

# STATE OF RHODE ISLAND WIOA PY2021

## Narrative Performance Report



Program Year 2021 saw Rhode Island's continued recovery and rebound from the Covid-19 pandemic. In July 2021, Rhode Island's unemployment rate was 6.0%; by June 2022 that figure was cut to less than half to 2.7%. Such a rapid and dramatic decline in the number of unemployed Rhode Islanders was the result, in part, of an aggressive and coordinated strategy across the workforce system to help Rhode Islanders return to work. Throughout the program year, the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training collaborated with state and local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and other partners to provide a host of programs and services, both existing and new, to assist job seekers and employers in meeting their employment and economic goals.

One of Governor Daniel McKee's top priorities for the workforce development network after assuming office in March 2021 was to ensure a deliberate and devoted focus on diversity, equity, and inclusivity. That priority was operationalized in the state WIOA system in a number of ways during PY2021. The State Workforce Agency (the state Department of Labor and Training) created an Office of Community Engagement with the direct responsibility to increase the outreach, engagement, and participation of traditionally underserved communities in Department-administered programs, including WIOA. PY2021 saw the approval and initial deployment of a community-affiliate American Job Center model comprised of smaller job centers housed in trusted community organizations within underserved communities. PY2021 also included a dramatic expansion in the scope, availability, and flexibility of support services available within the WIOA system.

These new initiatives build upon and leverage the innovations and tools developed during PY2020 as a result of the Covid pandemic including the launch and deployment of virtual service delivery models and the development of 'communities of practice' around areas like career counseling and job coaching.

There is critical work ahead to ensure continued economic stability and security for Rhode Island's businesses and our community. And the state workforce development network is prepared to do its part. We look forward to our continued collaboration in responding to the challenges ahead.

- **Progress made in achieving the state’s strategic vision and goals, as described in the state’s Unified or Combined State Plan, for developing its workforce and meeting employer needs in order to support economic growth and economic self-sufficiency.**

Rhode Island’s 2020-2023 WIOA Plan (modified in PY2021) outlines the following goals:

1. Implement a demand-driven, sector-based strategy to meet employer demand and establish a pipeline of skilled workers for future demand.
2. Advance a career pathway strategy to provide employment, education, training, and support services for individuals, particularly those with barriers to employment (including TANF recipients), that will ensure an opportunity to develop their education and skills to prepare them for a job at various points in their life.
3. Align policy and leverage existing government structures and resources so that government is “networked” and coordinated to achieve efficiencies and effectiveness throughout the workforce system.
4. Use data to inform policy-making decisions, guide investments and evaluate performance to measure return on investments

After substantial interruption in PY2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Rhode Island was able to make considerable progress in implementing and achieving the state’s goals during PY2021. Building on previous investments in community and industry-led workforce development partnerships; the WIOA system is now augmented by sixty-seven (67) partnerships that work with the state to address the unique workforce needs of Rhode Island’s leading industries and traditionally underserved communities. Investments in these partnership’s knowledge base and capacity help them adeptly identify the needs of their community and/or industry then partner with various elements of the workforce network to meet that need. More information on the state’s progress in implementing a demand-driven, sector-based strategy is provided in the following section.

Rhode Island also made measurable progress in advancing a career pathway strategy to provide employment, education, training, and support services for individuals, particularly those with barriers to employment (goal two). While historically the state workforce development system viewed support services as an extraneous cost secondary to other services like career services and training; support services have been elevated considerably throughout the system and are now viewed as the ‘third leg of the stool’ as it pertains to participant services. The state also made considerable progress elevating Registered Apprenticeship as a training model within the state WIOA system. More information on these improvements to the state’s career pathway strategy, and others, is provided in the following section.

- **Progress made in implementing sector strategies and career pathways. The discussion may include: business engagement strategies, work-based learning (including apprenticeship), work experiences for youth and adults, transitional jobs, and incumbent worker training strategies and policies in the state**

### *Sector Strategies*

Rhode Island continued to promote and position its industry sector partnership initiative, Real Jobs RI, as the key intermediary between the workforce development network and employers in the state’s largest and growing industries. In PY2021 the program evolved to include a dual focus of addressing the labor needs of the state’s largest and growing industries while promoting economic and employment opportunities for populations with barriers to employment. Within and among the sixty-seven community and industry-led partnerships that make up the Real Jobs RI program is a focus on:

- |                            |                                |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Agriculture              | • Healthcare                   |
| • Commercial Fishing       | • Hospitality                  |
| • Commercial Shell Fishing | • Information Technology       |
| • Construction             | • Manufacturing                |
| • Defense & Cybersecurity  | • Marine Trades                |
| • Design                   | • Medical Technology           |
| • Energy                   | • Social Enterprise            |
| • Finance                  | • Transportation and Logistics |

These partnerships identify and define common workforce opportunities and challenges, and connect with workforce, education, and economic development partners to create solutions. These partnerships also function as sophisticated, real-time, workforce intelligence aggregators that work directly with the state workforce network to disseminate actionable intelligence, detail emerging workforce trends, articulate skill requirements, and identify institutional and administrative barriers.

