



State of Rhode Island WIOA PY24

Narrative Performance Report



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Waivers

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 intended results, 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.

Rhode Island had four waivers from the USDOL-ETA in place in PY24:

- 1) a waiver of the requirements outlined at Sec. 107(b) 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 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);
- 3) 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; and
- 4) a waiver of 20 CFR 681.550 to allow WIOA individual training accounts (ITAs) for in-school youth (ISY).

The primary goal and outcome related to the waiver, which allowed the state board to function as a local board for the Greater Rhode Island area, was to comply with the governance provisions of WIOA and resolve a USDOL-ETA compliance finding. WIOA requires Chief Local Elected Officials to administer WIOA Title I funds and to appoint Local Workforce Development Board members. In Rhode Island, dating back to the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), 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, the 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, therefore, could not appoint the local board. USDOL-ETA 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 the 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 the condition that the Board ensure continued local input and feedback on 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 PY24 to ensure the local area's voice and representation in key WIOA-related matters, including policymaking, service data and demographic analysis, modification of the local WIOA plan, oversight of the rehabilitation and upgrading of local American Job Centers, and other related matters. The ultimate responsibility for these functions remains with the board.

This waiver was subsequently reauthorized in September 2020, June 2022, and (most recently) May 2024 with conditions related to maintaining proper firewalls and guardrails between the various roles and responsibilities under WIOA; pursue and receive local input into the work of the board; maintain compliance with federal rules and the Uniform Guidance, continue to meet state and local monitoring responsibilities, and continue to allocate funds to both local areas through a transparent allocation process.

The state continues to meet all of these conditions. The waiver has functioned without issue since its initial authorization in 2019. The members of the Local Area Advisory Committee meet regularly and are engaged in decision-making effecting the Greater Rhode Island local area; firewalls and internal controls are working as intended with board and staff taking reasonable precautions against real or perceived biases; the state remains in compliance with federal financial rules and expectations; state and local monitoring continues with regularity, and both local areas receive allocated WIOA funding through a transparent process that is consistent with federal regulations.

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 meet the needs of our youth population better and help expand and scale school-to-career programming and drop-out prevention strategies.

In PY22, 20.6% of all WIOA Youth served statewide were in-school youth; in PY23, that percentage decreased to 18.2% of all WIOA Youth served statewide; and in PY24, it further dropped to 14%. Accordingly, the balance of ISY has not yet increased. In part, this is due to one local area not utilizing the waiver and prioritizing OSY enrollment. The state nonetheless remains committed to using the flexibility granted by this waiver to promote innovative and flexible in-school service models, and our WIOA Youth Providers in the other local area do continue to see increased foot traffic from ISY into their service locations.

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; and to increase the usage of OJT among smaller firms. According to the State's Economic Progress Institute, 94% percent of Rhode Island companies in 2024 were "micro businesses" (10 employees or fewer). The initial waiver was approved in August 2021 and reauthorized in June 2022 and May 2024. Both local areas opted to utilize the flexibility provided through the waiver and passed policy reforms introducing a tiered reimbursement structure for OJTs based on employer size:

- 50 or fewer employees: up to ninety percent (90%) on-the-job training employer reimbursement (or the maximum allowable reimbursement [\$26.26 per hour], whichever is less);
- 51-250 employees: up to seventy-five percent (75%) on-the-job training employer reimbursement (or the maximum allowable reimbursement [\$26.26 per hour], whichever is less);
- 250 employees+: up to fifty percent (50%) on-the-job training employer reimbursement (or the maximum allowable reimbursement [\$26.26 per hour], whichever is less)

The percentage of smaller employers utilizing these waivers has increased steadily since the implementation of the waiver, to the point at which all current OJT employer utilizers are small businesses. In PY21 (the first year of the waiver), the percentage of OJT contracts issued that were utilized by businesses with under twenty employees was 30.7%. In PY22, the percentage increased to 53.8%; in PY23, it increased to 63.3%. In PY24, the State Board decided to limit OJT enrollments due to funding constraints. However, for the OJTs that began in PY24, 100% were for businesses with 50 or fewer employees, and 67% were for businesses with 20 or fewer employees.

