On-Ramps to Career Pathways in Rhode Island Evaluation Plan

Rigor of Proposed Evaluation for Proposed Project Type A: We are proposing to implement a combined set of systems changes and coordinated on-ramp strategies that we believe are supported by a strong logic model and successful outcomes data. Our hypothesis is that organizing workforce services through a targeted on-ramps system to career pathways will result in better outcomes for customers and employers, create greater system efficiencies and incentivize greater private training investments. The evidence for the effectiveness of the individual strategies that we are proposing to combine is strong yet preliminary, and is primarily found in the outcomes reported by programs. However, there is not one program or initiative evaluated that combines career pathways, on-ramp tools, career centers, and multi-agency funding; nor that takes the approach of documenting the impact of a new public sector approach on private training investments. Therefore, we are applying for project type A with an evaluation design that will include both an assessment of the systems change process and on-ramps implementation as well as a summative evaluation of the projects outputs, outputs and impacts resulting from the on-ramps system to career pathways implementation.

Detailed Evaluation Plan

Description of Study Methodology and Data Collection Methods

We plan to use both formative and summative evaluation methods as follows:

Formative Evaluation: A formative evaluation will be used to assess the systems change process and on-ramps implementation. This will be used to learn and make mid-course corrections along the way and ensure that the systems change and on-ramps are implemented effectively. The following are the evaluation questions:

Systems Change Process – Evaluation Questions
Are all required stakeholders engaged?
Are policy changes being made?
How is data being used across and within agencies?
How are funding decisions being made differently? Have funding streams been integrated?

Is there a plan for integrating supportive services into career pathways?

On-Ramps Implementation – Evaluation Questions
Are the on-ramps operating as they are supposed to?
If not, what changes are needed to make it operational?
Are customers receiving appropriate services?
Are eligible participants being recruited? Are clients participating from multiple agencies?
Has appropriate staff been hired?

Data Collection Methods: Data to support formative assessment will come from several sources including, but not limited to: interviews with key stakeholders, meeting documentation, DLT web site, State agency budgets, Foundation budgets, State agency MIS systems[1] and data related to services cost/participant, the Web career pathways tool and related manual/user guide. We will expect the evaluator to develop and use a rubric for collecting systems change information from stakeholders so that it we can effectively show where change has and hasn't been made. The data points and the structure/process for gathering the formative data will be determined within the first six months of the project. Baseline data collection will begin in the second two quarters to test our ability to gather the data. The evaluators will provide semi-annual reports on formative data to the leadership team who will review progress and serve as the barrier-busting committee to facilitate movement within state agencies. This will include data that indicates policy or regulatory issues to address; data from the business process analysis that may elevate staffing, policy, legal, or other issues related to implementing the on-ramp program within the one-stops; and feedback from employers on the project design. The leadership team will make course corrections as needed.

The following systems change outcomes will be measured:

[1] EmployRI –DLT's MIS system tracking used for WIA Title I, Wagner Peyser, TAA; CALIS - the Department of Education's MIS system, tracking WIA Title II and Perkins, InRhodes - The Department of Human Services's MIS system, tracking TANF, RI Works, SNAP Employment and Training, child care, Medicaid, and other support services.

Systems Change Outcome	**Key Data Elements (new elements are italicized)**	**Tool/System**
Increased number of career pathways mapped and transparent to customers and employers; more partnerships established across the system.	*Evidence of career pathways* *Count of partnerships* *Implementation of a web-based career pathways tool*	Documents, DLT web site
Funding streams are integrated and being used and re-aligned along career pathways.	*Presence of funding streams that are integrated and aligned.*	State agency budgets Foundation budgets
Increase in funds invested in career pathways.	Dollars spent in each program *Comparison of funding invested in career pathways as a percent of total workforce investment before, during and at the end of the grant implementation period.*	State agency budgets and plans FY2012-FY2015
Improved ability of agencies to evaluate impact of public investments leading to 1) improved targeting of resources based on customer and employer need; 2) reduced duplication and 3) realignment of funding towards what works.	Costs of each training and education program *Cost/person for outcomes* *Changes in investments and costs/person; costs/outcome*[2]	State agency budgets and plans FY2012-2015; agency MIS systems and data related to services cost/participant
Use of uniform performance measures across state agencies.	Existing performance measurements and changed measurements; use of dashboard *Change in use of data across and within agencies.*	State agency MIS systems Agency meeting minutes
Supportive services resource plan for career pathways.	Evidence of plan and alignment	Web career pathways tool; related manual; user guide

