

# Rhode Island indicators: Aging & work

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## RHODE ISLAND INDICATORS: AGING & WORK

By: Michelle Wong with  
Tay McNamara, Sandee Shulkin, Chelsea Lettieri and Vanessa Careiro

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### Quick Fact Check for Rhode Island

• Median age of the population	38.4 years
• % population 55+	24.7%
• Median age of the workforce	41.3 years
• % of population ages 55-64 employed	62.8%
• % workforce ages 55-64 self employed	17.4%
• Unemployment Rate of ages 55 - 64	4.8%
• Economic activity by industry sector	14.4% of GDP is real estate, rental & leasing
• Industry sectors with high percentages of workers 50-59 years old	Textile, apparel & leather manufacturing: 29.1% Primary metals & fabricated metal products: 25.7% Miscellaneous & not specified manufacturing: 25.0%
• Occupational groups with high percentages of workers 50-59 years old	Production occupations: 22.7% Education, training & library: 22.5% Management: 20.5%
• Educational levels achieved by residents 55 years or older	28.6% bachelors degree or higher

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>State Profiles Overview</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Section 1: Age Demographics of the Population</b> Introduction Population Changes: Distribution by Age 2000-2006 Anticipated Population Changes: Distribution by Age 2006-2010	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Section 2: Labor Force Participation Demographics and Age</b> Introduction Labor Force Participation: Distribution by Age Labor Force Participation in the Public Sector, Private Sector, and Self-Employed by Age Unemployment Rates by Age	<b>Page 6</b>
<b>Section 3: Industry Sector and Occupational Groups</b> Introduction Economic Output Employment by Industry Sectors Employment by Occupational Groups	<b>Page 11</b>
<b>Section 4: Education &amp; Workforce Preparedness</b> Introduction Educational Attainment by Age	<b>Page 14</b>
<b>Section 5: Legislative Readiness</b> Introduction Current Legislation Legislative Committees	<b>Page 15</b>
<b>Table of Figures: Appendix A</b>	<b>Page 18</b>

## State Profiles Overview

Changes in the age composition of the population – and of the labor force – have emerged as one of the defining social, economic and public policy issues of the 21st century. State leaders across the country are grappling with the implications of these shifts. As they move from awareness-to-action, they need access to information.

The State Perspectives Institute at the Boston College Center on Aging & Work has developed State Profiles to provide thoughtful leaders with information needed for planning decisions.

The State Profiles include information about the age demographics of the population, age demographics of the labor force, industry sectors and occupational groups, education and workforce preparedness, and legislative readiness.

## Section 1: Age Demographics of the Population

### Introduction

Age is one factor that helps us to predict and understand different types of life experiences. Some of these relationships are obvious. For instance, entry into the workforce typically occurs between the ages of 18 and 25. There are also connections between age and people's assessment of different aspects of their lives, such as life satisfaction. Information about age can provide insights into some of the interests and supports needed by people. For example, states with large percentages of people between the ages of 25-34 are likely to find differences in the demands for specific types of services than those states with high percentages of people over the age of 75 years.

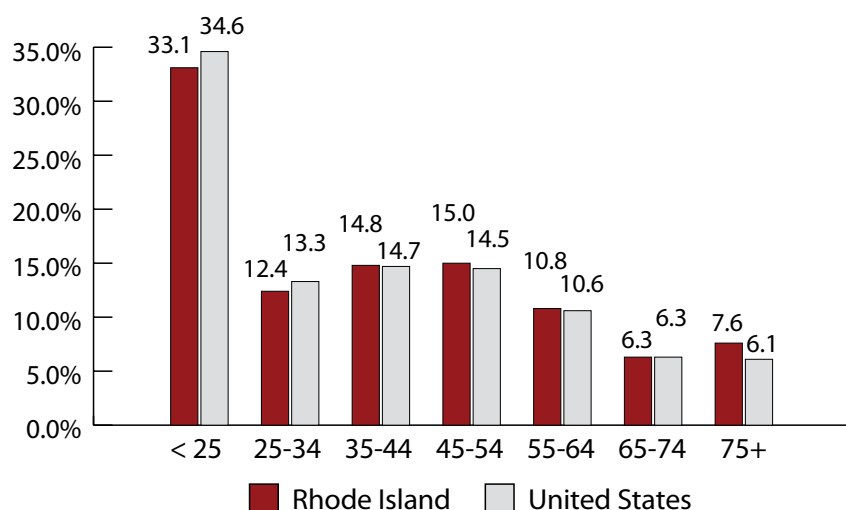
The median age in Rhode Island, 38.4, is higher than the median age of the nation, 36.4.