The primary goal of waiving 20 CFR 681.550 to allow WIOA individual training accounts (ITAs) for in-school youth (ISY) was to provide WIOA youth providers with the flexibility to serve their in-school clients with training needs effectively. Given that this was the first year of implementation and funding for ITAs ran short in PY24, no ISY clients utilized ITAs. However, the State remains committed to exercising this flexibility when needed to serve ISY best while continuing to prioritize OSY and their training needs.

Evaluations

Include brief descriptions of current or planned evaluation and related research projects, including the following:

- *Methodologies used;*
- *Efforts to coordinate the development of such projects with WIOA core programs, other state agencies, and local boards;*
- *A list of completed evaluations and related reports and links to where they were made accessible to the public electronically;*
- *State efforts to provide data, survey responses, and timely site visits for Federal evaluations;*
- *Any continuous improvement strategies utilizing results from studies and evidence-based practices evaluated; and*
- *Include planned timelines for completion and publication of evaluations as applicable.*

In Spring 2024, the state completed its first cross-program evaluation - a study of the geographic location of the WIOA service locations and their associated outreach and recruitment networks, as compared to the state's communities and subcommunities of greatest economic need. The design and scope of this evaluation were consistent with the state WIOA Plan and the Governor's priority of ensuring broad access and a focus on serving communities in greatest need. The final report highlighted "service deserts" of severe economic hardship that were not being reflected in our collective WIOA enrollment. The WIOA agencies then strategized on enhanced recruitment and awareness efforts in these communities. Given Rhode Island's small size, any progress in addressing employment barriers and building economic security in these communities would have an outsized impact on statewide measures of economic stability and growth.

Rhode Island also participated in and completed an academic randomized control trial of the entire RESEA program, conducted in partnership with the Brown University Public Policy Lab (Policy Lab).

The Policy Lab evaluated both short-term outcomes (wages and reemployment two quarters after the claim effective date) and long-term outcomes (wages and reemployment five quarters after the claim effective date, as well as the number of weeks of UI benefits received up to 78 weeks after the claim effective date).

Preliminary data on short-term earnings and unemployment indicate that selection into RESEA results in an average annualized increase in future wages of \$1,195 in the second full calendar quarter following selection, equivalent to approximately a 5% increase. The data also show that RESEA selection is associated with a 1.66% increase in reemployment during the second

calendar quarter after selection and a 1.77-week decrease in time spent on Unemployment Insurance in the same benefit year as the randomization, or approximately a 10% decrease. All statistically significant.

Preliminary data on long-term outcomes indicate that the short-term effects persist over the next seven quarters. RESEA selection results in an increase of \$1,153 in annualized wages, equivalent to approximately a 3.5% increase. It also leads to a 1.47% increase in reemployment and a 1.99-week decrease in weeks spent on UI in the 78 weeks following RESEA selection, or about a 12% decrease. Again, all statistically significant results.

A total of 24,120 Rhode Island unemployment insurance claimants were eligible for RESEA during the period of this study. Of those, 48.7% (11,756) were selected for RESEA (treatment group) and 51.3% (12,364) were not (control group).

The Department will utilize this data to inform and improve our processes and strategic decision-making under the RESEA Program. Rhode Island will share a formal report with the USDOL-ETA team once these results are finalized.

Customer Satisfaction

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:

- *The state's methodologies;*
- *The number of individuals/employers who were provided customer satisfaction outreach, the response rate, and efforts made to improve the response rate;*
- *The results and whether the results are generalizable to the entire population of customers; and*
- *A description of any continuous improvement processes for incorporating 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 inform service delivery and identify 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 beginning in PY21 that assesses qualitative measures of RIDLT career services associated with RESEA. The survey was developed as an ongoing assessment distributed to RESEA clients and provides insight into the efficacy of interventions, client satisfaction, barriers, and other relevant criteria. This survey was later reproduced and made

available in Spanish as well.

