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Policy Brief



RESEARCH IMPROVING PEOPLE'S LIVES



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Unlocking Data and Science to Improve Workforce Training

How can we improve reskilling programs to expand opportunity?

Americans expect policy leaders to solve their communities' toughest problems. A major nationwide challenge is growing inequality driven by a changing economy. America spends billions on reskilling programs, but government has few measures of what actually works. **Policy leaders want reskilling programs to generate shared economic prosperity and expanded opportunity for all workers. They want programs that are cost-effective, delivering skills for gainful employment within tightening public budgets.**

Research Improving People's Lives (RIPL) is leading a National Science Foundation (NSF)-funded, cross-sector partnership to help government use its own data to more meaningfully evaluate the effectiveness of workforce programs. How are we doing this? **In partnership with government, we are accurately calculating training and reskilling program effectiveness. We provide an easy-to-use, easy-to-understand web and mobile platform to share these measures.** Workers and job counselors will use these measures to make informed choices and gain the skills they need for the jobs of the future. Policy leaders can use them to know which programs work, expand access to those programs, and motivate all training program providers to innovate and improve. **The result will be better opportunities and outcomes for all workers per dollar spent on training.**

RIPL is a leading nonprofit research institute with faculty affiliates from top research universities across the country that partners with government to unlock data and science for research and the public good. We build comprehensive administrative data resources that empower policymakers to generate scientific-grade insights at the speed needed to make informed decisions. We partner with government to launch initiatives that support data-driven innovation and impact in healthcare, social insurance, workforce development, education, criminal justice, and civic participation.

RIPL has engaged two states (RI and CA) in Phase 1 of the NSF-funded workforce initiative. **We are adding three state or county partners to Phase 2, with the goal of scaling to a national model.** We seek government partners whose leaders are excited to come together to use their own data, paired with our expertise and funding, to improve workforce opportunity for all.

What will government partners receive?

- 1. Return-on-investment (ROI) calculations that are scientifically proven ways to measure how much value training programs add to later employment and opportunity.** Expert science teams from Brown, Columbia, Dartmouth, Stanford, and the University of Chicago, the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), and RIPL will code software with ROI measures. They will ensure the ROI measures identify real improvement in skills and jobs. This method is superior to the use of simple statistics, which fail to identify important factors that impact results.
- 2. Easy-to-use, user-centered interface for using ROI measures.** Government partners will get a web and mobile interface that provides workers, job counselors and policy leaders with ready access to better data on workforce outcomes. Workers and job counselors will be able to easily search programs and see ROI measures, so that they can make informed decisions that lead to gainful employment. Program providers will be able to innovate and improve. Government will use the measures to expand access to proven programs, creating a cycle that supports prosperity for all.

- 3. Technical resources and expertise to support data-driven policy insights and run the ROI measures going forward.** Partners get a secure cloud environment to safely host, join, and anonymize administrative records for insights. Our expert team has designed a safe, government-owned and -operated system to host administrative data with FedRAMP security, join it, anonymize it, and optimize it for insights. It will support the ROI measures, and can also generate dashboards and performance metrics to support broader policy goals in labor, education, crime, and other important policy areas.

Moreover, building this critical capacity means states can adapt and pivot to launch new, streamlined products, services, and insights in response to any crisis or need. For example, see [RIPL and Rhode Island's partnership](#) to immediately and successfully launch Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Claims system within 10 days of the CARES Act passage, so that people in crisis could be supported with desperately-needed unemployment benefits.¹

- 4. Funding, recruiting and administrative support to hire a project manager, data engineer, and community liaison.** We will hire a team for each government partner to implement a turn-key plan to align stakeholders, run the ROI measures, and disseminate them to expand opportunity. This team will have experience and expertise in relationship management and coalition-building.
- 5. Dedicated project and technical support.** RIPL's expert team will support end-to-end project implementation. A RIPL partnership will produce sustainable assets and processes that can be utilized for additional insights and dashboards for education and workforce development policy intelligence. Amazon Web Services (AWS) will train project staff on safely and securely using cloud computing, elevating government partners to the next level in using data, technology, and science to measure what works and act on it.
- 6. Turn-key manual and training to use ROI measures.** RIPL and the Centers for Civic Impact at Johns Hopkins University will provide a comprehensive set of resources for efficient and effective project implementation, ownership and operation by government partners going forward. These resources include surveys of local job seekers for each partner. Designed and implemented by a team of leading behavioral scientists, including ideas42, a leading nonprofit behavioral design and consulting firm, the survey results will provide valuable insights for policy leaders into the goals and needs of their workforce to help shape broader policy decisions.
- 7. Opportunity to introduce and finance "Pay for Success" measures.** A Pay for Success approach can increase funding for training and reskilling programs that work. Maycomb Capital will work with government partners and training programs to help them understand their data for improved employment results, ensuring that all training programs have the ability to reach their potential for scale and positive impact.
- 8. Membership in a growing community of practice.** A RIPL partnership empowers partners to join a network of other innovative, forward-thinking state, county, and local governments. Members will be able to instantly and securely replicate work that others have already successfully completed, share knowledge and innovation so that other policy leaders can learn from their successes, and have complete control over what and how much they share.

¹ The system is publicly available to all states. Please go to for more information. <https://www.ripl.org/ripl-and-state-of-rhode-island-partnership-leads-nation-in-response-to-covid/>

What will government partners provide?

1. **Leadership time and decision-making ability to drive project momentum.** We will launch a fully-functional platform and supporting infrastructure by 2022. Partners will provide a support letter for the project, and a point person with decision-making ability to coordinate implementation. We will give priority to state partners that have strong workforce improvement goals — such as states with Governor-led goals and counties with Board of Supervisors or CEO-led goals. We may also give priority to partners with supplemental funding or existing opportunities for the pilot.
2. **Willingness to partner with our expert science team to set up access to state administrative data, in compliance with all federal and state security and privacy laws, through a secure Amazon Web Services cloud environment.** The science team can build the environment and database solution, provide sample data use agreements, and provide a comprehensive manual for implementing security, access controls, and effective cloud governance. The environment and data will always be owned by government. Workforce, education, and corrections data support the project. Additional data from TANF, SNAP or non-government programs can be added to expand impact across additional policy domains.
3. **Staff time to brief project partners on unique features of the state (or local) workforce system.** We will conduct fieldwork at local workforce development sites, nonprofits, and training partners to deliver a high-quality program tailored to the needs of each partner’s communities.
4. **A drive for innovation and willingness to grow.** The RIPL team will deliver a new methodology for using science and data to improve outcomes for people. While this project is focused on applying this methodology in the workforce area, our goals are to apply the process and resources in a range of policy areas to improve lives.

What is the timeline?

1. We will select the first cohort of partners by **May 2020**.
2. We will launch a fully-functional platform and supporting infrastructure by **2021**.
3. Government partners can also work with RIPL **past 2021** to drive new policy insights and projects using the sustainable, ongoing resources built as part of the NSF-funded initiative.

How do we get started?

To learn more about participation, please contact us at FOWcoalition@ripl.org. To view the project abstract and current partner list, visit the RIPL website [here](#) (password: “futureofwork”).