood that is consumed at establishments related to the industry. A single mistake or oversight can potentially cause severe economic consequences for Rhode Island's entire aquaculture industry. Therefore, the ATP expected that training of new employees in food safety and industry best practices would minimize the possibility of accidents occurring in a quickly expanding industry.
- The aquaculture industry suffered from high rates of employee turnover. Many employees left old positions to form their own companies after the industry expanded and had grown more profitable.

II. Grant History

The Education Exchange is a 501(c)(3) adult education and training nonprofit in Washington County, Rhode Island. Founded in 1978 and incorporated as a nonprofit in 2003, The Education Exchange offers programs and training in GED preparation, English for non-native speakers, citizenship classes, digital and financial literacy, job readiness, essential skills, and industry certifications. It also receives funding from the Rhode Island Department of Education, as well as grants and donations from a variety of other sources.

In 2015, the members of The Education Exchange identified the aquaculture industry as one that promised opportunities due to the industry's continued economic expansion. The Education Exchange approached Dr. Bob Rheault, a leader and pioneer in the Rhode Island aquaculture industry and the founder of the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association, to form a training partnership that filled skills gaps in areas demanded by industry partners. With his guidance and direct assistance, The Education Exchange identified 12 potential partners and eventually selected eight original partners to form the ATP. The ATP began small, but it grew in size and scope as industry members grew more comfortable with the lead applicant and one another.

The Education Exchange designed training programs by using Real Jobs RI Planning Grant funds to host meetings with industry leaders that were announced via email and phone. The meetings were held after work hours and those participating received dinner and a stipend for their participation. It was at these meetings that companies gave The Education Exchange insights about industry skills gap shortages that were later incorporated in a survey that was used to identify statewide industry needs. The Education Exchange then used the results of the survey to articulate training goals and to develop training in support of meeting those goals.

After deciding on the focus of the training programs, the fledgling partnership formed three committees: an Educational and Advisory Committee, a Recruitment and Outreach Committee, and an additional Advisory Committee specifically focusing on career pathways. The Educational and Advisory Committee was responsible for identifying education strategies and designing a curriculum to meet the skills gaps that were identified by employers through the industry survey. The Recruitment and Outreach Committee recruited participants and industry partners, while also identifying potential employment barriers of participants and ways to overcome them. Finally, in addition to the Advisory Committee's focus on the industry's entry-level career pathways, its tasks included avoiding the ATP's duplication of services with Rhode Island's federal Sea Grant program, which offered training for potential business owners and farmers in the aquaculture industry.

III. Goals and Objectives

The ATP's goal was to design a training program that filled industry skills gaps and provided career pathways to new entry-level workers who are trained to understand the industry's challenges and are effective from day one. To achieve this objective, the ATP established the following specific goals:

1. Identify and address critical skills gaps and strategies for success within the industry workforce.
2. Collaborate with institutions of higher education to avoid any duplication of services while assisting participants in career growth and mobility.
3. Train new or underskilled workers while providing opportunities for additional training and wage increases for incumbent workers.

IV. Partnerships

The Education Exchange was the Lead Applicant for the ATP. While a variety of partners became involved in the partnership, some were more involved than others, especially East Beach Farms, Cedar Island Oysters, the Ocean State Shellfish Cooperative, and Behan Family Farms. These core partners were involved from the beginning of the planning phase throughout the grant's implementation, helped recruit other companies into the ATP, helped hold on-site demos, consistently hired program graduates, and offered overall assistance and support to the ATP.

