

THE
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REAL JOBS RHODE ISLAND CASE STUDY:

The Real Jobs Pathway for Minorities and Women

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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 including that included industry, workforce intermediaries, and educational institutions to address the economic needs of the state.

I. Sector Need

The Real Jobs Pathway for Minorities and Women (Hire Path Program), implemented by the Opportunities Industrialization Center of Rhode Island (OIC), was designed to provide workforce readiness training for underserved populations. This program focused on providing workforce readiness training pathways for people of color and women to obtain employment in the marine trades, construction, and green industries sectors. This grant served individuals statewide, but targeted Wards 8, 9, 10 and 11 in Providence where there are the highest concentrations of minorities, and where unemployment rates range from 15.5 to 26.5% (compared to 12.9% for the city of Providence as a whole and 8.5% for the State of Rhode Island)¹.

To implement the Hire Path Program, the OIC partnered with the New England Institute, Providence Career & Technical Academy, Electric Boat, Thielsch Engineering Welding School, RISE Engineering, Ace Mattress, the Providence Foundation, and Amos House. Through RJRI planning grant activities, the industry partners identified multiple job openings within the next 24 months in the following occupational categories:

- Operatives: Couriers (\$22,880 annual salary), Installers (\$29,120 annual salary), Lighting technicians (\$31,200 annual salary), Residential energy efficiency technicians (\$31,200), and Warehouse staff (\$29,120 annual salary).
- Administrative support workers: Administrative assistants (\$30,160 annual salary).
- Technicians: Field technicians (\$27,040 annual salary).
- Craft workers: Electrical apprentices (\$29,120 annual salary).

Some of these businesses had state and federal contracts that required meeting goals related to employing more women and minorities; as a result, companies hoped to fill at least 20 percent of available positions with women and/or people from racial and ethnic minority groups.

¹ Unemployment statistics from the 2015 5-year American Community Survey, 2010 Census tracts. Age 16+ via Data Spark.

The broader goal of this grant went beyond attaining jobs for underserved populations. The OIC mission focuses on providing low-income people the tools and support needed to overcome socioeconomic inequality. Therefore, as part of this mission the Hire Path Program focused on creating systems change that generates “hiring pathways” for minorities and women in sectors that have been heavily dominated by a White workforce.

II. Grant History

OIC originated as a small task force developed in 1967 in response to the civil rights movement, and over the next 18 years, transformed into the primary community development center in Providence and the larger region of Rhode Island. The organization has served the Rhode Island community in responding to pressing urban needs and helping people of color gain skills in order to obtain jobs and be successful.

Until 1992 when it closed due to economic challenges, OIC received broad national and local funding support including the United Way, the Rhode Island Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, federal and state governments, and major Rhode Island corporations. For example, OIC received a grant through a Green Jobs Program from former Mayor of Providence David Cicilline, and this was viewed as a breakthrough program for OIC in determining the processes for referral, training, and job placement. OIC designed the Real Jobs Rhode Island training program based on the successes of the Green Jobs Program.

In 2009, a group of volunteers, driven by community need, began taking steps to reestablish OIC, and in July of 2010, OIC became operational due to persisting under- or unemployment in urban neighborhoods within the broader region and to contribute to the future of economic development in the state. The RJRI grant program was one of the only training programs that fit with its training program vision, so OIC saw it as a good opportunity for the organization. OIC received an RJRI planning grant that helped them gauge current job needs, and developed the Hire Path Program to respond to those needs.

III. Goals and Objectives

The Hire Path Program sought to create a unique employment training program that developed marketable, sought after skills in industries that have both available positions and that pay living wages. Since job training programs often result in low-skilled/ low-compensation positions that, while part of a career pathway, require substantially more training and on-the-job experience before employees reach sustainable wage levels, the Hire Path Program partnership aimed to provide skills that allowed for immediate employment in positions that provide wages high enough to sustain a family and that also have growth opportunities and a level of job security.

The Hire Path Program was therefore established with the following goal:

- Prepare and refer people of color and women to training programs in marine and energy-related trades that lead to long-term employment opportunities at living wages.

