

THE
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REAL JOBS RHODE ISLAND CASE STUDY:

Westerly Regional Real Jobs Partnership

Prepared for:

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

I. Sector Need

The Westerly Regional Real Jobs Partnership (WRRJP) was established by the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce in collaboration with the Jonnycake Center of Westerly, Education Exchange, the Literacy Volunteers of Washington County, and 17 sector partnerships, including non-profit and for-profit organizations. Citing Westerly's high rate of unemployment (7.5 percent in 2015), this project described itself as an "employer-led regional approach," specifically designed to reduce unemployment in the Westerly region.¹

This partnership, with Westerly Public Schools as the lead applicant, received an RJRI planning grant, and as part of the grant, conducted focus groups and interviews with 110 employers in the Westerly region. Employers identified that the primary skills lacking among unemployed, underemployed, and undereducated (high school diploma or less) applicants included:

- **Soft/essential skills.** This included time management, initiative/self-motivation, problem-solving, customer service, negotiating, and appropriate personal cell phone use skills. This was determined to be the highest priority critical skill gap for current employees and applicants.
- **Digital literacy skills.** Employers needed candidates who could effectively use the Microsoft Office Suite software (particularly with spreadsheet and word processing skills) and who had email, file management, database, and basic troubleshooting skills.

Additionally, using survey data from the regional employers, the following statistics conveyed the importance of the WRRJP training program:

- 75 percent of employers identified there was a skills gap between the jobs they had available and the candidates applying.
- 40 percent of employers planned to hire additional employees within the next 12 months.

¹ RI Department of Labor and Training. 2016. <http://www.dlt.ri.gov/lmi/laus/town/westerly.htm>.

- 64 percent of employers indicated that it was very difficult to fill job vacancies.
- 45 percent of employers indicated it was critical to their survival and growth to fill open positions within their organizations.

Overall, the partnership’s primary objective was to train individuals in the region and provide local employers with “digitally-literate employees with professional attitudes and the essential skills necessary to work well with clients, coworkers and management.”²

II. Grant History

The WRRJP provided the first opportunity for the partners on the grant to work collaboratively on a project to benefit their community. The three primary partners on this grant were the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce (OCCC), the Jonnycake Center of Westerly, and the Education Exchange. The OCCC learned about the RJRI planning grants from a direct email sent to the executive director by the DLT. After the OCCC inquired about the opportunity, DLT conducted an information session at the OCCC to pitch the idea for the RJRI program, which approximately 20 businesses attended. Initially, the OCCC, which represents 800 employers, and the Education Exchange were both interested in applying for a RJRI grant, and when they learned that each entity was planning to apply, they came together with Westerly Public Schools to form the WRRJP and submit an application for the planning grant (which they received) and eventually the implementation grant. None of the primary partners had put together an extensive training program in the past; however, the Educational Exchange had previously conducted a brief soft skills training for those working towards their general education diploma (GED).

III. Goals and Objectives

The Westerly Regional Real Jobs Partnership was developed to address the insufficient capacity in the region to meet the current and projected workforce needs. This insufficiency was addressed by WRRJP through the following goals:

1. Implement a six-week Work Readiness and Digital Literacy training program to be held twice annually.
 - As part of this program, the WRRJP worked to provide participants with:
 - An initial assessment of skills, aptitudes, abilities and support services as needed.
 - Job search and placement assistance.
 - Development of individual employment plans.
 - Short term pre-vocational services, including resume writing, interview skills and word readiness skills.
 - Internships and employment experiences linked to careers.

² Page 1, Proposal

- Workforce preparation activities.
2. Execute two, week-long Biz Camp programs designed for high school students.
- The partnership worked to provide high school students (ages 15-17) with an informal course (no credits, no requirements) that offered a broad overview of essential skills sought by a cross section of industries in the region. The program was intended to provide a foundation of soft skills, digital literacy skills and job seeking preparedness strategies that would align students with employer expectations, thereby helping better prepare students for the available jobs in the region.

Specifically, WRRJP sought to meet the following recruitment and training objectives:

- Provide 40 participants with Work Readiness and Digital Literacy training.
- Provide 20-30 youth participants with Biz Camp training.