### *Career Pathways*

A key priority for Rhode Island’s career pathways system throughout PY2021 was the expansion and elevation of support services throughout the WIOA system. Using lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic including the pronounced role and oversized impact that support services had on participant completion and employment, Rhode Island sought to significantly expand the scope, availability, and flexibility of support services under WIOA. Through voluntary collaboration with both local workforce development areas, the state raised local caps/limits on support services and expanded the range of covered services and costs to include, but not be limited to: heating and utilities assistance (if determined necessary for continued participation in WIOA programming), Background Checks (BCI) as required; Child or Dependent Care Assistance; Clothing and Hygiene assistance; Emergency Food Assistance (if determined

necessary for continued participation in WIOA programming); Emergency Housing Assistance (if determined necessary for continued participation in WIOA programming); Healthcare or Medical Assistance; Legal Aid Services as required; Technology such as reasonable assistance with internet or computing equipment as required; and Tools, Equipment and Uniforms. Offering a wide net of support services was crucial to the success of many of the Department's employment and training initiatives during the pandemic; providing a responsive and customized approach to barrier mitigation that was widely praised by participants and employers, while maintaining fiscal accountability and integrity.

A second priority Rhode Island's career pathways system throughout PY2021 was the integration and realization of Registered Apprenticeship (RA) as a training model within WIOA. Rhode Island's primary focus was at the 'grassroots' level and ensuring that RA was fully present and activated in our WIOA Career Centers. The State Workforce Agency spoke to frontline WIOA staff directly to learn their first impressions of apprenticeship; did they have any questions, both personally or professionally, about apprenticeship, or any concerns or misconceptions? Having received that feedback; the state sought to address those concerns and answer those questions with the goal of building confidence and familiarity with registered apprenticeship among the staff, dissolving any misconceptions, and overcoming any hesitations. The result was an initial technical assistance series provided to staff; followed by desk guides and other 'leave behind' documents to provide ongoing assistance. Those documents cover:

1. Registered Apprenticeship on Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL)
2. The differences between Registered Apprenticeship vs Traditional Training
3. Effective Use of ITA and OJT for Register Apprenticeship
4. FAQ And Common Terms
5. A Funding Matrix of various streams that can be leveraged for Registered Apprenticeship

The state also made content knowledgeable staff available to serve as a 'help desk' and provide continuous technical assistance. PY2021 saw the first Registered Apprenticeship Program join the ETPL and the first participant enrolled in a Registered Apprenticeship Program through the ETPL. We expect to build on this progress in the coming years.

- **If the state has received a small state minimum allotment exception to decrease the minimum out-of-school youth expenditure requirement, describe how the exception has impacted services provided to both in-school youth and out-of-school youth, including specific strategies for serving each population, as well as how the state and/or local area is ensuring serving out-of-school youth remains a priority.**

N/A.

- **The state's performance accountability system, including:**
  - **Any specific state performance measures or goals and progress towards meeting them.**
  - **Any performance deficiencies on the primary indicators of performance, which may include descriptions of any factors impacting performance.**
  - **The state's common exit policy, including which ETA-funded partner programs are included in the state's common exit policy.**
  - **Negotiated performance levels for local areas for titles I and III core programs for program years 2016-2017.**
  - **The state's approach to data validation and ensuring data integrity, including a description of the methodology of any validation activities that occurred.**

#### *State Specific Measures*

Rhode Island has not identified any state-specific performance measures; however, the PY2020-2023 State Plan commits the state to exploring and considering such measures.

#### *Performance Deficiencies*

The Table on page 7 displays the negotiated goal, actual state performance, and percent of goal attained as reported for Program Year 2021 to the Employment and Training Administration. State performance goals are negotiated with DOL-ETA. A state level percent of goal below 50% of negotiated target is considered a performance failure.