As part of this, the Hire Path Program worked to:

- Support the strategic workforce development planning underway that is related to the demographic trends in Rhode Island.
- Create a steady pipeline of candidates of color and women for training in marine and energy related trades.
- Provide a pathway to employment that offers a living wage to candidates of color and women.
- Broaden and strengthen employment opportunities for people of color and women to new industries and to higher wages.
- Provide work readiness services to ex-offenders and the long term unemployed for employment.

Specifically, the partnership sought to meet the following objective:

- Provide work readiness training (two cohorts annually) and refer 110 people to employer partner training.

IV. Partnerships

Through industry research and outreach, OIC identified the construction, energy, and marine trades as target areas for employment. The partnership brought together a variety of industry employers in the marine trades, construction, and green industries as well as other partners to help with referrals, worker readiness, and employment because the partners had the expertise necessary to meet the specific needs of the target population and ensure successful employment. The chart below details the partners and their specific responsibilities.

Table 1: Partnership Members and Responsibilities

<p>Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC)</p>	<p>Responsible for conducting intake interviews and assessments for identification of skills and employment interests; developing and providing workforce readiness training program; referring participants to appropriate further training opportunities; recruiting participants through its network of community contacts; assisting candidates in finding available internship and employment positions and if needed finding alternative worksites for those who completed internships.</p>
<p>Electric Boat, Thielsch Engineering/ RISE Engineering, Providence-Cranston Workforce Investment Board, ACE Mattress, Amos House</p>	<p>Responsible for participating in recruitment efforts to bring interested candidates into the program; collaborating to develop a pipeline of industry career-readiness education and training programs; sharing information about employer skills needs, hiring requirements, and other factors that would enable the workforce and education systems to effectively respond to employer needs; providing feedback to the program; identifying existing employment and internship opportunities; considering job ready applicants for vacant positions and long-term employment.</p>
<p>Providence Foundation</p>	<p>Responsible for informing members of the initiative; encouraging members to provide job placement opportunities.</p>
<p>Providence Technical & Career Academy</p>	<p>Responsible for referring parents and families to the training initiative.</p>
<p>RIPTA</p>	<p>Responsible for providing expertise regarding training content.</p>
<p>New England Institute of Technology (SAMI program)</p>	<p>Responsible for providing training to participants as necessary.</p>
<p>Workforce Solutions</p>	<p>Responsible for referring and assess clients to the training program; developing an individual employment plan for each referral.</p>

V. Implementation Activities and Processes

Goal # 1: Prepare and refer people of color and women to training programs in marine and energy related trades that lead to long-term employment opportunities that pay living wages.

Recruitment & Pre-Screening

The Hire Path Program implemented a communications plan that guided its outreach efforts. This included communication with the Providence Career Technical Academy (PCTA), community-based organizations, women's organizations, churches, community leadership, elected officials from the four targeted wards, and social media.

Once individuals were referred to or expressed interested in the RJRI program, all potential participants completed a two-page intake assessment to gather information about their skill levels and employment interests. Once they finished the assessments, the Hire Path Program scheduled an hour-long appointment at the OIC with each person for further assessment and an interview. As part of the assessment (four to five pages long), the Hire Path Program utilized the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) test (assessment of basic skills for those with lower education) and the Harrington O'Shea interest inventory (career interest assessment). During the interview, the OIC staff asked the applicants about their capabilities, hardships, and needs. This helped the program learn if the applicant needed additional referrals before taking the workforce readiness program, such as English as a second language. For example, applicants needed to be able to fully understand the training in English before taking part. The interview component also helped to learn if an applicant had special skills, as this helped the Hire Path Program in placing individuals with a particular training program; and helped in determining if an applicant required additional supports to take part in the training, such as bus passes or clothing. If an applicant was not qualified, had drug or mental health issues, or did not have an interest in one of the identified industries, the Hire Path Program redirected them to other human service organizations, such as the Providence Center, or other businesses seeking their skills and motivation.

Workforce Readiness Training

After the assessment, all applicants were provided with basic labor market information and career guidance. If they were interested in continuing to work with OIC after receiving those services, participants could take part in the workforce readiness training program. This was a two-week program that ran Monday-Friday from 9:00am-1:00pm. In this program, participants were coached, engaged, and empowered to become capable and competitive candidates for employment. This training also provided participants opportunities to complete mock interviews with human resources from Rhode Island companies, develop a job search plan, and learn

financial aspects of being employed. During the training, participants worked on resumes and cover letters and gained workplace knowledge.

