# Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training
# Business Engagement for Youth Development

***"Nationally, state and local workforce boards and their youth-service-providing partners are realizing the need to assess their capacities and strategies to link with and provide supports to employers."***

*- National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability*

Under the leadership of Adelita Orefice, Director, the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training has a strategic investment in the development of youth and their preparedness for the contemporary labor market. As part of that investment, the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training has an opportunity to position itself as the conduit to connect youth and their educators with the employment community in an effort to support and prepare Rhode Island's youth to become the workforce of the future.

There are three key stakeholders who have unmet needs in this regard – *youth*, particularly those at the secondary education level; *Rhode Island high schools* charged with meeting Proficiency Based Graduation Requirements (PBGR), and; *employers* facing a predicted skills worker gap by the year 2010 (America's Career Resource Network). The following further evidences the need for intervention and assistance:

**Employer input indicates -**

- Nationally, over 80% of employers report they experience difficulty hiring qualified workers; only half are satisfied with the skill sets of their current employees. (Biztools4schools)
- Employers estimate that 45% of graduates are not adequately prepared with the abilities they need to advance beyond entry-level positions. (Chapin Hall)
- According to the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training's Labor Market Information unit, it is estimated that employers need to find workers to fill over 186,000 job openings through projection period 2004 – 2014.
- Monthly Labor Review claims in an excerpt entitled "Occupation Employment Projections to 2010" that most new jobs will arise in occupations that require only work-related training (on-the-job-training or work experience in a related occupation), even though these occupations are projected to grow more slowly, on average, than jobs requiring post-secondary education.
- Two key factors employers identify that contribute to both their willingness to bring youth into their workplaces and their satisfaction with the contribution youth make in the workplace are competent and convenient assistance in receiving youth referrals, and, good matches of youth skills and interests to job tasks. (National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability - NCWD)

**Youth data demonstrates -**

- Nationally, 58% of high school graduates say high school did not fully prepare them for work (Achieve, Inc. 2005)
- Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that the unemployment rate for youth not enrolled in college hovered at 25.0 percent in October 2006.
- Quality work experiences are not possible without *interested, willing, and well-prepared employers*. (NCWD) Workforce development for youth requires more than an altruistic placement at a place of employment. It requires invested employers willing to insure access to skills building and the development of appropriate work aptitudes and attitudes.
- Young people need a range of skills, both basic academic skills as well as the ability to apply these skills and knowledge in the workplace. (21st Century U.S. Workforce)

**RI Department of Education and secondary school considerations include –**

- Schools must establish policies and procedures that enable students to apply the knowledge they acquire outside of school, when appropriate, to satisfy the opportunities to learn and / or graduation requirements of the school. One such activity that supports students acquiring requisite learning is from *internships or work-based activities.*
- New graduation requirements (PBGR) include plans that must describe how high schools will incorporate applied learning for all students through classroom, *work-related* and / or community service experiences. (Office of Middle and HS Reform)
- The intent of Proficiency Based Graduation Requirements is to ensure that every student leaving public schools is well prepared for college and *work*. (RIDE Feb 2004)
- Schools must address strategies for responding to, recording and planning for each individual student's social/emotional, academic and *career needs beginning no later than grade five*. (Office of Middle and HS Reform)
- The Rhode Island Department of Education strongly recommends a school-business collaboration to achieve project-based learning (PBL). "Businesses can share authentic problems, supply materials and resources, provide advisors, and generally work with students and teachers to make connections between the classroom and world beyond school. PBL gives businesses the opportunity to contribute to educating today's young people and the benefits of students on an authentic problem."
- Rhode Island's After School Alliance, driven by key state leaders and stakeholders, includes in its definition of after school Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO), vocational exploration, internships and jobs.

***The overwhelming evidence points to a timely opportunity for the Department of Labor and Training to establish itself as the lead agency to facilitate the youth / business connection.*** Therefore, the following is a five-part outreach plan to meet the needs of the three key stakeholders and establish a foothold for the Department of Labor and Training in this regard.

1. **Establish DLT as a resource for Employers to meet their human capital needs and create a pipeline to their future workforce**

    - Develop an outreach plan that incorporates the use of Employer Service Representatives and their connection to human resource professionals. Outreach must be proactive and responsive to youth employment trends e.g. summer employment opportunities and/or entry-level occupations in high growth, high demand sectors.
    - Assign an Employer Service Representative as the point of contact for employers wanting to train and/or hire youth. As each Youth Center opens, determine additional Employer Service Representatives to be assigned to the youth liaison role based on geography and demand.
    - Connect with each industry partnership workforce intermediary to present the statewide youth initiative and secure employer commitments to train and/or hire youth.
    - Present to local Chambers of Commerce, trade groups and business associations.

2. **Create an outreach plan specific to partner agencies. Present the Department of Labor and Training as the conduit to connect youth with the business community so they begin to identify the Department in this capacity.** Use this as an opportunity to highlight the Department's all youth vision.

    - Office of Rehabilitation Services
    - Department of Human Services
    - Rhode Island Department of Education
    - Department of Children Youth and Families

3. **Connect with the education community in each school district**

    - Position the Department of Labor and Training and the netWORKri based Youth Centers as the touch point for educators to meet work-based learning, service learning and applied learning needs. Present the Department as a resource to resistant educators who must meet the new high school requirements designed to help youth transition to the world beyond school.
    - Connect with high school principals and key administrators, by way of protocol, to inform them of our intention to outreach to key staff.
    - Outreach, educate and align with School-based Coordinators (charged in some school systems with meeting the training and employment needs of youth although not the goal of their position).
    - Establish relationships with guidance counselors and supporting career professionals in secondary, post-secondary, vocational training and trade schools.
    - Present to Transition Advisory Councils (Northern, Providence, West Bay, East Bay and South County) and other education stakeholders such as the Education Partnership and the RI After School Alliance.

4. **Outreach to and engagement of Youth**

   - Establish a youth advisory with representation to fulfill an all youth agenda. Primary roles could include input for Youth Center design and services, web portal information and links, customer satisfaction input and, overall advisory.
   - Establish Youth Centers that are designed with youth input and made to attract more youth. Centers must be more than a traditional computer laboratory. They must also offer activities, recreation, and connection to a consistent and readily available adult. Centers must be opened beyond traditional hours – satellite sites could be instrumental in this regard.
   - Educate youth so they know that the Youth Centers are the premier place to find jobs. Follow through with jobs!
   - Establish a youth specific web portal, which connects youth to the Youth Centers, invites them into the Youth Services Statewide System and provides linkages to service providers, vendors, training opportunities and jobs.
   - Create a job bank specific to youth that includes options for part-time, after school, summer opportunities, apprenticeships, on-the-job-training, as well as traditional openings.
   - Provide work readiness workshops for youth on a consistent and regular basis for those more job ready and have a bank of available jobs that are immediately accessible for referral (staff at Youth Center must have the ability to provide the employer contact information). To insure a dual customer approach of satisfying both the youth and the employer, the workshops can serve as a screening tool to measure the appropriateness of the referral to the employer.

5. **Employ an overall public awareness campaign to target the community at large but also other key state agencies/partners that do not provide direct service to youth but have an investment in their development**. Those agencies include, for example, the Education Partnership, the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation and the Rhode Island Economic Policy Council.