Rhode Island - Statewide	PY 2021 Final		
	Neg Perf Goal	Actual PYTD	% of Goal
<b>Employment (2nd Q after Exit)</b>	Exiters 07/01/20-06/30/21		
Title III - Wagner-Peyser	73.50%	66.70%	<u>90.75%</u>
Adult	82%	75.50%	<u>92.07%</u>
DW	82%	80.30%	<u>97.93%</u>
Youth	70%	74.60%	106.57%
<b>Employment (4th Q after Exit)</b>	Exiters 01/01/20-12/31/20		
Title III - Wagner-Peyser	69%	57.30%	<u>83.04%</u>
Adult	80%	66.70%	<u>83.38%</u>
DW	82.20%	76.10%	<u>92.58%</u>
Youth	69.50%	72.00%	103.60%
<b>Median Earnings (2nd Q after Exit)</b>	Exiters 07/01/20-06/30/21		
Title III - Wagner-Peyser	6,400	8,297	129.64%
Adult	6,800	7,922	116.50%
DW	7,700	10,357	134.51%
Youth	3,050	3,371	110.52%
<b>Credential Attainment Rate</b>	Exiters 01/01/20-12/31/20		
Title III - Wagner-Peyser			
Adult	58%	71.60%	123.45%
DW	76%	72.60%	<u>95.53%</u>
Youth	55%	51.90%	<u>94.36%</u>
<b>Measurable Skill Gains</b>	Active 07/01/21-06/30/22		
Title III - Wagner-Peyser			
Adult	40%	50.70%	126.75%
DW	42%	64.00%	152.38%
Youth	42%	44.50%	105.95%

The Covid-19 pandemic and the associated economic challenges and disruptions continue to impact Rhode Island's statewide WIOA performance. While no single individual indicator fell below the 50% performance threshold; (unadjusted) 4th Quarter Employment Rates for the Wagner-Peyser and Adult Programs were below 90% of negotiated goal.

We believe that these deficiencies are almost fully attributable to the pandemic: job seekers from both programs, especially those exiting in the first half of calendar year 2020, entered a compromised job market with a substantial reduction in available jobs; many Wagner-Peyser clients abruptly Exited services as the state went into the pandemic 'lock down'; and the availability of enhanced and/or expanded unemployment insurance compensation such as Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC), Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) and Extended Benefits (EB) influenced the decision of many participants whether or not to seek employment. Those exiting in the latter half of calendar year 2020 had considerably better employment prospects which we believe is illustrated by the gradual improvement in Wagner-Peyser performance on this metric in each quarter; for QE 12/31/2021 (covering Exiters from 04/01/20-06/30/20); the 4th Quarter Employment Rate for Wagner-Peyser program was 53.9%; for QE 3/31/2022 (covering Exiters from 07/01/20-09/30/20) the 4th Quarter Employment Rate for Wagner-Peyser had risen to 64.7%; and by QE 6/30/2022 (covering Exiters from 09/01/20-12/31/20); the 4th Quarter Employment Rate for Wagner-Peyser rose to 71.0%. We believe these metrics, and other Employment-related metrics, will continue to improve as future exiter cohorts, particularly those exiting in a post-vaccine economy, are included in the analysis.

Despite the above performance deficiencies, Rhode Island's PY2021 performance included a number of other metrics considerably above target. The state improved the tracking and recording of Measurable Skill Gains for Title I programs and will continue to provide technical assistance to prevent backslide. The state is also pleased that Median Earnings were above target for all Title I programs and Wagner-Peyser. Rhode Island places a strong emphasis on job quality and prioritized placing participants in family-sustaining and economically self-sufficient wages.



### *Common Exit Policy*

For the purposes of performance calculations in all WIOA core programs, except Vocational Rehabilitation, exit is the point after which an individual who has received services through any program meets specific criteria (§677.150(c)). This criterion is:

- i. 90 days of no services has elapsed, and
- ii. No future services are planned

For the purposes of this definition, a participant's use of self-service or the provision of information-only activities or follow-up services will not prevent a participant's exit. For the Vocational Rehabilitation program, an individual would be determined to have exited the program on the date the individual's case is closed in accordance with the Vocational Rehabilitation program requirements. Under Vocational Rehabilitation, those individuals who have achieved a supported employment outcome at a subminimum wage are excluded from the definition of "exit".

*PY2020-2021 Negotiated Performance Levels*

<b>Performance Measures</b>		<b>PY 2020</b>	<b>PY 2021</b>
<b>WIOA Title I Adults</b>			
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)		81.0%	82.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)		79.0%	80.0%
Median Earnings		\$6,600.00	\$6,800.00
Credential Attainment Rate		53.0%	58.0%
Measurable Skill Gains		38.0%	40.0%
<b>WIOA Title I Dislocated Workers</b>			
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)		81.0%	82.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)		81.7%	82.2%
Median Earnings		\$7,200.00	\$7,700.00
Credential Attainment Rate		75.0%	76.0%
Measurable Skill Gains		40.0%	42.0%
<b>WIOA Title I Youth</b>			
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)		68.0%	70.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)		68.0%	69.5%
Median Earnings		\$2,980.00	\$3,050.00
Credential Attainment Rate		53.0%	55.0%
Measurable Skill Gains		40.0%	42.0%
<b>WIOA Title III Labor Exchange (LEX)*</b>			
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)		73.0%	73.5%
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)		68.0%	69.0%
Median Earnings		\$6,200.00	\$6,400.00