The workforce readiness training enabled the Hire Path Program to not only see trainees in action in class, but also to assess if participants were punctual, were comfortable interacting with others, and if they were listening. This allowed OIC to determine if each individual was “workforce ready.” By the time individuals finished the workforce readiness training, the OIC staff wanted to be confident that each individual was ready to be referred to one of its industry partners.

The following chart displays the topics covered during the training period.

Table 2. Training Module Overview

Training Activities
Development of a job search plan, identification of resources, facilitation of mock interviews, development of employment portfolio, understanding the RI workforce, and financial aspects of being employed
Topics Covered
Pitching yourself; developing your network; working cooperatively; using effective collaboration skills; accepting criticism; benefits of diversity; learning to listen; effective communication; handling constructive feedback; social media communication; electronic etiquette; the value of punctuality and reliability; work ethic; setting priorities; responding to/caring for customers; avoiding demotivation; creating a personal action plan; creativity self-assessment/improving creativity; identifying fallacies/questioning beliefs; fact vs. opinion; inductive and deductive reasoning; cultivating creativity and innovation; problem-solving; resolving/dealing with conflict; understanding the Rhode Island workforce; leadership style

Job Training, Internships, & Job Placement

Once individuals completed the workforce readiness training and received the “OIC stamp of approval,” OIC then worked with interested program graduates to place them in a training program within a sector of interest to the individual that made sense based on their skills and aptitudes, including welding, manufacturing, advanced manufacturing, construction, financial services, healthcare, or information technology (e.g., NEIT (SAMI), Thielsch Welding School, on-the-job training at RISE Engineering, Providence Career and Technical Academy). These existing trainings consisted of instructional curriculum and hands-on experience in the marine trades and energy trades. Candidates who took part in the Thielsch Welding School training, a program administered by the Providence-Cranston Workforce Investment Board, received stipends of \$70 per week for six weeks. Thielsch trainees also received support from OIC to encourage their completion of the program.

Candidates who successfully completed training advanced to complete industry-based internships at either industry/training partners or another appropriate job. Following successful internships, candidates were eligible for available employment at the industry partners or to be assisted by the Hire Path Program in finding alternative work sites based on their individual needs.

VI. Achievements

Partnerships

Identification of New Partners

In implementing the RJRI grant, OIC continued to identify new employer partners, such as Johnson & Johnson, from within Rhode Island, which helped improve its list of potential placements for individuals who complete their workforce readiness training programs. OIC staff increasingly became involved in job growth initiatives targeted towards hiring more minorities in Rhode Island. This was seen as a strength regarding the sustainability of this program.

Recruitment

Successful Recruitment Practices

The recruitment efforts used by the Hire Path Program were successful in identifying participants. Its members purposefully did not take part in more recruitment efforts because it did not have the capacity to include more potential trainees. The pre-screening and assessment process, particularly the interview portion, was beneficial for identifying individuals’ level of workforce readiness, needed supports, and appropriate training program referrals.

Trainee Barriers

Ability to Address Individual Personal Challenges

Being able to provide services and supports as needed to individuals was critical to the success of training participants. The personal and family challenges among each training participant were many, and varied greatly across participants. The Hire Path Program’s ability to

tailor programming and identify resources from community partners to meet individual needs was critical to providing this training program. For example, with one applicant during the interview, Hire Path Program staff learned he had a Civil Engineering degree from Haiti, so they knew he could benefit from a more advanced training program so that companies could utilize his skills. In other cases, OIC worked with the Clothing Collaborative to find suits, coats and other professional clothing as needed.

Training

Focus on Quality over Quantity

The OIC staff was confident its workforce readiness training helped adequately prepare individuals for employment, and candidates stated how helpful training tasks were to program staff following employment. The OIC wanted every job candidate that completed the workforce readiness training to be viable candidates for employment (i.e., have the right skills, good attitudes, arrive on-time) because it did not want any individuals to tarnish the reputation of its training program. It strongly believed in the value of its reputation, so it focused efforts on ensuring every participant was prepared for employment. As such, it focused on the quality, and not quantity, of training program participants and graduates.