Table 1: Partnership Members and Responsibilities

<p>The Education Exchange</p>	<p>Lead Applicant: Implementation Grant fiscal agent; responsible for overseeing and providing all training; providing transportation to training and job placement; providing work gear; serving on the Executive Committee; consulting the Educational Advisory Committee; liaison to industry partners; screening and selecting participants; assisting with job placement; and providing program oversight and management.</p>
<p>East Coast Shellfish Growers Association</p>	<p>Partnership Convener: Responsible for teaching selected training modules; evaluating participant performance; serving on the Executive Committee; consulting the Educational Advisory Committee; acting as liaison to industry partners; screening and selecting participants; assisting with job placement; and providing program oversight and management.</p>
<p>Cedar Island Oysters, Behan Family Farms, East Beach Farms, LLC, Matunuck Oyster Farm, Ocean State Shellfish Cooperative, American Mussels, Walrus & Carpenter, American Mussel Harvesters, Salt Pond Oysters, Jamestown Oyster Co., and Watch Hill Oysters</p>	<p>Potential employers that supervised interns: responsible for training and supervising at least two on-site program participants and evaluating their performance; interviewing participants to fill vacancies; and hiring qualifying participants; agreeing to send a collective representative to the ATP Executive Committee.</p>
<p>Roger Williams University</p>	<p>Education consultant and advisor.</p>
<p>Michael Jarret</p>	<p>Educational consultant and liaison to Chariho Public Schools for classroom space: responsible for referring potential participants.</p>
<p>Coastal Institute</p>	<p>Educational consultant, educational adviser, and member of the Educational and Advisory Committee.</p>
<p>Literacy Volunteers of Washington County</p>	<p>Responsible for providing volunteer tutors; educational consultant; educational advisor;</p>

	recruiting and screening participants.
The Town of South Kingstown	Consultant, advisor, and in-kind donor: responsible for helping introduce potential interested stakeholders and community partners to the partnership; assisting with recruitment; assisting with coordination of meeting space; providing mapping resources and other town documents related to local coastal ponds to help facilitate development.
Jonnycake Center of Peace Dale	Responsible for assisting with recruitment, initial screening, and referral of potential participants; providing discount work clothing and interview attire to participants, if needed.
Jonnycake Center of Westerly	Responsible for assisting with recruitment, initial screening, and referral of potential participants; offering to provide classroom space, if needed.
Families Learning Together Through Literacy of Westerly Public Schools	Responsible for assisting with recruitment, initial screening, and referral of potential participants; offering to provide classroom space, if needed.
Welcome House of South County	Responsible for assisting with recruitment, initial screening, and referral of potential participants.

V. Implementation Activities and Processes

Program implementation began with a rigorous recruitment strategy. The ATP engaged The Welcome House, The Education Exchange, The Jonnycake Center of Peacedale, and Literacy Volunteers of Washington County to recruit for the program, while also encouraging the other partners and consultants to recommend the participation of current employees. Target populations included the under- or unemployed, and those with experience working outdoors, with a special focus on fishermen, farmers, contractors, veterans, Narragansett Indians, and recent high school graduates in Washington County.

The application process for recruits included two interviews, a physical test, and an extensive medical history questionnaire. The East Coast Shellfish Growers Association and The Education Exchange conducted the initial application process and were assisted by the ATP's student services coordinator, industry partners, and adult education and social service providers. The screening process sought to identify disqualifying criteria, while qualified candidates were able to swim, were physically fit, had no serious medical history preventing physical labor, and had no recent serious criminal record (shellfish theft is an industry-wide problem). The partnership assessed physical fitness in the first round of training by asking if the applicant was able to lift up to 50 pounds, and then verified the participant's physical ability in person by requiring the applicant to lift and carry a 50 pound bucket. This was done to ensure that applicants could meet at least a minimum physical standard. Applicants completed Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) tests to assess their reading and math levels. The Education Exchange, Literacy Volunteers of Washington County, and Families Learning Together through Literacy used the test results to provide additional support on the basis of educational levels, educational goals, and career goals of selected participants. These groups also worked with selected participants who did not have a high school diploma or a college degree to provide them the services and assistance necessary to start a GED or college program.

Once participants were selected for the training program, they were given access to the Education Exchange's Student Services Center, which gave students support in applying for state subsidized daycare and food assistance programs. It also supplied information to identify transportation options, food pantry locations, and other community services. Eligible participants earned a daily stipend equal to the minimum wage (\$9.60 per hour) that was contingent upon attendance and participation at training sessions.

The training program was planned to provide participants with the basic skills and certifications needed to find employment in the aquaculture industry. Classroom training was held at the Education Exchange's offices in Peacedale, RI, and despite offers of classroom space from partners, never expanded beyond that area. Hands-on training, however, occurred on-site with industry employers. The following is a description of each training module provided.