*PY2022-2023 Negotiated Performance Levels*

Performance Measures		PY 2022	PY 2023
<b>WIOA Title I Adults</b>			
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)		80.5%	82.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)		78.5%	80.0%
Median Earnings		\$7,000.00	\$7,100.00
Credential Attainment Rate		61.0%	62.5%
Measurable Skill Gains		45.0%	47.0%
<b>WIOA Title I Dislocated Workers</b>			
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)		82.5%	83.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)		83.0%	83.5%
Median Earnings		\$8,000.00	\$8,100.00
Credential Attainment Rate		76.5%	77.0%
Measurable Skill Gains		43.0%	43.5%
<b>WIOA Title I Youth</b>			
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)		72.0%	72.5%
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)		70.0%	70.5%
Median Earnings		\$3,200.00	\$3,300.00
Credential Attainment Rate		60.0%	60.5%
Measurable Skill Gains		40.5%	41.0%
<b>WIOA Title III Labor Exchange (LEX)*</b>			
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)		61.4%	62.4%
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)		65.3%	66.0%
Median Earnings		\$7,000.00	\$7,100.00

*Data Validation*

Data element validation is conducted to ensure that the data elements in participant records used to calculate aggregate reports are accurate. Data element validation involves reviews of a sample of participant records against source documentation to ensure compliance with federal definitions. The sample files are selected by the Office of Planning, Integrity, & Compliance from reported participants and participants that have exited in EmployRI. WIOA and discretionary grant data element validation is conducted remotely. Participant data and documentation is available for review electronically in EmployRI.

Sample files are selected running WIOA Performance Reports with the Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) Reporting Assistant. Data Samples for Wagner-Peyser, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth and Trade, are randomly selected to conduct Data Validation on a Quarterly basis for each Program Year. Electronic Worksheets are completed and sent to Program Managers for Failed Elements to be corrected.

- **Activities provided with the funds reserved by the governor, which can be up to 15% of the state's allotment. In this section of the narrative, states may describe activities undertaken in whole or in part with their Governor's Reserve and how those activities have directly or indirectly impacted performance.**

During PY 2021, Governor's Reserves funds were predominately spent on required activities including the WIOA monitoring and compliance work of the Department of Labor and Training's Office of Policy, Integrity, and Compliance (formerly known as the Integrity and Compliance Unit), as well as finance and accounting staff and operations. Funding was also used in support of the State Workforce Development Board staff and operations for WIOA oversight and related activities.

- **Rapid response activities and layoff aversion, which may include:**
  - **Data on number of companies served and number of individuals served.**
  - **Discussion of strategies for linking Rapid Response recipients to American Job Centers and processes for intake or co-enrollment in the Trade Adjustment Assistance and the Dislocated Worker programs.**
  - **Discussion of layoff aversion strategies, including any metrics/outcomes developed and/or tracked by the state with respect to layoff aversion, such as return on investment or measures showing the economic benefits of Rapid Response and layoff aversion.**
  - **Discussion of how Rapid Response and layoff aversion activities are aligned with business engagement, sector strategy, and career pathway efforts, which may include a discussion of any systems, tools, networks or approaches designed to identify companies in distress and strategies to deliver necessary solutions as early as possible, as well as outcomes of the use of such systems or tools.**
  - **Discussion of specific types of services or workshops provided to both companies and affected workers.**

Rhode Island's Rapid Response system is built on a proactive approach to planning and preparation ahead of dislocation events, with the ability to quickly mobilize services to provide aid to companies and their affected workers and minimize disruptions associated with job loss. Layoff aversion activities are vital to operations and are embedded in Rhode Island's strategic approach. Staff members sustain and develop relationships with a wide array of stakeholders for field intelligence and interpretation of trends, including other state agencies and units, such as the RIDLT Labor Market Information Division, RI Commerce Corporation, and other businesses groups. The Rapid Response team meets regularly and recognizes the importance of customization and responsiveness in relation to service delivery and has leveraged technology tools and digital enhancements to maintain effectiveness, including options for virtual interventions, such as remote orientations, job fairs and customized workshops.