Transition from Training to Employment

Completing Training

Of the eight participants who completed the workforce readiness training during the first cohort, all were successful in completing training programs and finding employment.

Other

Ability to Persevere Through Challenges

The OIC's ability to persevere in implementing its training program was noted as a strength of the partnership. Even when OIC encountered many people and organizations who doubted them, it continued its endeavor to run the organization and run the RJRI training program. OIC's mission to change people's lives and provide opportunities for families to advance themselves is commendable. OIC wanted people from its programs to find opportunity beyond just sustaining themselves.

Table 3: Performance Metrics for All Training Programs

IG-26 The HIRE Path (OIC)	Start Date of First Cohort	Proposed End Date for All Cohorts	Target Enrollment	Enrolled	Target Completed	Completed
Recruitment, Training, and Employment						
Referral to Training (Job Seekers)	3/15/16	4/29/16	10	8	10	8
Referral to Training and Career Services (Job Seekers)	7/15/16	3/10/17	100	90	50	33
Total Participants placed in training-related employment					30	20
Total Participants retained in training-related employment					TBD	Ongoing
Other Objectives						
Total Participants that are referred to additional industry-specific training					TBD	Unknown
Total Participants that exit public assistance (when applicable)					TBD	Ongoing

VII. Challenges

Partnerships

Resistance to Cooperation

The staff believed that many of the challenges they faced stemmed from the reality that entities tend to operate within their silos and have their own self-interests that often do not align with the OIC and the Hire Path Program's missions. This was especially true of new partner organizations, who needed time and assistance to figure out the best ways to work with the Hire Path Program. The Hire Path Program staff recognized that systemic change across the business sector was extremely important to the success of this grant, but that this was not easy.

Difficulty Incorporating Minority Recruits into the Industry

With most of the employer partners, the Hire Path Program staff discussed that they might hire one or two people of color, which was a good starting point, but not enough to confidently state that a pipeline between the training program and the employer had been developed. Further, when one person was hired, this did not mean that every member of the staff at the organization was welcoming to this individual in such a way that the person continued working there over the long-term. As a result of these types of instances, this partnership discussed the need for cultural sensitivity training among employees and a deep understanding of administrators and supervisors to comprehend some of the challenges of new employees being, for example, the only black individual in a predominantly white workforce. Businesses that are working to improve workplace diversity through hiring may also need to ensure that supervisors and current employees are supportive and open to diversity.

Recruitment

Inability to Serve Large Populations for Recruitment

The partnership deliberately did not advertise its services because it had not felt that it could handle the likely influx of people requesting assistance. It knew the people were out there and had ideas of how to recruit, but felt it was currently meeting the needs of those who came to them through word-of-mouth and did not think they could expand to serve additional populations.

Trainee Barriers

Obstacles with Employment Requirements

Several individuals involved in the training program had difficulty fulfilling common employment requirements. The areas in which trainees faced the most difficulties were background checks, drug screenings, and skill deficiencies. Electric Boat required background checks to meet federal requirements, so this made it difficult for some participants to take part in their training. Further, a couple of individuals lacked basic computer skills, such as email and typing, and this made it difficult when, for example, a person needed to attach a resume or cover letter to an online application.

Perception of Education as an Expense, Not an Investment

The Hire Path Program noted a need to market the importance of educational opportunities to poor families who may see education or training as expensive and time-consuming rather than an investment, and thus may deem a training program, for example, not worth the time and money for their family members. These types of perceptions often kept potential applicants from moving forward with or completing the training program.

Difficulty Convincing Employers to Accommodate Minority Recruits

The Hire Path Program staff also discussed the need for employer partners to recognize, understand, and then accommodate some of the personal challenges, such as transportation issues, that made it difficult for minority populations to be successfully employed at their organization. Program staff discussed that it takes time, creativity, attitudinal change, and dedication within an organization to truly diversify its workforce, and the reality was that most organizations did not fully recognize or have the capacity to address these issues. The partnership mentioned that some key players helped with these issues, such as the minority business enterprise, which among other things, helps Black and Latino contractors build their capacity, but as a whole, many Rhode Island employers were/are not fully committed to investing in and working with employees of diverse cultures.