IV. Partnerships

Successful sector-driven job training strategies must include businesses/employers that need workers and can identify the training needs of their workforce vacancies as well as workplace intermediaries who can reach, recruit, and train potential workers. The WRRJP included a broad array of partners, such as non-profit organizations that promote education and training opportunities and provide additional services such as food and clothing assistance for community members, and multiple businesses within the region. The chart below details the partners and their specific responsibilities.

Table 1: Partnership Members and Responsibilities

<p>Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce</p>	<p>Lead Applicant: responsible for implementing Biz Camp for high schools students; providing classroom space for the essential skills training module; recruiting participants; providing initial assessment of skills, aptitudes, and abilities of potential participant; offering support services as needed as well as job search and placement assistance; facilitating development of individual employment plans, short-term pre-vocational services, internships and work experiences linked to careers, workforce preparation activities; ensuring training providers were registered on the state eligible training provider list.</p>
<p>Jonnycake Center of Westerly</p>	<p>Responsible for employing and supervised a Case Manager; providing classroom space for the digital literacy training module; providing additional classroom space when available for other training modules; assisting in case management for participants; compiling a detailed log of the support services trainees require to ensure their success.</p>
<p>Education Exchange</p>	<p>Responsible for employed the instructor of and supervising the Essential Skills Training Module and Work Readiness and Resume Boot Camp Module; developing curriculum for the Essential Skills Training Module and Work Readiness and Resume Boot Camp Module; providing transportation for WRRJP through its van when available.</p>
<p>Literacy Volunteers of Washington County</p>	<p>Responsible for employing all independent contractors needed to facilitate the Digital Literacy Training Module; supervising and overseeing all aspects of the Digital Literacy Training Module; providing additional literacy support to all participants identified during screening; providing the NorthStar Digital Literacy Assessment for candidates and trainees; providing standardized computer-based reading and math Assessments as well as the BEST Plus assessment for English as a Second Language candidates.</p>

Westerly Hospital, Washington Trust Company, Darlington Fabrics/Moore Company, Westerly Public Schools, Ocean Community YMCA, Ocean House, Paddy's Beach Club, Grey Sail Brewery, Valenti Toyota, Servpro of Washington County, Hauser Chocolatier, Professional Planning Group, Hoyt, Phillipetti & Malaghan, Operation Stand Down RI, Families Learning Together (WPS Family Literacy), Westerly Public Library and Wilcox Park, Westerly Economic Development Commission, Apple Rehab of Watch Hill, BioTech Pest Controls, Bridge Restaurant, McQuade's Marketplace, Sea Spray Inn, The Journey, Tower Street Community Center, Uptown Salon, United Builders Supply, Westerly Animal Shelter, Windjammer, Westerly Town Hall, Frank Olean Center, Golden Years Assisted Living, Westerly Cooperative Gallery, TJ MAXX, Westerly Education Center, ELMS Assisted Living, Pier 1 Cleaners, Coastal Laundry, Shoreline Painting, Mia's Café, Randall Realtors, H&R Block, Cappazano Olive Oil

Responsible for helping to administer the trainings; providing internship and employment opportunities for trainees.

V. Implementation Activities and Processes

Goal #1: Implement a six-week Work Readiness and Digital Literacy training program to be held twice annually.

The WRRJP recruited, trained, and supported currently un- and underemployed, low skilled individuals in enrolling in its workplace preparation programs. Local non-profit organizations, including the Johnnycake Center of Westerly, the Education Exchange, Literacy Volunteers of Washington County, WARM Center, and Westerly Public Schools, that work closely with un- and underemployed adults in this region served as important referral sources. A total of 40 referred potential applicants per session took part in a testing and screening process that included a Digital Literacy self-assessment, Learning Styles Inventory, Trainee Contract, Multiple Intelligences Inventory, O*NET(R) Computerized Interest Profiler, one-on-one interviews with a business and industry-led screening committee, and successful completion of state proctored standardized Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) Reading and Math assessments. A total of 20 candidates per session were accepted as trainees. However, if candidates obtained less than a CASAS score of 230 in math or 236 score in reading, they were recommended to one or more of the Adult Education Partners for one-on-one or small group tutoring, GED prep-classes, or other programs specifically designed to help the individual improve their English or Math proficiency. If the individual's scores improved, they were eligible for the next scheduled training.