Rhode Island has also refined this survey to assess Title I service satisfaction. The state sustained deployment to Title I customers throughout PY24 with two primary language options to encourage response. Each response is read by Rhode Island Workforce leadership to ensure client services are continuously improved. The results of these surveys are provided to staff through regular feedback and review, and help inform service and strategic decisions in PY24. RIDLT surveyed over 1100 Title IB clients with 110 unique responses, a slight proportional increase over PY23.

Of the results, which are not generalizable, most respondents (approximately 80%) indicated satisfaction with the services, and a little over 70% indicated that the services were very useful. For those who are or were not satisfied, managers regularly review survey comments and results to identify any trends and address them, and use this feedback to initiate ongoing training and enhancement discussions as applicable and appropriate.

State Strategies

In the report, states should consider providing information in the following areas:

- *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 to support economic growth and economic self-sufficiency.*
- *Progress made in implementing sector strategies and career pathways, such as business engagement strategies, work experiences for youth and adults, transitional jobs, and incumbent worker training strategies and policies in the state.*
- *Efforts to increase access to Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAP), including the creation of new RAPs and the expansion of existing RAPs, such as new youth apprenticeship opportunities.*

Rhode Island's workforce development strategies are fully aligned with the priorities of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), focusing on enhancing the state's workforce system by placing employer demand at the forefront. By improving the employer customer experience, the state ensures that businesses can access skilled talent to meet their workforce needs and increases the quality and quantity of potential placements for jobseeker customers. At the same time, Rhode Island utilizes a person-centered case management approach that tailors services to the unique needs of job seekers, providing them with individualized support. This approach is complemented by the development of clear and effective pathways to employment, empowering individuals to successfully transition into sustainable careers while meeting the evolving demands of the labor market. Through these

interconnected strategies, Rhode Island is developing a dynamic, responsive workforce system that supports both employers and job seekers, fully aligning with the goals of WIOA.

Rhode Island's 2024-2027 WIOA Plan includes 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 lives.
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

Throughout PY24, the Department of Labor and Training (in its role as State Workforce Agency) and the state's Workforce Development Boards (WDB) (one state/local, one local) maintained progress in achieving these goals while ably meeting their collective responsibilities under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

Rhode Island continued to integrate its employer-led industry sector partnerships with WIOA, connecting sector partners with American Job Centers and WIOA Business Service staff on industry-specific hiring events. The state also shared feedback and intelligence with job coaches and other WIOA partners. This included a significant increase in the number of employer-led Registered Apprenticeship Programs appearing on the ETPL.

A specific focus in the latter half of PY24 was an aggressive and strategic review and refresh of the state's employer outreach operations. The state reimagined employer services as a Business-to-Business (B2B) enterprise, recognizing that we must earn the employer's business and trust. This effort included the creation of a professional uniform employer presentation for business outreach staff to utilize when speaking with employers, a review of all outreach materials and "leave behinds" and the reissuance of new, polished, and contemporary collateral for business outreach staff, and, using non-federal funds, the purchase of promotional materials such as tote bags, pens, mugs, and hand sanitizers to aide in employer recruitment and recognition. Rhode Island is currently reviewing its processes for signing up for WIOA programming to ensure the employer user experience is as simple and streamlined as possible.

The state also made progress in advancing a career pathways system for all job seekers,

particularly those with barriers to employment. Rhode Island continued to build strategic referral partnerships with organizations serving veterans, youth in state care, and returning citizens (former offenders), utilizing a joint case management approach that leveraged the expertise and resources of both organizations to best meet the needs of the participants.

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. The program funds industry sector-driven partnerships in Rhode Island's largest and growing industries, including:

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

During PY24, the state sought to establish channels within and among these partnerships to provide real-time business intelligence and analysis to the workforce system. Whether rumors about a specific business closure or expansion, industry changes, and disruptive technologies that could impact employment, or evolving skill and certification demands, such feedback allows the workforce system to remain near the cutting edge and respond to industry needs. With the advent of artificial intelligence and automation, this work has become even more important in recent years.

