



Observations on Rhode Island's Workforce Efforts

Rhode Island, though small, has been a leading state in bringing its workforce into the digital age. The state's leadership team, including the governor, has asked the Markle Foundation to discuss the importance of the initiatives they have undertaken.

The unrelenting digitization of our economy has propelled America into the greatest economic transition since the Industrial Revolution. Rhode Island has an innovative vision and proven commitment to workforce development – starting in kindergarten and going through college to lifelong learning – and is effectively bringing together the stakeholders in the labor market to enable businesses to get the workforce they need and workers real opportunity. Rhode Island and the Markle Foundation share a common goal of preparing students, workers and businesses for success in the digital economy, and, over the years, the state's leadership team has been a valuable advisor in informing the Foundation's strategy and actions.

We have today an American paradox: Across the country, six-million-plus jobs are going unfilled often because employers can't find skilled workers yet millions of Americans with in-demand skills, or job seekers who are capable of learning those skills, are unemployed or underemployed.

Markle's [Skillful initiative](#), which launched in 2016 in Colorado, works with businesses, job seekers and workers, and educators to create a skills-based labor market that enables employers to find the talent they need, job seekers to see where the jobs are and find jobs uniquely suited to their skills, and educators to know what training is needed to create a skilled, nimble and entrepreneurial workforce.

"Skillful in a Box" was created thanks to imaginative input from Rhode Island's governor. It enables all states to benefit from Skillful, as it gives employers the templates, tools and access to training and resources to help transition their businesses to skills-based hiring.

A Pew Research Center survey, conducted in association with Markle, found that eighty-seven percent of Americans believe that lifelong training is central to career success in the digital age. Rhode Island's response to the demands of the new labor landscape has been to put in place initiatives that provide robust resources that link education, training and career development to support the work force of the 21st century. Real Jobs RI, for example, has helped boost the state's jobs to the highest-ever – 499,200 – with a gain of 3,100 alone this past August.

Real Jobs RI has brought together 300 firms in 17 industries to partner with 150 skills-training programs to provide skills education to current and potential employees while retaining and obtaining talent, allowing incumbent employees to improve their skills as their employers fill immediate openings with experienced workers. As of September 1, more than 900 new hires have been placed – including 400 job seekers in high-skill jobs building submarines at Electric Boat – and 500 incumbent workers trained for future advancement.





Rhode Island students, through CS4RI (Computer Science for Rhode Island Initiative), are learning the skills and critical thinking needed to create, get and advance in good jobs in the 21st century. By this December, children in every school in the state will be taught computer skills starting in kindergarten and continuing with AP Computer Science courses in high school.

The state's focus on higher education and its crucial role in preparing residents for rewarding careers this year produced the Promise Scholarship which covers the cost of tuition and fees at the Community College of Rhode Island for all state residents who graduated high school the previous spring.

Rhode Island's innovative public and private sector partnerships, such as Real Jobs RI and CS4RI, are part of an effort to leverage existing resources more effectively and craft new tools and programs to equip Rhode Islanders, of all ages and backgrounds, to engage in lifelong learning that meets the needs of the new work world.

All Americans deserve to find a meaningful place in the new economy. We encourage Amazon to set the standard for the nation by emphasizing a state's deep commitment to preparing its workforce for the jobs of the future.

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