Upon the culmination of the screening and testing portion, applicants took part in a five-week program including Orientation, Essential Skills (Module 1), and Digital Literacy (Module 2), followed by a one-week, employer-led, Work Readiness and Resume Bootcamp (Module 3). The specific focus of Module 3 was to provide resume writing, interview skills, and advanced customer service skills sessions conducted with partner business owners, managers and human resource representatives. The training program used for the WRRJP was loosely based on the successful healthcare industry Stepping Up RI Program.

Table 2. Training Module Overview

Module	Overall Topics	Specific Focus
Module 1: Essential Skills	Teamwork and collaboration; enthusiasm and positive attitude; communicating effectively; problem solving; conveying professionalism; and career planning	Understand the value of collaboration to the workplace; learn strategies for creating and maintaining a positive mental attitude; learn importance of being specific, non-verbal communication, asking clarifying questions, and following directions; gain familiarity with strategies for conflict management, handling constructive feedback, and making ethical decisions to enhance perception of self as a professional and extend idea of professionalism in context with work attitude, teamwork, and problem solving; introduce students to career planning process and related resources.
Module 2: Work Readiness and Resume Bootcamp	Resume writing; interview skills; and advanced customer service	Learn the standard components of a job application and when each is appropriate to use; learn how to communicate with the employer to demonstrate they have the skills, background, and ability to do the job and that they can successfully fit into the company and its culture.
Module 3: Digital Literacy	Introduction to Microsoft 2010 and 2013 and components of Microsoft 2012 (Excel, PowerPoint, Microsoft Word) as well as Google Doc and Spreadsheets	Gain basic knowledge of and ability to use business word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation graphics applications and understand the basics of relational databases and the importance of accuracy and consistency in data input; learn best practices for file and email management, cloud technology, and digital device installation and management; gain familiarity with Skype and Google Hangouts to conduct business meetings; enhance one's ability to use online meeting management tools such as Doodle.

Trainees also achieved NorthStar Digital Literacy Certification in up to seven modules, which included: Basic Computer, World Wide Web, Windows 7, Using Email, Word Processing, Social Media, and Spreadsheets.

When trainees fulfilled their Trainee Contract, they were directed to interviews for current job openings, an up to 6-week internship or, if applicable, industry specific certification programs such as QuickBooks followed by internships. Trainees who were identified as struggling to maintain the mandatory essential skills outlined in the Trainee Contract, were provided with resources to overcome identified barriers.

Trainee stipends were paid on a weekly basis if benchmarks outlined in the Trainee Contract were met. For the internship segment, the WRRJP paid \$9.60 per hour for 30 hours a week for the first three weeks of the internship, and the employer paid a minimum of \$9.60 per hour for the remaining three weeks of the internship. All trainees were supervised and provided with a mentor within the business. The WRRJP Education Coordinator worked closely with the trainees and employers to identify concerns and provide specific remedial support as needed. A case manager was also available to assist training participants in overcoming any personal or family issues that hindered success in the program, such as finding transportation, obtaining childcare, getting appropriate clothing, or securing a bank account.

Goal #2: Execute two, week-long Biz Camp programs designed for high school students during February and April vacation, 2016.

As part of an innovative addition to the implementation phase of the grant, the WRRJP developed a program for high school students, ages 14 or older, who did not intend to attend college, entitled Biz Camp. During the one-week, 40-hour training program, the high school students in Biz Camp received Essential Skills training, technology certifications, and received daily homework. They also had the opportunity to participate in worksite visits and short-term internships of one to two weeks or day-long job shadow experiences. The internships and job shadow experiences were custom-matched between the students and the industry of their choice/interest.