A key priority for Rhode Island's career pathways system during PY24 was to modernize career tools and counseling to reflect today's job market. While topics like interviewing skills and resume writing remain critically important, job seekers increasingly mention concepts such as artificial intelligence, the efficient and effective use of professional social media like LinkedIn, and remote work and decentralization as areas they wish to learn more about. For this reason, WIOA Title I and III training and technical assistance have evolved to include these contemporary topics. Virtual and in-person workshops and seminars will soon integrate these topics, and customer handouts and collateral covering the topics will be disseminated.

A second key priority for Rhode Island's career pathways system during PY24 was to significantly expand the quality and quantity of programs available on the state Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). Previously, the state took a more passive approach to maintaining the

ETPL; processing applications as they were submitted, but not actively building awareness of the ETPL among training providers. This past program year, the State Workforce Agency prepared a “road show” presentation explaining the benefits and opportunities of placement on the ETPL with a focus on providers in growing industries with documented strong performance. The effort resulted in over twenty new providers submitting applications for placement on the ETPL (compared to the current ETPL roster of 24 unique providers – not including Registered Apprenticeship Programs). Submitted programs are in growing industries, including healthcare, manufacturing, and a few programs specializing in Artificial Intelligence, which aligns with the Administration and the US Department of Labor’s priorities. With Individual Training Accounts remaining the primary avenue to occupational training, expanding the ETPL will offer more and better choices to job seekers looking to reskill.

PY24 also saw the continued expansion of apprenticeship opportunities aligned with these industry clusters. Rhode Island remains a leading state in implementing Registered Apprenticeship programs (RAPs) as a practical training and career preparation tool under WIOA. Rhode Island has emphasized developing RAPs outside of the traditional trades and in the state’s most significant and growing industries. The state has registered several new models in manufacturing, healthcare, and information technology, among others, and, through collaboration between the state apprenticeship office and the WIOA network, encourages the placement of such programs on the Eligible Training Provider List whenever practical. The state also provided continuous technical assistance and training to frontline WIOA staff to help them build knowledge, comfort, and understanding of Registered Apprenticeship programs, which has helped improve adoption and usage within the American Job Center network.

Performance Accountability

The state's performance accountability system, including:

- *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, as applicable, including which ETA-funded partner programs are included.*
- *Negotiated performance levels for local areas for Title I core programs. A suggested table format is below, which may be included as an attachment.*
- *The state's approach to data validation and ensuring data integrity, including a description of the methodology of any validation activities*

PY24 Local Board Code	Measure	PY24 Negotiated Target	PY24 Actual Result	PY25 Negotiated Target
44005 WSPC	Adult ERQ2	85.00%	88.0%	85.75%
44005 WSPC	Adult ERQ4	82.25%	86.2%	83.50%
44005 WSPC	Adult MEQ2	\$7,500.00	\$8,148	\$8,000.00
44005 WSPC	Adult CRED	67.00%	74.2%	68.00%
44005 WSPC	Adult MSG	51.00%	77.2%	53.00%
44005 WSPC	DW ERQ2	85.00%	91.2%	86.00%
44005 WSPC	DW ERQ4	84.50%	87.9%	85.25%
44005 WSPC	DW MEQ2	\$9,500.00	\$11,852	\$9,800.00
44005 WSPC	DW CRED	72.50%	78.6%	73.00%
44005 WSPC	DW MSG	48.00%	69.2%	49.00%
44005 WSPC	Youth ERQ2	73.00%	69.3%	74.00%
44005 WSPC	Youth ERQ4	71.00%	78.0%	72.00%
44005 WSPC	Youth MEQ2	\$3,800.00	\$3,912	\$3,900.00
44005 WSPC	Youth CRED	63.00%	72.4%	64.00%
44005 WSPC	Youth MSG	49.00%	57.5%	49.50%
44020 GRI	Adult ERQ2	78.75%	79.3%	79.50%
44020 GRI	Adult ERQ4	78.75%	83.3%	79.50%
44020 GRI	Adult MEQ2	\$8,000.00	\$9,539	\$8,350.00
44020 GRI	Adult CRED	50.50%	88.9%	52.50%
44020 GRI	Adult MSG	48.00%	62.7%	49.00%
44020 GRI	DW ERQ2	87.00%	83.0%	87.25%
44020 GRI	DW ERQ4	85.00%	89.3%	86.00%
44020 GRI	DW MEQ2	\$10,000.00	\$11,069	\$10,500.00
44020 GRI	DW CRED	71.00%	68.0%	72.50%
44020 GRI	DW MSG	52.00%	82.9%	53.00%
44020 GRI	Youth ERQ2	73.00%	72.2%	74.00%
44020 GRI	Youth ERQ4	71.00%	69.8%	72.00%
44020 GRI	Youth MEQ2	\$4,150.00	\$3,761	\$4,200.00
44020 GRI	Youth CRED	63.00%	45.9%	64.00%
44020 GRI	Youth MSG	36.00%	59.3%	38.00%

