

Rhode to Prosperity

A Working Document

Employer-aligned, data-driven, and focused on raising Rhode Islanders' income and personal wealth.

In Governor Dan McKee's State of the State Address earlier this year, he set a goal to raise per capita income in Rhode Island by a minimum of \$20,000 by the year 2030. From that goal, Rhode to Prosperity was formed under the leadership of Department of Labor & Training Director Matthew Weldon and Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner Shannon Gilkey. Much like Governor McKee's Learn365RI goal of raising student outcomes to reach Massachusetts achievement levels by 2030, Rhode to Prosperity will be a statewide effort that seeks to address raising incomes, one of the McKee Administration's top three goals for Rhode Island: improving education outcomes, raising incomes and personal wealth, and building a healthier state.

We know that Rhode Islanders can succeed when they have a clear path to higher-wage employment, access to the necessary skill development, and supports to help them along the way. This working document will be shared and discussed with employers, educational institutions, labor leaders and other stakeholders over the next several months. Together, we will build out this strategy and put our state on a Rhode to Prosperity.

The labor force conditions are shifting, and Rhode Island needs to harness the wave of change to propel its residents forward. Success means more Rhode Islanders in higher wage jobs, so they may gain access to a higher quality of life and, in many cases, afford to own a home. Progress is accomplished by providing more and better opportunities for Rhode Islanders to become skilled, technical, and postsecondary-credentialed workers. The preparation Rhode Islanders—young and old—receive, the opportunities afforded to them, and the effectiveness of the education and training system to support them on their path to a credential are now more important than ever.

In 14 of the last 15 months, Rhode Island has grown its workforce, reaching a record 583,500 participants in March. In fact, according to the [Bureau of Labor and Statistics](#), Rhode Island is leading New England in the annual percentage change in employment. Rhode Island is also currently surpassing its neighbors in the quarterly percentage change in per capita income, according to the [Bureau of Economic Analysis](#). This momentum is exciting.

However, while our percentage growth in income may be exceeding our neighbors, actual wages are still below those in Massachusetts and Connecticut—a gap that has widened over the years. Rhode Island must accelerate its efforts to skill up its workforce in order to raise incomes and personal wealth.

That is why we propose a strategic approach to education and training opportunities—one that connects skill development to existing and emerging jobs in sectors where we have a strong presence or anticipate future growth—sectors such as but not limited to construction, offshore wind, life sciences, cybersecurity and artificial intelligence. The approach must articulate currently viable pathways to higher-wage jobs within those sectors and then, in the long-term, identify and build new pathways that lead to improved income generation.

Measurements:

The Rhode to Prosperity will measure what matters: postsecondary attainment, higher wages and home ownership – and pivot our state strategies to focus on moving these indicators.

1. *Rhode to Postsecondary Attainment* – In addition to monitoring the annual performance and progress toward postsecondary attainment, we will align career and technical education (CTE), trade and workforce training certifications with higher-wage jobs available in the economy.
2. *Rhode to Higher Wages* – In addition to employment data, we will evaluate our progress toward higher wages quarterly by monitoring per capita income (PCPI) from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA). This will provide our state with a focus on Rhode Islanders' changes in average wages compared to the consumer price index, which includes rates of inflation.
3. *Rhode to Home Ownership* – Owning a home and progressing through the housing market is a proven strategy to increase wealth over time. While our administration has made significant investments to increase the production of housing inventory, we will measure our progress toward ensuring Rhode Islanders purchase those homes over time.

Proposed Strategies:

Rhode Island has tremendous workforce needs across industries. To move the needle on higher wages, we'll need to make bolder moves in the following proposed strategies, ensuring Rhode Islanders and our employers have access to the necessary talent pipelines.

Because thoughtful efforts in recent years have created many workforce development success stories in Rhode Island, we do not need to start from scratch. Rather, we need to strategically build upon our network of adult education, CTE, workforce training, postsecondary credentialing—with a renewed focus on employer input, involvement and investment.

To help bolster the strategies outlined below, the State is also making an \$81.7 million investment to create community learning centers across the state. These state-of-the-art spaces will offer programming to improve education outcomes and student performance, provide workforce training for better and higher-paying jobs, and help residents monitor their health.

Our proposed strategies include:

Clear pathways to higher-wage employment – Our education and workforce training system must prioritize the development of skills and clear pathways to higher-wage/high-demand occupations for Rhode Islanders of all working ages. This system of clear pathways should include flexible off- and on-ramps within education and training programs to accommodate adult participants' personal and familial responsibilities. The system must also address the need for coaching, wrap-around supports, and financial literacy. Businesses of all sizes can also build internal pathways to higher-wage employment to ensure better employee retention and increased levels of productivity.

Partnering with business and labor leaders, the Rhode Island education and training community will increase its focus on adult education, CTE, higher education, and workforce training that align with higher-wage jobs. Our strategy will identify existing pathways to higher-wage occupations and then propose ways to build new pathways over time, ensuring Rhode Islanders have the necessary education and training and the required support to earn a higher-wage job. Each plan will pay special attention to career ladders within high-need/higher-wage occupations.

Experiential learning – Work experience is a proven model for delivering education and training. Rhode Island is prepared to bet big on employer-aligned models for providing on-the-job experience for our Rhode Islanders who want access to higher-wage jobs. Apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities must dramatically scale up by 2030 for our state to ensure that Rhode Islanders are prepared for the next step in their careers. Rhode Island’s work-based learning strategy will be twofold.

- **First, we will expand registered apprenticeships.** Apprenticeships are among our most effective training models; by design, they lead to wage growth, skill advancement, and credential attainment. They are a proven workforce development approach used by hundreds of Rhode Island employers, particularly in the trades but increasingly in non-trade occupations. Expanding apprenticeships in Rhode Island will dramatically and positively impact residents’ earning power over time.
- **Second, we will embed experiential learning across education and training programs.** Our state will work with employers and education and training providers of all sizes, seeking commitments to provide work-based learning opportunities for higher-wage occupations that align with employer needs. Every postsecondary credential program will seek to include a work-based learning component by 2030.



Achieving our goal of raising incomes and personal wealth involves more than government investment and policy. It requires broad-based participation among businesses, educational institutions and, most importantly, the Rhode Islanders who make up our workforce.

That is why outreach is the next logical step in building out the Rhode to Prosperity strategy. This summer, the McKee Administration will hold convenings among business and education leaders to better identify ways the current workforce development system can support industry needs—and conversely, how industry can provide work-based learning opportunities to its own employees to support career advancement and improve retention.

No single sector can lead this effort alone—it will require collective ownership, collaboration, and urgency. Recognizing the scope of Rhode Island's challenge to raise incomes by 2030 is a critical first step to catalyze cross-sector action, and our administration seeks the community’s help in making it a reality.