In PY 2021, RIDLT's Rapid Response program assisted 51 companies and 1674 affected workers from a variety of industries and was able to offer workshops for impacted employees about services available in English and in Spanish as needed, nearly half of which occurred virtually. During these events, representatives from a variety of units assist with health insurance, unemployment insurance benefits, reemployment topics and where appropriate additional services, such as support with Trade Adjustment Assistance, training options and Health Care and Retirement Coverage by US DOL Employee Benefits Security Administration.

Through Rapid Response, the team generates referrals to the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) process, and staff regularly discuss companies that are experiencing closures or layoffs and those who may or may not be eligible for TAA. Job Coaches and Business Services Representatives are involved in Rapid Response activities from the outset to create an operational link to American Job Centers and a pathway to additional programs or resources.

- **Activities provided under the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service section 7(b) (e.g., services to groups with special needs or extra costs of exemplary models for delivering services).**

N/A

- **Any National Dislocated Worker Grants (DWGs) awarded to or within the state and how those funds are coordinated with state rapid response activities and dislocated worker programs, as well as how the DWGs fit in with state co-enrollment policies and disaster/emergency management activities, as applicable.**

The COVID-19 Disaster Recovery National Dislocated Worker Grant (NDWG) was awarded in April 2020 with a period of performance from April 13, 2020 to March 31, 2022. In PY 21, Rhode Island served participants in the career and training services portion of the grant through the Real Jobs Rhode Island (RJRI) vehicle using engagement strategies that have been developed and refined over the life of the RJRI program. The RJRI program is designed to ensure that Rhode Island employers have the talent they need to compete and advance while providing targeted education and skills training for Rhode Island workers. Over the course of the COVID-19 disaster relief grant, individuals participated in disaster-relief employment and in career and training services. All of the participants' disaster-relief employment placements concluded as of the end of PY 21 and many were hired into permanent positions with the disaster-relief employers. A number of other participants transitioned to full-time, permanent employment with other area employers.

Awarded on April 1, 2019, the National Health Emergency (NHE) Opioid Disaster Recovery Grant has a current period of performance from January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2022. In PY21, the NHE DWG project provided disaster relief employment as peer recovery specialists and employment and training services to individuals in the Rhode Island impacted by the adverse effects of the opioid crisis, including addiction and overdose, as well as those seeking opportunities in mitigating professions. Rhode Island's sector-based partnership model coupled with a tactical recruitment and support approach served as the primary platform that enabled the successful provision of training and career services in PY 21.

Co-enrollment is key state strategy for aligning resources and meeting the needs of workforce system customers, and Rhode Island benefits as a small state with only two LWDBs. Program staff work in concert to ensure resources are optimized and job seekers have what they need to succeed. In PY 22, Rhode Island is looking forward to expanding its 'no wrong door' approach to service through receipt of the QUEST Disaster Recovery DWG, awarded on September 26, 2022. QUEST DWG services and programs will be available to participants through multiple entry points and the state will begin to work in closer partnership with community-based organizations that serve historically marginalized communities.

- **Any technical assistance needs of the state workforce system. 2 See WIOA section 128(a)(1).**

N/A.

- **Promising practices, lessons learned, and success stories that focus on serving employers, communities, and individuals with barriers to employment, including information based on the state's evaluation and related research projects. This discussion should cover a broad range of at-risk and priority populations served, including out-of-school youth, low-income adults, dislocated workers, individuals who are basic skills deficient, individuals with limited language proficiency, individuals with disabilities, veterans, the long-term unemployed, and any other individuals with barriers to employment, or other populations the state may wish to discuss.**

As mentioned previously, Rhode Island's extensive expansion and elevation of support services is both a lesson learned and promising practice for helping job seekers, particularly those with barriers to employment, complete WIOA-funded activities and obtain and retain employment. When the state launched its 'Back to Work Rhode Island' initiative in immediate response to the Covid pandemic; the state included a deliberate focus on expanding the scope, availability, and flexibility of support services for participants. The positive impact on program performance was considerable; but so was the impact on participant perception and perspective. Anecdotal responses captured a sentiment of surprise (at the ease, efficiency, and level of support), relief (that the state was willing and able to provide the sort of assistance that truly met their needs) and confidence (that the state was positioning them for success and 'had their back' if barriers got in the way). Building on these lessons during the pandemic; and with voluntary collaboration with both local workforce development areas, the state raised local caps/limits on support services under WIOA and expanded the range of covered services and costs. Offering a wide net of support services (while maintaining fiscal accountability and integrity) remains crucial to the success of many of the Department's employment and training initiatives and has been widely praised by participants and employers.

- **Any challenges the state workforce system faces, which may include policy, implementation, or other relevant challenge.**

N/A.

- **Any strategies/policies relating to Pay-for-Performance contracting, which may include examples from local areas**

N/A.