The WRRJP planned to provide Biz Camp twice in 2016 during February and April school vacations. This program was initially designed to include only Westerly High School students, but opened enrollment to other Rhode Island schools when the program encountered recruitment difficulties. The WRRJP's business partners, as potential future employers, worked closely with the students in this program. The program included role playing and group and panel discussions to help formulate a foundation of what makes a good employee, thereby better meeting the needs of area employers. Trainers who have the education to teach these skills and the personality to keep the students engaged were specifically sought out for this program. For most of the segments, two to three different industries were present and either the President or the Human Resources director of those companies administered the lessons. There was also an additional field trip aspect wherein students received the opportunity to visit some of the

workplaces, such as the Hauser Chocolatier factory and the Ocean House restaurant, and apply concepts discussed in training. The Education Exchange provided a van to help BizCamp students get to field sites.

VI. Achievements

Partnerships

Industry-led Development and Implementation

According to the main partners on this grant, the idea for this training program was tied to the needs of the region's businesses, and the training program content in both programs were well-received by businesses and trainees. Employers highly valued the training program, and wanted to provide internships and hire trainees. According to the partnership, businesses were "...willing just to be involved because they see the long-term potential" in that young adults would learn the material and then have lifelong skills that could later benefit the businesses in the area. The WRRJP effectively facilitated communication with its partners when facing issues and barriers. The WRRJP also expanded its sector partnerships to include more employers and have been able to attain high levels of engagement among the partners. This expansion and engagement was critical to creating a seamless transition from training to employment.

Connecting Usually Separated Organizations

The WRRJP partners also discussed how this partnership was a unique opportunity for the region because it connected organizations that were used to working in separate "silos." The WRRJP found strength in its unity and valued each other's contributions.

Recruitment

Using Extensive Networks to reach Recruits

This partnership included the OCCC with connections to many employers, educational organizations who worked closely with the school district, and the Jonnycake Center that had access to social services and served low income individuals and families. This is often a difficult population to serve, but the WRRJP was able to be successful in this area. The WRRJP found its extensive networks and vast social media presence to be a contributing factor to its success, which helped in recruiting trainees and, over time, getting businesses increasingly involved.

Trainee Barriers

No specific achievements related to trainee barriers were discussed by this partnership.

Training

Achieving Training Objectives

The Work Readiness & Digital Literacy Training recruitment and training objectives were nearly achieved, and only one individual who enrolled did not complete the training. Although not as many students attended the Biz Camp as originally proposed, the WRRJP stated

that the curriculum content was well received. In addition, all students who took part in the Biz Camps have secured employment and accrued the soft skills necessary to be successful in the workplace.

Frequent Updates based on Feedback

For both training programs, the WRRJP worked to continuously update the training content and mode of instruction based on lessons learned, including confiscation of cell phones as needed, which contributed to the success. Students in the programs were engaged and excited when taking part in the program, and those involved in executing the trainings could see the personal growth in participants over the span of the program. The WRRJP viewed participants' excitement in learning and the personal growth of participants as some of the grant's biggest successes. The WRRJP was also committed to its programs. For example, on the basis of previous iterations of the program, the WRRJP reworked the Biz Camp program several times. This persistence paid off and eventually led to a successful program.

Transition from Training to Employment

Nearly half of the Work Readiness and Digital Literacy training participants identified employment following the training. For the BizCamp program, some trainees completed short term internships, and some trainees went directly into the job market. Overall, many trainees made connections through Biz Camp that resulted in summer jobs.

Other

Support of Town Government

Furthermore, the WRRJP was, according to the three main partners (OCCC, Education Exchange, and Jonnycake Center of Westerly), a "huge source of pride for the town." It was important to the town government to see that the state saw the Westerly region's workforce needs as a priority. This has been a motivating factor for partners to continue to work together and to implement this training program. Overall, the WRRJP stated its success can be attributed to the incredible buy-in across businesses and with government officials.

Table 3. Performance Metrics

Westerly Regional Jobs Partnership (IG-28)	Start Date of First Cohort	Proposed End Date	Target Enrollment	Enrolled	Target Completed	Completed
Recruitment, Training, and Employment						
Work Readiness & Digital Literacy Training (2 Cohorts) (Job Seekers)	3/14/2016	8/12/16	40	37	40	36
BIZ Camp (Goal: 2 Cohorts)	2/15/2016	4/22/16	20-25	9	TBD	7
Total Participants placed in training-related employment					40	19
Total Participants retained in training-related employment					10	Ongoing
Other Objectives						
Total Participants that earn an industry recognized credential					10	36
Total Participants promoted due to training (Incumbent Workers Only)					TBD	Ongoing
Total Participants receiving an increased wage due to training (Incumbent Workers Only)					TBD	Ongoing
Total students in BIZ Camp Program that earn certificate					20-30	7
Total BIZ Camp students that improved digital literacy skills					20-30	7
Total participants that exit public assistance (when applicable)					TBD	Ongoing
Total NorthStar Basic Computer Skills Certificates earned					36	32
Additional Partners Added					TBD	33