Training and Transition from Training to Employment

Difficulty Translating MOUs into Successful Hiring Programs

The program staff discussed that having a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with a partner working to diversify its workforce was certainly a first step to identifying employment, but having the MOU did not necessarily mean that the partnership would immediately flourish. As an example, with Electric Boat, OIC staff had multiple meetings in an attempt to establish a pilot program for getting minorities and women hired, and even though positive relationships between the two organizations were developed, the pilot program never came to fruition due to various barriers.

Other

Lack of Cash Flow

On a day-to-day basis, the OIC had cash flow challenges, and were only able to employ one full time and two part-time employees. While OIC felt its current team of staff was strong, it did find its cash flow challenges to be a major barrier to making progress for the Hire Path Program.

Lack of Funding for Capacity Building

The OIC indicated it had limited capacity to work towards making systemic change. While the RJRI grant provided money for training and services, the grant did not provide funding

for capacity-building in order to introduce a new demographic into the workforce. For example, the OIC staff discussed a need to hire additional staff to embark on strategic planning, goal-setting, and implementation. They mentioned that it was difficult to get funding for those operations.

Difficulty Fulfilling High Community Expectations

The OIC also discussed that the community has set high expectations based on OIC's past successes, and while the community reputation of the OIC could also be seen as a strength, the reality is that the OIC did not have the capacity to fulfill those high expectations. Therefore, the OIC worked to balance expectations and capacity such that it did not over-promise or let individuals down.

VIII. Sustainability

OIC believes its program is highly sustainable and greatly needed; however, OIC does not believe its efforts could continue without funding from the city and state. The OIC has been working with the Governor's Office and the General Assembly, looking at the restoration of a block grant program of community service programs that would be managed by the Department of Education. The Hire Path Program utilized the implementation grant year to refine their system of intake, assessment, workforce readiness training, and referrals to training programs and employment. It did this to prepare for major investment in future years for helping larger numbers of their target populations find employment. OIC stated that hundreds of people could utilize a training program like this, but it needed to ensure there was a workable system in place prior to completing larger recruitment efforts.

In the future, the OIC believes that a staff of five or six people would be ideal, including the current staff of a CEO, Project Manager, and Office Manager. It also determined that having one staff person dedicated to development, such as grant writing, and one staff person dedicated to community engagement, such as recruitment and marketing, would be best for moving forward with true systemic change.

IX. Lessons Learned

The following lessons were learned by the Hire Path Program in executing this training program:

- While training and partnerships can help minorities obtain jobs in traditionally white fields, these efforts do not address the workplace culture that may be unwelcoming to minorities. Future grants may be well served by building in a training component of diversity appreciation for business partners.
- Capacity issues can prevent organizations from fulfilling their missions.

X. Best Practices

These best practices were utilized by the Hire Path Program:

- Identify multiple employers to provide many options for individuals based on their skills and interests.
- Continue to identify new partnerships and to foster older partnerships to ensure continued focus on the hiring of women and minorities in employment areas typically held by White men.
- Utilize extensive pre-screening and assessment procedures, including an in-person interview, when enrolling individuals in the training program.
- Ensure the workforce readiness training is competency based (e.g., develop or improve cover letters, hold mock interviews).
- Ensure that each training participant is “workforce ready” and proudly communicate to employer partners and others what getting the training program stamp of approval means.

XI. Recommendations

Based on the successes and challenges of the Hire Path program, the following recommendations are suggested:

- Provide some type of funding for partnerships focused on systems change about building a diverse workforce to help them educate employers and families.
 - Consider identifying existing resources, such as through the AmeriCorps program, to help this partnership go around the state and educate businesses about how to truly work towards having a diverse workforce and to educate families about the value of education.
 - Identify (or work with an educational entity to develop) curriculum about unequal opportunity across racial groups and difficulties of being an employee of color or a woman in a traditionally White male workforce in such a way that it does not create further rifts between groups of people (something similar to what has been commissioned by the African American Policy Forum about Unequal Opportunity and Race).
 - Consider partnering with organizations, such as those found on the Rhode Island Society for Human Resource Management (<https://ri.shrm.org/diversity-resources>), in the next round of funding to develop diversity training for employers in Rhode Island.
- Identify employers that provide successful integration of employees of color and women and utilize these companies/organizations to help other entities develop similar best practices.