Table 2. Training Module Overview

Name of Module	Training Provided	Duration
Essential Skills	Instruction in teamwork and collaboration, enthusiasm and positive attitude, communicating effectively, problem solving, conveying professionalism, and career planning. As the first module, this portion of the training was an additional screening tool that identified participants unfit to continue specialized training.	20 hours
Boating and Safety Skills	Gave participants instruction in basic boating safety, rules, etiquette, and navigation. Specific skills covered included vessel approach in windy conditions, basic knots, how to safely tie up vessels to other boats and docks, setting anchors, and safely maintaining equipment. Participants completed the RI Boating Safety Practice Test as part of this module, and were encouraged but not required to take the RI Boating Safety Test at the end of training. Passage of the practice test was not required to complete the module.	10 hours
Boating Tools and Maintenance	Gave participants instruction in how to operate basic tools involved in shellfish cage and bag manufacture and repair; the operation of wire cutters, wire benders, hog-ring tools, and pneumatic hand tools; operation and troubleshooting of outboard motors; and safe operation and maintenance of common machinery used in the aquaculture industry.	10 hours
Basic Shellfish Biology and Farming Technique	Gave participants instruction in shellfish feeding, reproduction, and growth; methods and steps used to culture shellfish; potential health hazards associated with shellfish harvest and consumption; regulations in shellfish harvest and delivery; Department of Environmental Management (DEM) tagging and record keeping requirements; and the ramifications of failing to uphold regulatory standards. This training also fulfilled the standards of training required by the DEM for all licensed shellfish harvesters.	6 hours
Basic Shellfish	Gave participants instruction in the basics of grading,	5 hours

Dealer and Shipper Skills	sorting, culling, and packing oysters; Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) risk management; FDA Standard Sanitation Operation Plan (SSOP) instruction; and record keeping and regulatory requirements of shellfish dealers.	
ServSafe Kitchen Manager Certification & Food Handler/Shucking	Gave participants instruction in food safety; classic shellfish and oyster preparations; how to clean and sanitize effectively; and how to safely and quickly shuck oysters and clams. Participants completing the module received a ServSafe Kitchen Manager certification.	24 hours
Optional: ServSafe Alcohol Certification & Shellfish Wine Pairing	Gave participants instruction in alcohol service laws; how to accurately describe characteristics of oysters and shellfish to restaurant customers; how to identify and describe the grape and region of common wines; how to pair oysters and shellfish with common wines; and how to describe these pairings to restaurant customers. Module completion resulted in participants receiving a ServSafe Alcohol certification.	5 hours
On-Site Training	After completion of all other modules, participants interviewed for job placement, were assigned a training partner, and spent two days at three different aquaculture farms with different methods of farming. Participants spent one day with a shellfish dealer, and one day in a restaurant where participants were exposed to all aspects of the aquaculture industry.	65 hours

The training program took place on a full time work schedule over four weeks and each participant's success was measured by his or her completion of rubrics at the end of every module. Successful participants were given assistance in submitting applications and resumes to industry employers in the focus area of the participant's choice.

Achievements

Partnerships

A strong partnership

Although trust was not widespread during the formation of the partnership, the education providers carefully worked to gain the trust of industry leaders. Now the ATP's training programs have become well-respected and well-liked by its industry partners, which contributes to the overall success of the training program. The training program is also working well with employers. The ATP cited the enthusiasm of employers for the training program and the trainees, and the program has now become a way for employers to find employees when positions open. Particularly helpful to the industry is having a "place to call" when employees are needed rather than having to extensively recruit on their own for potentially untrained recruits. In the long term, this allows employers to invest more in their workforce and less on recruitment.

Recruitment

Partnering with nearby organizations

The ATP found that partnering with the Jonnycake Center and the Welcome House was an effective way to identify good candidates for participation in the program. Both were within walking distance of The Education Exchange which also helped ensure that participants found through these entities could also reach the training location. The ATP found that making flyers available in the Jonnycake Center and advertising in a free newsletter that was circulated to local residents were both instrumental in helping the partnership reach its recruitment goals.

Fulfilled recruitment goals

The ATP successfully recruited 30 participants into industry training, 25 of whom completed training and 10 of whom were placed in training-related employment upon completion of training. During the program's first run, most recruitment came from identified recruitment partners like the Jonnycake Center and the Welcome House. However, in subsequent rounds of training, the ATP expanded its recruitment efforts to include advertising on Facebook, in newspapers, and on Channel 10 News.