- **Identify each waiver that the state has had in place for at least one program year and provide information regarding the state’s progress toward achieving the goals and performance outcomes in ETA’s letter of approval for the waiver (sec 189(i)(3)(C)(ii)) and outlined in the state’s waiver request (when applicable). Discuss how activities carried out under each approved waiver have directly or indirectly affected state and local area performance outcomes. To the extent possible, provide quantitative information.**

Rhode Island had four waivers in place for at least one program year in PY2021: (1) a waiver of the requirements outlined at Sec. 107 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, allowing the state board to function as a local board for the Greater Rhode Island area; (2) a waiver of WIOA Section 134(c)(3)(H)(i) and 20 CFR 680.720(b) in order to increase on-the-job training (OJT) employer reimbursement up to 90 percent for businesses with 50 or fewer employees; (3) a waiver associated with the requirement at WIOA Section 129(a)(4)(A) and 20 CFR 681.410 that the State and local areas expend 75 percent of Governor’s reserve youth funds and local formula youth funds on out-of-school youth (OSY); and (4) a waiver of 20 CFR 680.780 to adjust the six-month employment requirement for incumbent worker training (IWT).

The primary goal and outcome related to the **waiver allowing the state board to function as a local board for the Greater Rhode Island** area was to comply with the governance provisions of WIOA. WIOA requires Chief Local Elected Officials to administer WIOA Title I funds and appoint Local Workforce Development Board members. In Rhode Island, as far back as the Job Training Partnership Act, the Governor had performed the functions of the Chief Local Elected Official for the Greater Rhode Island (GRI) LWDA. This means the Governor was appointing both the State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) and the GRI LWDB.

Under WIOA, the Governor continued to serve as the Chief Elected Official for the GRI LWDB. During a compliance monitoring review conducted in February 2018, United States Department of Labor (USDOL) regional staff identified that the Governor acting in this capacity was inconsistent with WIOA requirements because the Governor was not a local elected official and, thus, cannot appoint the local board. Regional staff advised finding one or more local elected official(s) to assume the role of Chief Local Elected Official for the area or submit a waiver requesting that the SWDB act as, and carry out roles and responsibilities of, the GRI LWDB. After conferring with the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns (Which represents all 39 municipalities in Rhode Island, including the 37 that make up the Greater Rhode Island area), the state elected to submit a waiver to allow the state board to function as a local board for Greater Rhode Island. This waiver was initially approved in September 2019 with a condition that the Board ensure continued local input and feedback into decisions impacting the Greater Rhode Island area. In response, the Board worked with the League of Cities and Towns to establish a Local Area Advisory Committee for the State Board. This Subcommittee met throughout PY2021 and helped ensure local area ‘voice’ and representation in key WIOA-related matters including policymaking, service data and demographic analysis, modification of



the local WIOA plan, overseeing rehabilitation and upgrading of the local area American Job Centers, and other matters. The ultimate responsibility for these functions remains with the board.

This waiver was subsequently reauthorized in September 2020, with the conditions that the State meet the following requirements:

- Establish a written agreement delineating the roles of and firewalls among the state board, board staff, fiscal agent, and service providers;
- Demonstrate administrative procedures and policies consistent with Uniform Guidance;
- Conduct regular and complete monitoring of local areas.

In response to condition one; on March 29, 2021, the state provided USDOL regional staff a copy of the document entitled “Firewalls and Internal Controls Re: State and Local Board Responsibilities.” This document memorializes the internal controls that all staff must adhere to when fulfilling State and Local Workforce Board responsibilities in order that business will be conducted in a manner that will prevent actual, potential, or questionable conflicts of interest and will provide clear separation of duties.

In response to condition two; the Board’s administrative and fiscal agent, the Department of Labor and Training, continues to conduct the responsibilities and functions of both boards consistent with Uniform Guidance.

In response to condition three, the state continues to conduct regular monitoring of local areas. Consistent with the terms of the waiver, the state revised its statewide monitoring policy to ensure that local monitoring decisions were free from any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest.