Rhode Island is pleased with statewide WIOA performance for PY24, having met or exceeded fifteen of eighteen employment and earnings performance indicators across Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Wagner-Peyser programs. The state met all performance metrics for Wagner-Peyser and Adult programming, narrowly missed the target on one Dislocated Worker metric (described below), and fell below the target on two Youth metrics (also described below), while still meeting the definition of successful performance for these indicators. Rhode Island is especially proud that these performance marks were achieved alongside a devoted focus on reaching traditionally underserved populations throughout the program year.

No single metric fell below the 50% performance threshold for a single individual indicator; however, Rhode Island underperformed against its negotiated goals for Dislocated Worker 2nd Quarter employment (99.88% of target); Youth 2nd Quarter employment (97.94% of target); and Youth Credential Attainment (87.30% of target). The state met performance on the three indicators, which were below target in PY23: Adult 4th Quarter employment, Adult Credential Attainment, and Dislocated Worker Credential Attainment.

Rhode Island will continue to monitor 2nd quarter employment rates to ensure they meet negotiated goals. Additional staff capacity and training may help provide the support and guidance participants need to obtain employment. The state has also made strategic investments and increased its focus on employer services over the past program year, with the goal of increasing employer awareness, interest, and involvement in our WIOA programming. With a greater commitment to employment, we can increase the quality and quantity of potential placement opportunities, with the hope that employment rates will improve for WIOA participants.

The state will also provide continuing technical assistance regarding how to identify, track, and report credential attainment. Technical assistance provided in response to the state's past underperformance in Adult and Dislocated services appears to have borne fruit – for example, in PY22, the state's Adult Credential Attainment was 85.25% of the target; it is now 128% of the target. This technical assistance training will be provided to Youth service providers, with appropriate follow-up, to improve performance in PY24.

The state will continue to prioritize staff training, technical assistance, and support to meet the employment and education goals of our participants, as well as the WIOA performance goals set for our state.

On February 23, 2024, the USDOL and USDOE issued a new rule regarding the reporting of Effectiveness Serving Employers as part of the required statewide Annual WIOA Reporting. Beginning with Program Year 2024 (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025); “Retention with the same Employer” will be the sole ESE metric under WIOA.

For PY24, Rhode Island’s performance on this metric is as follows:

Measure	Rate
Retention with Same Employer in the 2nd and 4th Quarters After Exit Rate	70.6%

This is an increase from PY23, where the state’s performance was 65.0%.

The state does not utilize state-specific performance measures or goals.

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 have 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 is considered to have exited the program on the date their case is closed, in accordance with the program's requirements. Under Vocational Rehabilitation, those individuals who have achieved a supported employment outcome at a subminimum wage are excluded from the definition of “exit.”