Trainee Barriers

The ATP did not discuss any achievements with overcoming trainee barriers.

Training

Improved and targeted screening processes

Initial screening of applicants for pre-existing health conditions, access to transportation, and physical ability did not receive the seriousness it deserved in the recruitment process. As a result, several participants encountered health and transportation issues that prevented them from fully completing training or participating in work during the trainings. Further, mental health issues, substance abuse issues, and the criminal records of some participants were revealed only after they had begun training. The ATP responded to this challenge by significantly expanding screening and adding a physical test to the application process. One particular success of the partnership was in being able to develop a screening process based on specific criteria of employers that were more specific than common practices. For example, criminal background checks are commonly utilized to screen employees but also exclude good employees based on minor or old criminal convictions. The criminal background checks employed in the training program, therefore, screened for specific crimes like theft, which is a longstanding problem in the aquaculture industry. This allowed the ATP to screen for crimes specific to industry concerns without excluding potential employees based on minor or inapplicable infractions. The ATP used this method primarily as a method to encourage self-reporting, however, and only ran background checks on a small number of participants.

Transition from Training to Employment

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

Table 3: Performance Metrics for All Training Programs

IG-17 Aquaculture Training Partnership (Education Exchange)	Start Date of First Cohort	Proposed End Date for All Cohorts	Target Enrollment	Enrolled	Target Completed	Completed
Recruitment, Training, and Employment						
Aquaculture Career Training - (2 cohorts) (Job Seekers)	4/4/16	9/9/16	32	30	24	25
ServSafe for Incumbent Workers	4/4/16	9/9/16	8-10**	1	TBD	1
Total New Participants placed in training- related employment					24	10
Total New Participants retained in training- related employment					10	12
Other Objectives						
Total New Participants that are prepared for the DEM Boating license					32	4*
Total New Participants that earn ServSafe Kitchen Manager certification					32	25
Total New Participants that earn ServSafe Alcohol certification					24	23
Total Incumbent Workers promoted due to training					TBD	1
Total Incumbent and New Workers receiving an increased wage due to training					TBD	Unknown
*The DEM boating license was dropped from the program, and one is not needed if born before 1985.						
**Number of spots available. This measure was only necessary if the employer partners choose to use the available seats.						

VI. Challenges

Partnerships

Hesitant partners

Members of the industry initially hesitated to participate as partners and to help design a training program because they thought doing so would open their operations to competitors and, therefore, expose their trade secrets. Additionally, some employers in the past had experienced training workers who left to start their own businesses; if this happened due to a sector training, it could increase competition in the sector for a limited set of goals. The ATP responded to this initial reluctance by offering dinner and a stipend of roughly \$200 for industry participation in the planning process, while also promising that no individual trade secrets would enter the training modules.

Recruitment

Accessing target populations for recruitment

The partnership was specifically interested in reaching both un- and underemployed workers (which it successfully reached through its partners), but also reaching displaced fisherman, contractors, farmers, and, specifically, veterans. The ATP was unable to reach these specific populations through its recruitment efforts and its partner organizations, although the failure to do so did not affect its overall effort to reach its numerical recruitment goals. One challenge in regard to veterans specifically was that the ATP was not executing a training program that was approved by the VA, and so any veterans enrolling in the program would not have access to the same VA benefits they would otherwise be able to access in VA-approved training. The ATP is nevertheless confident that the outdoors training that is provided through its program will be a particularly good opportunity for veterans struggling with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Thus, ATP is working with Apprenticeship RI to be listed as a recognized trainer with the VA, and the partnership remains committed to recruiting the target populations originally identified for recruitment.

Trainee Barriers

Lack of appropriate gear

The ATP found that training providers and on-site employers lacked essential water gear for participants during the on-site training component, which was discovered after planning and budgeting had occurred. This oversight forced the ATP to purchase gear at a cost to itself since it had not originally budgeted for outdoor gear. Given that the gear was necessary to complete training, the ATP's purchase of the gear allowed the partnership to complete the training program.