[2] ***Cost savings*** will be demonstrated through measuring the costs of individual services across the multiple funding streams, and then correlating them with the outcomes in terms of employment, retention, and wages. From that, we expect to have a cost per outcome equation that will determine the cost savings. Our efficiency measure will take into account the impact of investment for the *level* of outcome, not just for the cost/outcome, because we expect more intensive services for harder to serve populations. Given the long-term nature of career pathways work, we may also seek to develop interim cost savings/efficiencies measures. We will also measure decrease in public benefit receipt because of increased wages and estimate increased state revenues as a further impact and as part of a larger cost-benefit analysis to the state.

We will be comparing costs for the pilot systems change program with costs for individuals not in the pilot program, because we want to hold relatively constant the effects of the economy and labor market on outcomes (and therefore the costs needed to achieve those outcomes).

Summative Evaluation: A summative evaluation will be used to measure the success of the project in terms of the outputs and outcomes desired for both of the two main project goals. We will use a quasi-experimental strategy that will compare a demonstration group (experimental group) to a comparison group across time to answer the following core questions: a) Do on-ramps to career pathways create better employment and retention outcomes than general on-ramps? b) Does organizing the system around career pathways produce better outcomes? c) Is using on-ramp services overall more effective than no on-ramp services. We also plan to measure the intensity of services (how many services, how long) as part of the evaluation to make causal connections about which interventions are the most effective.

Comparison Group Methodology

Customers will self-select to be in the comparison group or the experimental group. Upon entrance to a one-stop center or with a one-stop staff at a remote location, all customers will use DLT's EmployRI system to complete a standard eligibility questionnaire. We will capitalize on the existing eligibility questionnaire currently used by DLT and will adapt EmployRI as needed to capture a standard set of eligibility information that is agreed upon by the Project Implementation Team. This will be used to: 1) determine the eligibility of the customer (based on shared eligibility criteria determined by the Project Implementation Team) and 2) gather baseline data on the entire population of customers. Once a customer is determined to be eligible, they will be offered three choices:1) participate in regular services; 2) participate in a general on-ramp program (work readiness/experiential work, job coaching); 3) participate in on-ramp program that leads to career pathways. Those that don't choose the on-ramps and career pathways will become the comparison group. We expect that 1500 people will be assessed as eligible with approximately 500 people choosing to participate in regular one-stop services and become the control group. Of the remaining people, we estimate that 500 people will receive general on-ramp services and 500 people will receive on-ramp plus career pathways services. An estimated 1000 people will receive some combination of work readiness workshops, coaching (in-person and virtual), and supportive services linkages.

Selection Bias: We know that the evaluation design will need to control for the selection bias in the control group because of the potential that eligible customers who are self-selecting not to participate in an on-ramp and career pathway might somehow be different. We will be looking to our evaluator to provide expert guidance on how to minimize the selection bias.

Data Collection Methods: Most data will be collected on both the comparison and experimental group using EmployRI, the Dept of Labor and Training's MIS system. This system, used currently by the career centers, will be adapted for this project to capture all required participant level data collected during assessment, training and placement including demographic information, the intensity of services received, intensity of support services received, skill and literacy level progression, program retention, and certification and job placement and retention information. All participants, regardless of the path they chose will be tracked for outcomes. One stop counselors will be charged with calling participants and employers to collect placement and retention information. In addition, we will be adapting the state's existing customer and employer satisfaction surveys for this project so we can measure pre-, during- and post- customer and employer satisfaction.

The following participant level outcomes will be measured:

Individual Outcomes	**Key Data Elements (new elements are italicized)**	**Tool/System**
Higher completion of programs	Program completion rates	EmployRI, CALIS, InRhodes
Increased number of people who are connected to needed services	# *receiving one or more support services*	Employ RI, CALIS, InRhodes
Increased retention in jobs for those receiving multiple supp. services	Employment retention; services used post-employment	Employ RI; UI Wage Data
Reduction in case mgmt/coaching hours per client	*Coaching hours/customer*	Employ RI, CALIS