Rhode Island utilizes a “Common Exit” policy (Workforce Innovation Notice 08-01) for most WIOA core and associate programs (including the WIOA Youth Program). Under this definition, for the purposes of performance calculations and the delivery of Follow-Up Services, “Exit” is the point after which an individual who has received services through **any program** has 90 days of no services and no future services planned.

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. 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 by running WIOA Performance Reports with the Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) Reporting Assistant. Data Samples for Wagner-Peyser, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth and Trade, SCSEP, and JVSG 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.

Statewide Governor's Reserve Funds

Activities provided with the funds reserved by the governor, which can be up to 15% ³of the state's allotment.

- *Describe activities undertaken in whole or in part with the Governor's Reserve and how those activities have directly or indirectly impacted performance.*
- *States may include descriptions of state-funded activities or investments in this section.*

During PY24, Governor's Reserve funds were predominantly 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, as well as the business office staff and operations for related financial accounting and reporting. Funding was also used in support of the State Workforce Board staff and operations for WIOA oversight and related activities.

Rapid Response

Rapid response activities and layoff aversion, which may include:

- *Data on the number of companies served and the number of individuals served.*
- *Strategies for linking Rapid Response recipients to American Job Centers and processes for intake or co-enrollment in core and partner programs. Details of specific types of services provided to both companies and affected workers.*
- *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, and how layoff aversion activities are aligned with business engagement, sector strategy, and career pathway efforts. States may detail systems, tools, networks, or approaches designed to identify companies in distress and strategies to deliver necessary solutions as early as possible, as well as the outcomes of using such systems or tools.*

RIDLT's Rapid Response Layoff Aversion program provides wraparound assistance to companies at risk of layoffs or plant closures by planning and coordinating ahead of dislocation events, with the ability to mobilize services to aid companies and their affected workers, thereby minimizing disruptions associated with job loss. The Rapid Response program is built on a proactive approach and strives to sustain relationships with federal, state, and local quasi-interagency partners through the RIDLT Labor and Market Information Division, RI Commerce Corporation, HealthSource Rhode Island, and the USDOL Employee Benefits Security Administration. Program customization and responsiveness in service delivery have leveraged technology tools and digital enhancements to meet business and worker demands, maintaining effectiveness through options such as virtual information sessions, job fairs, and customized workshops that promote job readiness.

RI's Rapid Response program assisted 32 companies and 2410 dislocated workers from a wide variety of industries in PY24, offering informational sessions and career readiness workshops in several languages to support linguistic needs. During these events, representatives (community, state, and federal levels) offered resources on health insurance, unemployment insurance benefits, reemployment topics, and available training options through the Trade Adjustment Assistance and Health Care and Retirement Coverage by the US DOL Employee Benefits Security Administration. The Rapid Response Team offered both virtual and in-person services to help laid-off employees acquire all the necessary tools to re-enter the workforce as quickly as possible.

The state Rapid Response team has a number of layoff-aversion tools in its toolbox that are made available to employers. The WorkShare program enables employers to retain their skilled workers during periods of slowdown by reducing the work hours of a group of employees and allowing those employees to receive a portion of their regular unemployment insurance benefits to compensate for the lost wages, for up to 52 weeks. The state-funded Incumbent Worker Training grant program provides up to a 75% reimbursement for eligible costs (up to \$30,000) on employee reskilling and reallocating talent. The team can also engage state Economic Development organizations to explore other business opportunities that can prevent or minimize layoffs.

Wagner-Peyser Activities

Activities provided under the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service section 7(a) and 7(b), including activities such as providing job search and placement to Unemployment Insurance claimants, administering the work test, and making eligibility assessments (e.g., Reemployment Services Eligibility Assessment).