Issues with transportation

The ATP accepted applicants without reliable transportation into the training program assuming that they would find transportation into work, use the money earned through the

training program to purchase transportation, or would utilize a van the ATP planned to lease to provide transportation to training sessions and internship responsibilities. However, the DLT was not able to fund the lease of a van due to state and federal funding regulations. Further, due to limited public transportation routes that serve Southern Rhode Island, not all participants had access to public transportation. To overcome these challenges, the ATP paired trainees without access to transportation with trainees that had transportation access to increase the ability of trainees to complete the program. The ATP later submitted a separate pitch that allowed them to be reimbursed by the DLT for gas mileage used in transporting trainees.

Training

Training timing

During the first round of training, shellfish farmers announced to the ATP that they would be hiring employees at some time around Labor Day. To align with the industry's hiring plans, the ATP planned to complete the first round of training to coincide with Labor Day. When the training finished, however, it became apparent that the companies no longer planned to hire additional workers after having completed their hiring earlier that spring. This led to fewer employment opportunities for participants who completed their training that fall and caused the ATP to revisit the training program's timeline so that it could be completed in time for spring hiring.

Assault during on-site training

One training participant was assaulted by the owner of an aquaculture business. This caused the ATP to end its relationship with that employer.

Education of trainees

The ServSafe Kitchen certification program requires seventh grade reading and eighth grade math. This was an unforeseen challenge in reaching the ATP's target population. The ATP had not accounted for the additional expense of providing participants with the educational support needed to complete the certification, but it responded to this challenge by incorporating additional education support into the training budget for future programs with the DLT.

Lack of certificate attainment

No participants took part in ServSafe Alcohol Training or received a certificate, and only one incumbent worker received the training and certification for the ServSafe Kitchen Manager program. These results were far below what the partnership expected for these programs, especially since the ATP believed these certifications would enable participants to compete for restaurant jobs if they were unable to find employment in the aquaculture industry.

VII. Sustainability

The ATP expects to sustain the program through its plans to lease a training farm on

Point Judith salt water pond where training programs will continue and oysters will be harvested and sold to the Ocean State Shellfish Cooperative. Profits will then be earmarked for future training programs. Under this plan, the ATP expects to operate independently from the DLT in five years. As this independent effort continues, the ATP also envisions expanding its services and training to aquaculture businesses in Northern Rhode Island.

The ATP is also hopeful about the future of its training programs as a result of positive feedback it has received nationally. Its partnership is the first of its kind in Rhode Island and in the United States. The ATP received positive feedback from members of the national industry during a trip to Washington D.C, and has interpreted the positive attention as evidence that the program is serving a real need in the aquaculture industry. Other states have expressed interest in adopting the ATP's model. This reaction gives the partnership hope that its model will be supported both in Rhode Island and nationally in the future.

Finally, the ATP is confident in the program's sustainability due to its relationship with the Coastal Institute. The ATP also worked with the Coastal Institute and the Rhode Island Sea Grant to modify Roger Williams University's aquaculture curriculum. The ATP's current training programs focus on participants who want to be employed in aquaculture companies, while the newly modified training focuses on entrepreneurs desiring to launch aquaculture companies. The ATP wants to unite both curricula and connect graduates of both training programs, which will strengthen the aquaculture industry on the whole.

VIII. Lessons Learned

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

- Work with industry employers to ensure that training is aligned with industry hiring timelines.
- Budget for gear and materials for participants.

IX. Best Practices

These best practices were utilized by the ATP:

- Purchase accident insurance for participants as part of the training to minimize the risk to industry employers of hosting training participants for on-site training.
- Identify and work with well-known industry leaders to bring industry partners together and unite the partnership.
- Conduct an extensive pre-training application process to reduce the pool of applicants to a group with a high likelihood of success in the aquaculture industry.
- Provide a stipend for program participants.

X. Recommendations

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

- Locate classroom trainings near public transportation drop-off locations, assign applicants with transportation issues to employers located closest to transportation points, or develop individualized plans to help trainees get to employer locations.
- Develop a method to accommodate transportation needs after completing training and gaining employment at least during a transitional period as the employee is able to save money for sustainable transportation.
- Form relationships with bait and tackle shops for fishermen and local farm organizations, particularly in areas with high under- or unemployment, to help outreach efforts to recreational fishermen, farmers, and others who have experience working outdoors.