VII. Challenges

Partnerships

Challenges with Time Commitment for Involved Partners

Although the WRRJP continues to expand its employer partnerships, the required time commitment has posed a threat to the success of the grant implementation for all entities involved because each is running their own operations (e.g., business, non-profit organization) while taking part in this training program. Attracting and acquiring new and diverse partners has been advantageous to this training program, but simultaneously makes scheduling particularly difficult. The WRRJP has found that scheduling at least three subsequent meetings at a time has helped in maximizing participation among the partners.

Communication Difficulties with Employer Partners

One issue the WRRJP encountered was miscommunication about hiring and internship commitments. Employers had initially offered to either hire or provide internships for trainees. Employers initially fell short when it came time to fulfill these commitments. The WRRJP worked to gather data and information to help identify the causes of these problems. The WRRJP was able to discuss and rectify these issues with partners and through better communication, guaranteed that employers successfully held up their commitments.

Recruitment

Difficulty Meeting Recruitment Goals in Originally Targeted Populations

The partnership had planned to include only Westerly high school students in the BizCamp training, but when it encountered recruitment challenges, the WRRJP expanded to include all Rhode Island schools. Unfortunately, it still had difficulties identifying 20 students, so for the first cohort of Biz Camp, the WRRJP included 7 students. While the original Biz Camp was planned for the two school breaks (February and Spring breaks), it turned out students were either not interested in committing during these breaks or had other commitments. As a result, only one Biz Camp program was held. While the WRRJP had a difficult time finding enough RI students to meet its goals, students from Stonington, Connecticut wanted to register for the program but could not because RJRI does not provide funds to assist Connecticut residents.

Trainee Barriers

Transportation

The WRRJP experienced difficulties in finding an agency willing to provide transportation for the Biz Camp participants to attend site visits. There were a number of partners involved who had vans, but did not have the proper insurance and certification and so they were not willing or able to take on the liability. The Education Exchange was able to provide its van when it was not being used for the other RJRI grant it was involved with, but this

may not be a sustainable venture because the insured operator of the van was already committed to extensive managerial tasks within the organization.

Identifying Training Time

The WRRJP found it particularly difficult to identify a lengthy period of time in which at least 20 high school students from Rhode Island schools could attend a week-long training. The grantee originally tried to administer the week-long training during the school's scheduled February break, but encountered issues identifying enough students to meet its goals. To address these challenges, the WRRJP first tried scheduling the second training during other school breaks, at night, or over weekends rather than over the scheduled April break. However, the WRRJP found it difficult to coordinate and schedule due to other activities and commitments of the students (e.g., sports, clubs, after school activities). Therefore, initially the grantee was unable to meet its target goals for enrollment in the Biz Camp program. However, the WRRJP changed its approach to the Biz Camp program to implement it during school hours to allow for greater participation. The WRRJP found that it could hold in-school Biz Camp sessions during the student advisory period. To date this has been more successful and enrollment numbers increased significantly after this iteration.

Background Checks

Getting the necessary background checks required at some of the internship sites sometimes took longer than anticipated. This was especially pertinent in the healthcare industry, which requires full background checks that can take several weeks to complete.

Training & Transition from Training to Employment

Issues with Internships and Site Visits

The Workforce Readiness and Digital Literacy Training Program faced several obstacles, especially in regard to the internship portion of the curriculum, which may have impacted job placement success. Some students opted out of the internship for a variety of reasons. For example, there were not as many internship sites as there were students, and the internship placements were not always a good match with the students' needs or aspirations. In addition, students were not required to complete an internship in order to graduate, so some chose not to take an internship.