Under the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service, the state has implemented a comprehensive, tiered sequence of services designed to ensure that all individuals entering the workforce development system receive timely and meaningful support. Upon entry, every customer is automatically enrolled in Wagner-Peyser services and connected with a career specialist who provides comprehensive career guidance and labor exchange activities. This universal enrollment model ensures equitable access to services, regardless of income, background, or employment barriers. Wagner-Peyser services form the foundation of the state's workforce strategy, with co-enrollment into WIOA Adult or Dislocated Worker programs reserved for customers who express interest in, or demonstrate need for, occupational training or more intensive services. This approach maximizes efficiency while ensuring that every job seeker has access to individualized, work-focused career services.

Wagner-Peyser staff deliver a robust set of career services tailored to the needs of job seekers.

These services include individualized career counseling, resume development, mock interviews, job referrals, and guidance on effective work search strategies. Counselors are trained to interpret and share real-time labor market information (LMI), enabling job seekers to make informed career decisions based on current and emerging industry needs. Staff are also equipped to discuss evolving workforce trends, such as the growing influence of artificial intelligence and automation, ensuring that customers understand the skills in demand and how to remain competitive. This dual emphasis on immediate job search assistance and long-term labor market insights positions customers to pursue sustainable employment opportunities.

In addition to career services, Wagner-Peyser plays an integral role in supporting the state's Unemployment Insurance (UI) system. Employment Service staff assist claimants in navigating the UI application process, connecting them to self-help tools, and addressing any technical or procedural questions they may have. By bridging UI and workforce development services, Wagner-Peyser ensures that claimants not only secure their benefits but also begin the process of reemployment planning early in their UI claim cycle. This integration reduces barriers, minimizes delays, and ensures that unemployed individuals are connected to reemployment resources at the moment of greatest need.

A cornerstone of the state's Wagner-Peyser program is the delivery of Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA). Individuals selected for RESEA receive a mailed (and emailed) notification of their mandatory participation and are provided the flexibility to schedule their initial appointment either virtually or in person, at a time most convenient for them. During RESEA appointments, Wagner-Peyser-funded staff review work search requirements, conduct eligibility assessments to ensure continued UI compliance, and orient participants to the full array of workforce development services available through the American Job Centers. Beyond compliance, RESEA staff focus on building pathways back to meaningful employment through targeted services such as resume critiques, job search coaching, and referrals to occupational training where appropriate.

The RESEA process serves as a vital bridge between unemployment and reemployment, reinforcing accountability while offering actionable career services. By combining eligibility reviews with personalized guidance, RESEA appointments encourage claimants to engage with the workforce system and take proactive steps toward re-entering the workforce. This holistic approach not only supports claimants in meeting UI requirements but also enhances their long-term employability and connection to in-demand jobs. Staff also leverage LMI to demonstrate how local industries are shifting and to highlight high-demand sectors, empowering participants to make informed decisions about upskilling or retraining.

Overall, the state's Wagner-Peyser program has evolved into a fully integrated service model that supports both the immediate and long-term employment needs of job seekers. By aligning career services, UI assistance, and RESEA delivery, the program ensures that every participant

receives guidance, accountability, and opportunities for reemployment. The result is a workforce system that is both customer-centered and responsive to economic conditions, positioning the state to support its residents as they adapt to a dynamic labor market.

National Dislocated Worker Grants (NDWGs)

NDWGs 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 NDWGs fit in with state co-enrollment policies and disaster/emergency management activities, as applicable.

The QUEST Disaster Recovery DWG was awarded to Rhode Island DLT in 2022. Through the QUEST grant, Rhode Island adopted a "no-wrong-door" approach, supporting participant enrollment through multiple entry points, including Community-Based Organizations and American Job Centers. In line with this effort, through Rhode Island's signature sector partnership initiative (Real Jobs RI), RIDLT executed contracts with over 30 organizations aligned to critical industry sectors, including infrastructure-related sectors and the care economy. These contracts represent workforce development programs specifically aligned with the QUEST intent. Contracts were also executed with the Rhode Island Office of Postsecondary Commissioner Support Service Navigator program and all of Rhode Island's Local Workforce Development Boards.