Individual Outcomes	**Key Data Elements (new elements are italicized)**	**Tool/System**
Customers have a career plan and can identify steps to move forward.	*Evidence of career plan* Evidence of resume	EmployRI
Virtual coaching services have same impact as in-person for less cost	# *customers using virtual coaching; cost per customer and outcome*	On-line coaching/career tool; Employ RI
Increased customer satisfaction	Services and outcomes satisfaction	Survey at one-stops
Higher employer satisfaction	Services and outcomes satisfaction	Employer satisfaction survey
Higher wages	Wage/hour; number of hours worked/week	EmployRI, UI Wage Data
Demonstrated movement along pathway	Wage increases, *add'l trainings and courses,* new job	Employ RI
People in experiential activities have faster or higher rate of hiring	Time from program completion to hiring; # hired	EmployRI
More employers access and use experiential programs and report increase in work ready candidates	# of employers using work exper. and work readiness; employer satisfaction	EmployRI Employer satisfaction survey
Increase in workers receiving private sector training/tuition.	Comparison of private sector training funding and tuition/worker	Governor's Workforce Board incumbent worker training program; surveys

<u>Evaluation Model</u>

The project evaluation will be conducted in three phases:

1) **Phase I: Implementation Stage (First 6 months):** During this phase the following will be completed: 1) Establish and collect baseline data, hire an evaluator, develop an expanded evaluation design, evaluate and analyze data and activities, develop conclusions and recommend mid-course corrections.

2) Phase II: Operational Stage (Months 7-28): During this phase implementation and systems change data will be collected and analyzed and compared to baseline data.   Conclusions will be developed and mid-course corrections recommended.

3) **Phase III: Summative Stage (Months 29-32):** During this phase data will **c**ontinue to be collected and analyzed and preliminary findings will be created.

4) Phase IV: Final Summative Stage (Months 33-36): During this phase we will determine the effectiveness and external validity of project as a whole, and develop final recommendations.

Workplan – Preliminary Planning and Ramp Up Workplan

	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb
Select Evaluator								
Develop Evaluator RFP	X							
Release RFP		X						
Responses Due			X					
Selection of evaluator; contract negotiated				X				
Develop an Evaluation Design and Plan								
Review and confirm evaluation goals and logic model					X			
Design the evaluation, confirm measures, and data sources; address selection bias issues.					X	X		
Develop data collection instruments (surveys)					X	X		
Start collecting and analyze baseline data							X	X

How funding the proposed evaluation will provide knowledge that can be used to enhance the broader system: If our hypotheses are correct, and both using career pathways to organize workforce activities and using a set of on-ramp tools results in better outcomes and a more efficient use of resources, than we expect that the approach will be adapted by not only the remaining one-stops centers, but also by other agencies and community organizations in Rhode Island. We also expect that the results of this three-year project will provide critical spillover effects, linkages and information to inform strengthening the state's K-12 work on career readiness, although it is not the focus of this application.

Process for procuring the services of a third party evaluator, including levels of capacity and expertise we will require of the selected organizations: DLT will competitively procure an independent evaluator for this project by: 1) identifying 5 evaluation firms with experience in one or more of the focuses of this application and with experience in conducting DOL evaluations; 2) develop an RFP in the first month after grant award that has broad parameters for the evaluation and leaves open the approach to evaluation in order to seek the best structure; 3) the leadership team will interview at least three evaluation firms; 4) select the evaluation firm in consultation with DOL. Once selected, On-Ramps will work with the evaluator and with DOL to develop a plan for a formative evaluation that a) has adequate rigor to test the hypothesis and program model, including use of a comparison group; b) identifies data points and the processes for the evaluator to access data; c) identifies the qualitative process evaluation work plan; and d) has a staffing plan that will result in a robust evaluation.

The chosen evaluator must: 1) have experience or engage a partner with experience in conducting evaluations in the area of workforce development and working with similar levels of resources; 2) have the ability to deliver a full range of program evaluation activities including research design, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, and dissemination of the results; 3) be able to work within the project evaluation budget; 4) is willing to work collaboratively to develop an evaluation plan that meets the needs of the project; 5) is able to communicate in simple, practical terms; 6) understands and considers considers cultural and socio-economic differences; 7) has the time available to do the evaluation; and 8) will treat data confidentially. The evaluator will be expected with work with the leadership and project implementation team to make smart, and thoughtful decisions about methodology, weighing benefits and costs to find the most suitable overall plan. The evaluator will also be expected to solicit input and buy-in about the evaluation design from stakeholders, administrators, colleagues, and other individuals who will be responsible for project implementation.