Fulfilling the Internship Stipend

The program's intent had been for the RJRI grant to pay for 50 percent of the internship and for employers to pay the other 50 percent. However, there were employers unable to fulfill that obligation. For example at the hospital in Westerly, the human resources department had categories for volunteers or for employees, but they did not have an option to pay interns half of the amount stipulated.

Lack of Experience Handling Money

Some students who received their internship payment had little to no experience handling money, so the WRRJP identified staff from partner organizations to help them to secure bank accounts and deposit checks.

VIII. Sustainability

The WRRJP saw the Workforce Readiness and Digital Literacy training as highly sustainable, but questioned the sustainability of Biz Camp. The WRRJP planned to apply for additional funding to supplement and grow its innovative workforce training program through local Community Development Block Grants, state and national foundations, local charities, and municipalities. An example of this effort to secure blended funding for the WRRJP's training is the recently applied for Episcopal Charities ServSafe grant. Further, there is a new program, called Fresh Start, that is a partnership between the Jonnycake Center and the local food bank where they work on individual case plans to define their goals and successes. The WRRJP is seeing that Fresh Start participants are likely candidates for the RJRI program, and Johnnycake has roughly 3,000 individuals who pass through its doors seeking services. The partnership believes that capitalizing on these types of opportunities is critical for the continued success of the training program.

The grantee also plans to continue to apply for RJRI funding because it believes there is an increasing need for Adult Education training, and there may be specific jobs in which some advanced training could be provided to continue to support those who take part in the WRRJP trainings. The grantee would also like to return to the business community and identify additional opportunities for employment.

IX. Lessons Learned

The following lessons were learned by the WRRJP in implementing its training program:

- Identify employer partners' requirements for internships in advance, such as criminal background checks. The lesson is to inquire with businesses about employee requirements during the design phase of the program in order to anticipate issues that trainees may need to address to before starting their internship. For example, background checks could be conducted as part of the process of enrolling participants in training if they indicate they are interested in a field that requires an extensive background check. This could reduce the time lag between the completion of the training and the beginning of an internship and could increase retention of students for the internship component.
- Ensure the students in the training program include the internship portion of the training as part of the Trainee Contract rather than as an option for them after completing the in-person training portion of the program.
- When working with youth who will be paid for participation in the training, build in training time to help the students learn about getting a bank account and managing

money. This came up because trainees were provided incentives to complete the training, and many of trainees did not know how to manage their money.

- Schedule meetings far out in advance to ensure maximum participation/attendance at meetings and training events from all partners involved on the grant.
- Anticipate challenges in scheduling trainings around high school student schedules.
- Continue to identify and recruit new employer partners.

X. Best Practices

The three main partners (OCCC, Education Exchange & Jonnycake) had admirable intentions regarding the purpose of the grant. This enabled them all to come together to achieve their goals. These best practices were utilized by the WRRJP:

- Have a partner that has access to a social service department that serves unemployed, underemployment individuals and provides access to services, such as food, clothing, and household vouchers. This partner can provide a nice connection between providing services and suggesting recruitment to the training program.
- Have a case manager and an education coordinator who is able to navigate personal challenges and help with various tasks, such as driving to the bank and providing transportation.
- Design and execute training with extensive involvement by businesses looking to hire new workers. Businesses were surveyed to identify the needs, help decide training curriculum, and conduct the trainings. The partnership also visited work sites with training participants so they could practice what they learned in classes through real-life examples and related what they learned to practical applications.
- Use multiple community partners with extensive networks and social media presence.

XI. Recommendations

Based on the implementation successes and challenges for the WRRJP, the following recommendations for RJRI are suggested:

- Identify best practices from programs across the country for providing training to high school students or consider partnering with schools to incorporate the Biz Camp curriculum as part of school programming.
- Consider partnering with Connecticut so that WRRJP could provide training opportunities for both Rhode Island and Connecticut job-seekers.
- Provide a van to grantees or ensure the entities with available transportation can utilize their vehicles to transport RJRI trainees as needed. Encourage them to incorporate waivers that trainees could sign or another mechanism to ensure that entities do not avoid offering transportation for liability reasons.
- Ensure that employer partners are at the table at the beginning of the partnership and are clear about their commitments to providing internships and employment.