In PY24, Rhode Island made tremendous progress meeting the stated goals and intent of the QUEST grant program - to support pandemic-impacted workers, industries, and communities. Our focus on training for in-demand occupations resulted in the provision of services to one thousand five hundred and sixteen (1516) participants during the program year (3497 total for grant performance, with over half receiving training) - surpassing our stated enrollment goal. In keeping with the QUEST focus of ensuring services for those most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, over ninety percent (90%) of Rhode Island's QUEST served participants are experiencing at least one of the following barriers to employment: justice involved, English Language Learners, those experiencing houselessness, single parents/runaway youth, low income individuals, Migrant Seasonal Farmworkers, elder individuals, and Long Term Unemployed.

A significant part of this success in enrollments was Rhode Island's focus on fulfilling the intent of the QUEST NDWG, through engaging communities across the state and ensuring access to the trainings funded for those disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This focus highlighted that many of the clients served by our contractors required supplementary support to be training-ready, such as additional case management, credentialing support, as well as enhanced non-training supports to address barriers to employment. These additional supports also required additional time and resulted in credential and employment outcomes that have not yet been fully realized for some of our clients.

To fully realize the opportunities supported by the QUEST grant, Rhode Island sought and was awarded a no-cost Period of Performance extension through September 30, 2025 – beyond the reporting period for this Annual Narrative. With this additional time, Rhode Island ensured credentialing and employment opportunities were fully supported for all communities served, as well as continuing to support enrollments through the American Job Centers and contracted training providers.

State Best Practices and Needs

This section may address:

- *Challenges the state workforce system faces, which may include policy, implementation, reporting, data analysis, or other relevant challenges, and any assistance needs of the state to address those challenges.*
- *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 individuals with a barrier to employment as defined in WIOA Section 3(24)⁴, Registered Apprenticeships, or other populations the State may wish to discuss.*
- *Strategies/policies relating to Pay-for-Performance contracting, which may include examples from local areas.*

Rhode Island has been strategically focused on installing Registered Apprenticeship as a recognized and utilized workforce solution within the American Job Center system. Through strategic partnerships with the State Apprenticeship Council and industry/labor intermediaries, information regarding ETPL/WIOA funding is regularly distributed to sponsor employers. American Job Center managers and designated Apprenticeship-ambassadors participate in a series of discussions focusing on the structure of the Registered Apprenticeship Program, their placement on the ETPL, and supportive services operations and procedures. As of the writing of this report, thirty-eight (38) RAPs are registered on ETPL.

This focus on Registered Apprenticeship is a ground-up, not top-down, effort. Rhode Island specifically and intensely focused on frontline staff when rolling out Registered Apprenticeship within the America Job Center system; providing repeated training, technical assistance, and “help desk/office hours” resources to help ensure that job coaches and counselors understood the unique features of Registered Apprenticeship (as compared to the training models they were historically familiar with); and how to maximize WIOA resources when connecting customers with Registered Apprenticeship Programs. This approach was a key factor in the successful adoption of Registered Apprenticeship within

the state workforce system, breaking down misconceptions and misunderstandings that could otherwise hinder that process.

A second key priority for Rhode Island's career pathways system during PY24 was to significantly expand the quality and quantity of traditional training programs available on the state's Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). Previously, the state took a more passive approach to maintaining the ETPL, processing applications as they were submitted but not actively building awareness of the ETPL among training providers. This past program year, the State Workforce Agency prepared a "road show" presentation explaining the benefits and opportunities of placement on the ETPL with a focus on providers in growing industries with documented strong performance. The effort resulted in over twenty new providers submitting applications for placement on the ETPL (compared to the current ETPL roster of 24 unique providers – not including Registered Apprenticeship Programs). Submitted programs are in growing industries, including healthcare, manufacturing, and a few programs specializing in Artificial Intelligence, which aligns with the Administration and the US Department of Labor's priorities. With Individual Training Accounts remaining the primary avenue to occupational training, expanding the ETPL will offer more and better choices to job seekers looking to reskill.