The primary goal and outcomes of the **waiver of WIOA Section 134(c)(3)(H)(i) and 20 CFR 680.720(b) in order to increase on-the-job training (OJT) employer reimbursement up to 90 percent for businesses with 50 or fewer employees**; included: increased flexibility for smaller Rhode Island businesses to help them ramp up operations and keep pace with evolving market demands as the state recovers from the economic impacts of the pandemic; and to increase the usage of OJT among smaller firms. Per the US bureau of Labor Statistics, 91.1 percent of Rhode Island entities were those which employed fewer than 20 workers in 2021. The initial waiver was approved on August 13, 2021. During the months of September and October 2021, the state board conferred with staff and thought leadership on the best approach to operationalizing this waiver among the local areas and raising employer awareness. In December guidance was issued by the State Board to all local areas and state staff was made available to answer any questions. The Greater Rhode Island local area issued enabling policy changes, with required procedural changes and guidance in early February 2022; the Providence/Cranston local area issued enabling policy with required procedural changes and guidance in late March. During PY2021, 81% of OJT establishments contracted in the Greater

Rhode Island workforce area alone employed fewer than 50 individuals, and 59% employ fewer than 20 employees. We anticipate this ratio to maintain or increase as both local areas continue to build employer awareness and outreach regarding the enhanced match.

The primary goal of the **waiver associated with the requirement at WIOA Section 129(a)(4)(A) and 20 CFR 681.410 that the State and local areas expend 75 percent of Governor's reserve youth funds and local formula youth funds on out-of-school youth (OSY)**; was to better meet the needs of our youth population and help expand and scale school-to-career programming and drop-out prevention strategies, especially in light of and in response to the challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic. 24% of WIOA Youth served in PY2018 were in-school youth, compared to 23% in PY2019, and 31.4% in PY2020 (above the program maximum and attributed to the disruptions of the pandemic). In PY2021, 24.3% of all WIOA Youth served statewide were in-school youth; however not all local workforce development areas elected to use the flexibility to serve additional in-school youth provided through the waiver. The local area that opted for the increased service flexibility (Greater Rhode Island) served 27.8% in-school youth, despite lingering in-school logistical challenges related to the pandemic. Rhode Island plans to enhance our partnerships with regional high schools and anticipate this ratio will continue to grow.

The primary goal of the **waiver of 20 CFR 680.780 to adjust the six-month employment requirement for incumbent worker training (IWT)** was to eliminate a barrier to providing incumbent worker training to employers and workers looking to restart operations and increase competitiveness as the state recovers from the COVID19 pandemic. As mentioned in Rhode Island's initial waiver application, the state previously offered a state-funded incumbent worker training program that was popular statewide and made a WIOA-funded iteration of IWTG redundant. The program was put on hiatus as a result of financial difficulties brought about by the Covid-19. After financial review, the state elected to bring the state-funded incumbent worker training program back during PY2021 and for the foreseeable future. Therefore, Rhode Island determined that the waiver was no longer necessary and elected not to enable a WIOA-funded IWT program. The state will continue to monitor the interest and need for Incumbent Worker Training under WIOA. Such training may still be made available in local areas who authorize it, but with the six-month employment requirement, as described in 20 CFR 680.780.

- **Identify the two approaches the state has chosen for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers performance indicator pilot. If the state is piloting a state-established measure of Effectiveness in Serving Employers, or has any other metrics to assess employer engagement, describe the measure or metric as well.**

WIOA sec. 116(b)(2)(A)(i)(VI) requires the US Departments of Labor and Education to establish a primary indicator of performance for effectiveness in serving employers. In December 2016, the Departments announced they will be piloting three approaches designed to gauge three critical workforce needs of the business community.

Approach 1 – Retention with the same employer

Approach 2 – Repeat Business Customers

Approach 3 – Employer Penetration Rate

Rhode Island originally elected to adopt Approach 1 (Retention with the same employer) and Approach 3 (Employer Penetration Rate) described below.

Approach 1 – Retention with the same employer: The number of participants with wage records who exit during the reporting period and were employed by the same employer during the second quarter after exit and the fourth quarter after exit DIVIDED by the number of participants with wage records who exit and were employed during the second quarter after exit.

Approach 3 – Employer Penetration Rate: The total number of establishments, as defined by the BLS QCEW program, that received a service or, if it is an ongoing activity, are continuing to receive a service or other assistance during the reporting period DIVIDED by the total number of establishments, as defined by BLS QCEW, located within the State during the final month or quarter of the reporting period.

However, as statewide data collection got underway, our State Workforce Agency realized that querying Approach 2 – Repeat Business Customers would not require much additional effort since the employer data was already available to us. For this reason, in PY 2021 we tracked all three Employer Effectiveness measures, the results of which are outlined below:

Measure	Rate
Retention with Same Employer in the 2nd and 4th Quarters After Exit Rate	71.7%
Employer Penetration Rate	6.1%
Repeat Business Customers Rate	39.2%

- **Include brief descriptions of: (a) current or planned evaluation and related research projects, including methodologies used; (b) efforts to coordinate the development of such projects with WIOA core programs, other state agencies and local boards; (c) a list of completed evaluation and related reports and links to where they were made accessible to the public electronically; (d) State efforts to provide data, survey responses, and timely site visits for Federal evaluations; and (e) any continuous improvement strategies utilizing results from studies and evidence-based practices evaluated.**

The Department of Labor and Training (Rhode Island's State Workforce Agency) has brought on a PhD-level Director of Data and Performance who, in partnership with the State Workforce Development Board has begun overseeing a series of comprehensive evaluation projects of core and partner program services delivered through the Job Centers. This effort will include participation by the staff which represent the core programs under WIOA and additional programs. The assessment evaluation will also include information obtained from assessments conducted by federal agencies such as the Department of Labor and Department of Education.

