



Case Study

Apprenticeship Rhode Island



September 2019

Quick Look

Location: Rhode Island

Sector: Healthcare, Information Technology and Manufacturing

Occupations: 55 occupations since program launch

Launched: 2016

Length: 1 to 4+ years depending on occupation

Type: Time-based/Competency-based/Hybrid

Sponsor: Building Futures

Sponsorship Model Type: Individual/Group, Joint/Non-Joint

Workforce Target: 30% from minorities, including women in male-dominated occupations.

URL: apprenticeshipri.org

Apprenticeship RI has helped register 55 non-traditional occupations on behalf of 36 sponsors and 69 employers. These programs have trained 750 apprentices.

Apprenticeship RI is helping Rhode Island employers design, register, implement and sustain their non-traditional apprenticeship programs. 55 new occupations have been registered over the past three years in the healthcare, information technology and manufacturing sectors.

Background & Approach

Building Futures was founded in 2007 with a mission to meet construction industry need for skilled workers through the Registered Apprenticeship system while creating family-sustaining career opportunities for low-income diverse community members. It provides hands-on pre-apprenticeship training, education and other workforce readiness services that prepare individuals for Registered Apprenticeship (RA) programs in the construction industry. Seeing the value of the training approach to both employers and workers, Building Futures sought to expand RA programs beyond the trades to other sectors also struggling to find skilled workers. With support from an American Apprenticeship Initiative grant, in 2016 Building Futures launched Apprenticeship Rhode Island.

Apprenticeship RI provides technical assistance to help Rhode Island employers design, register, implement and sustain their apprenticeship programs. It works with both large and small employers in sectors that include Information Technology, Healthcare and Manufacturing. Apprenticeship RI connects these employees to training providers, curriculum resources, and often provides support to sponsors who want to create and deliver customized instruction in-house. It also helps companies leverage state and federal resources that can offset their apprentice training costs. In addition, Apprenticeship RI helps the state build their capacity to manage the growing apprenticeship ecosystem.

Example of Outreach Materials for Healthcare Apprenticeships

Benefits of Apprenticeship for Healthcare Employers

▶ Addressing a Talent Shortage

As baby-boomer nurses and other medical professionals begin to retire, healthcare organizations are turning to the apprenticeship model as a creative recruitment strategy as well as an opportunity to up-skill current employees. Apprenticeship provides experienced workers a chance to pass along their knowledge to the next generation.

▶ Creating Consistency in Practice

With an overlap in occupational titles and job responsibilities system-wide, apprenticeship can create a consistent system for on-the-job learning as well as related training.

▶ Enhancing Skills

For certified and licensed professions, apprenticeship offers a structured way to up-skill the entire workforce to the required professional standards.

▶ Developing Career Pathways

The model of apprenticeship lends itself to creating lateral or upward career pathways as well as cross-training between different occupations.

▶ Measuring Outcomes

Studies show increased ROI and improved talent recruitment. 97% of apprenticeship sponsors would recommend the model to others.

▶ Expanding into New Occupations

Biomedical Equipment Technician
Case Manager Specialist
Community Health Nurse
Community Health Worker
Certified Peer Recovery Counselor
Fetal Echo Ultrasound Technician
Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN)
Medical Assistant
Medical Coder
Medical Interpreter
Pharmacy Technician

Challenges

Raising Awareness

Creating a culture of apprenticeships in non-traditional industries has been slow system-changing work that has required patience and persistence. Registered Apprenticeship programs are relatively new in the healthcare, manufacturing and IT industries, and this unfamiliarity initially made it challenging to make inroads with employers. Cold calls were not a very effective approach, but Apprenticeship RI did find success by partnering with organizations and industry associations that can open doors to employers and help get them interested in RA.

Once employers are engaged they have been fairly receptive to the workforce strategy, but they do need ongoing guidance to get them up to speed on the terminology and requirements. Employers also need help shifting from a mentality of hiring fully qualified people versus hiring people and training them. This sometimes requires rethinking entry requirements for a job position. The growth in IT apprentices has probably been slowed by employers designing 1-2 year apprenticeships requiring an IT degree for entry, rather than longer programs that open the door to applicants without an IT degree.

Geography

Rhode Island's geography has provided both challenges and opportunities. It is the smallest state in the Union and does not have a lot of big 'anchor' clients that can sponsor and fill programs on their own. As a result, Apprenticeship RI has focused on promoting the Group Sponsorship model to Industry Associations that are already partnering with smaller companies. While this adds to the time needed for administrative and reporting requirements, it has also enabled Apprenticeship RI to more quickly become known across the state. The State's small size also means networks between companies within industries are already well developed. Since "everyone knows everyone" it can make it easier to organize cohorts of apprentices from multiple companies.

Success Factors

Employer-Focused

Based on Apprenticeship RI's experience, if a company doesn't have a pain point they are not a good prospect for an apprenticeship program. All of its programs are employer-driven and designed around a company's specific workforce challenges.

The ability for employers to customize their programs is a key selling point for apprenticeships. It also helps that the Rhode Island State Apprenticeship Council is fairly open to accepting what employers propose, and take employers as experts in their own workforce needs.

Extensive follow-up with employers is also a must. Employers get busy and balls get dropped, so it's important to regularly check-in and make sure employers are moving forward.

Cultivating Champions

Apprenticeship RI has cultivated employer champions in all the industries they serve, and have provided opportunities to connect these leaders to other businesses through panel discussions and other industry-focused events. These champions provide valuable word-of-mouth promotion for apprenticeship programs through Rhode Island's well-developed industry networks.

"If you have lost your path while hiking, then you know the fear that comes with losing your way. Like a path in the woods, Apprenticeship provides the space and direction to reach your career goal – even when you encounter obstacles along the way." - Andrew Cortés, Executive Director of Building Futures

Start with Incumbent Workers

When Apprenticeship RI started most of their partners were interested in incumbent worker training first. Focusing on existing employees de-risked the approach for employers and helped get them onboard. Once these employers adopted apprenticeship and became comfortable with the training approach, more of them have started to use RA as a recruitment tool for new hires.

Union Support

While the vast majority of Apprenticeship RI's RA programs are non-union, those programs where the union has taken a leadership role are a bit stronger. When unions and management are collaborating, the outcomes have generally been better, and this collective focus on shared goals has been shown to improve the collective bargaining process as well.

Looking Ahead

Apprenticeship RI continues to see strong interest in apprenticeship among employers who need help designing and registering programs and establishing apprenticeship as part of their workplace culture. Looking ahead the organization intends to grow their staff to grow their impact, starting with an employee focused on supporting non-HIB occupations including the building trades.

Future activities include continuing to develop employer champions statewide, and targeting new companies. Apprenticeship RI also plans to work with high schools, focusing on the youth apprenticeship movement and growing and expanding non-trade pre-apprenticeship programs. It is also looking at sustainability for existing programs, including connecting them with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) dollars.

For more information, contact:

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