In October of 2020 the Department began participation in an evaluation of the National Health Emergency Demonstration Grants to Address the Opioid Crisis. These grants, administered by the Employment and Training Administration (ETA), provided funding to states to test innovative approaches to addressing the economic and workforce-related impacts of the opioid epidemic. The U.S Department of Labor contracted with Mathematica and its partner, Social Policy Research Associates (SPR), to collect and analyze the data for the evaluation. The evaluation team used the study findings to provide DOL with a report documenting the activities that grantees are implementing, including populations targeted and reached, challenges experienced, and promising practices or lessons learned. As part of the evaluation, RI DLT worked with Mathematica and SPR to ensure there was full access needed to perform the evaluation. This included collecting data, virtual site visits, and interviews with relevant individuals involved in implementing the grants, including the state grant director, state administrator, frontline staff, external partners, and grant participants. Rhode Island established connections between Mathematica and SPR and two local sub-awardees, as well as facilitated the scheduling of multiple focus groups including participants affected by the crisis receiving grant services and participants in occupational training to address the crisis.

At this time, the Department of Labor and Training is utilizing an independent study to assess the effectiveness of its Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program. Rhode Island's RESEA program connects select Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants with a career counselor who helps them navigate the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training's (RI DLT) resources with the objective of facilitating gainful and sustainable employment. RI DLT contracted the Policy Lab at Brown University to evaluate how well Rhode Island's RESEA program meets its mission objectives. Through a randomized controlled trial to

measure the causal effects of enrollment in RESEA on several key metrics, such as how soon participants find employment and how much they earn while at those new jobs, the Policy Lab will provide objective data to assess the effectiveness of current programs. The goal of this evaluation is to see if Rhode Island's specific intervention leads to positive outcomes for those selected to participate in RESEA compared to those not selected. This evaluation serves two purposes. The first is to see if the resources offered by DLT are comparatively better than the baseline (no services). The second is to refine which members of the population selected for the RESEA most benefit from the intervention. The results of this multi-year evaluation will directly speak to future service delivery. The evaluation will also help make appropriate updates to state's WIOA Plan as needed. Such evaluation and resulting actions, such as policy changes or adjustment in strategy, will be shared with the federal agencies at the appropriate time.

- **Describe the state's approach to customer satisfaction, which may include such information used for one-stop center certification, in accordance with 20 CFR 678.800. This description should include: 1) the state's methodologies; 2) the number of individuals/employers who were provided customer satisfaction outreach, the response rate, and efforts made to improve the response rate; 3) the results and whether the results are generalizable to the entire population of customers; and 4) a description of any continuous improvement processes for incorporating the customer satisfaction feedback.**

Rhode Island integrates customer satisfaction and outreach into the ongoing activities of the workforce development network, and the state's approach is customized by program, creating a manifold feedback system. The state uses collected feedback to aid in service delivery and in identifying enhancements that may further benefit employers and job seekers. With the assistance of the Brown University Policy Lab, the state implemented an evidence-based evaluation in PY 2021 that assesses qualitative measures of RIDLT career services associated with RESEA. The survey was developed as an ongoing assessment distributed to RESEA clients and provide insight into intervention efficacy, satisfaction, barriers, and other criteria.

Using this survey as a foundation, Rhode Island contextualized the survey and utilized the approach for all clients receiving Title IB Services to assess effectiveness and address client needs or concerns should they arise. Due to reopening efforts post the COVID-19 pandemic, and the incorporation of the recommendations from the Brown Policy Lab, this procedure began in the second half of the program year. As such, RIDLT sent survey invitations on a weekly basis via email to capture WIOA Title IB services in PY 21 from December 2021 on, totaling 453 services and 122 unique individuals surveyed. The state received 8 responses from this effort. Since generalizability and usefulness of these results beyond individual insight was limited, the state aims to improve methods in PY 22 through use of state-sponsored email address, an optimized survey schedule, and additional campaigning to encourage engagement.

A number of other employer-focused surveys are conducted regularly throughout the PY including surveys following recruitment events, such as job fairs.