*Questions you might want to consider:*

*How does the age distribution of the population in our state compare to all of the states in the country?*

*Have businesses and education/health/social service providers in the state customized their marketing and outreach and delivery of products and services to the different age groups?*

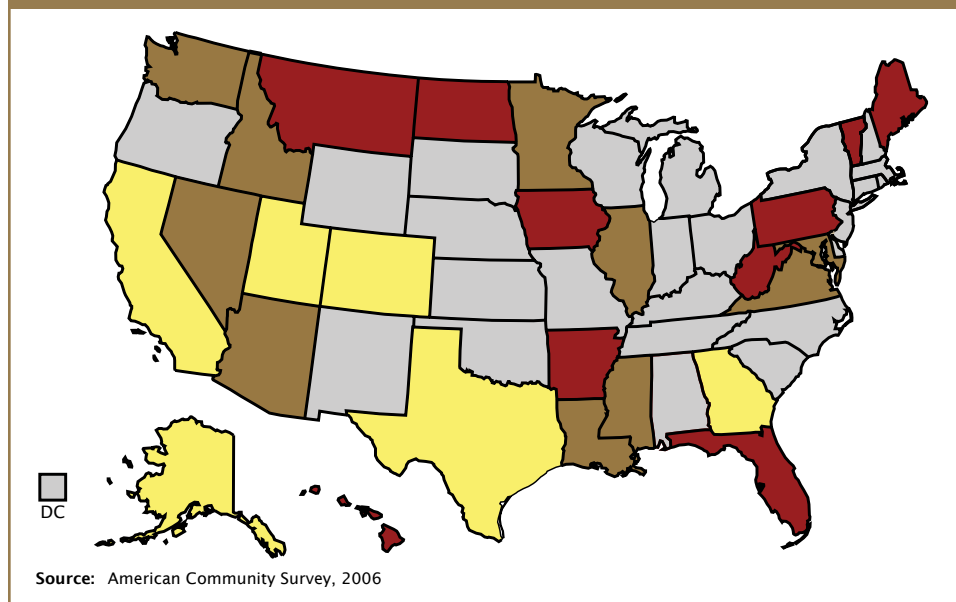
Figure 1: Population by Age (2006)



Source: American Community Survey, 2006

Nearly one in every four people residing in Rhode Island (24.7% of Rhode Island's population) is 55 years of age or older.

**Figure 2: % of Population Aged 55+ by State**



## Population Changes: Distribution by Age 2000-2006

### Importance of this Information:

Unique leadership opportunities can arise when there are shifts in trends, such as changes in the age demographics of the population. These changes may prompt leaders to pause, step-back, and think about the past, the present, and the future.

Times of change can also be opportune moments for state leaders in the government, business, and non-profit sectors to assess the state's capacity to leverage the changes into competitive advantages.

### Observation about Recent Changes in the Age Distribution of Rhode Island's Population:

From 2000-2006, the changes in the age distribution of Rhode Island's population reflect national trends. That is, in Rhode Island, there was a decrease in the percentage of the population under the age of 45 and an increase in the 45-64 age group. In comparison to national statistics, Rhode Island was behind the curve with regard to the increase in the percentage of people aged 75 and older.

#### Key:

- 25% +
- 23 - 24.9%
- 21 - 22.9%
- < 21%

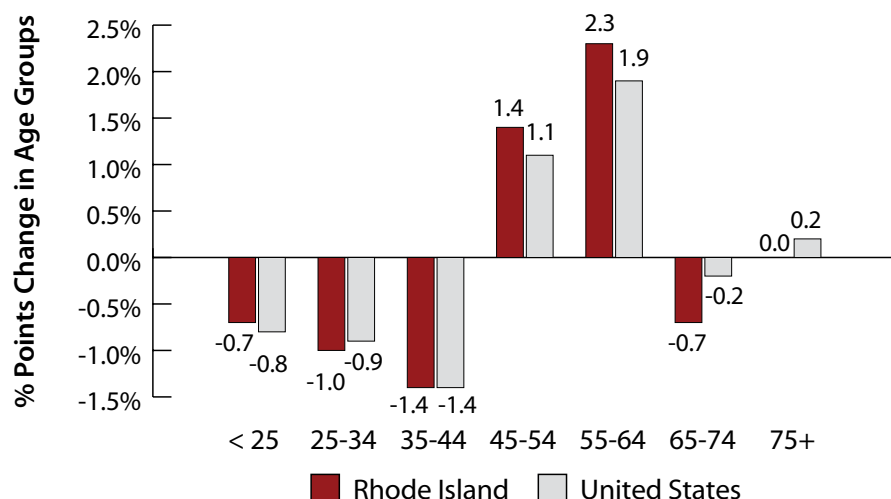
*Questions you might want to consider:*

*Did leaders in our state anticipate the changes which have occurred recently in the age demographics of our population?*

*As appropriate, did leaders from the government, business, and non-profit sectors engage in collaborative dialogue about the potential impact of these changes?*

*Were the responses of the state to the changes in the age demographics effective?*

**Figure 3: Percentage Point Changes in Population Age Groups  
2000-2006 in Rhode Island and the United States**



Source: American Community Survey, 2006 and Census, 2000

## Anticipated Population Changes: Distribution by Age 2006 – 2010

### Importance of this Information:

Forecasts about the future can help states to enhance their readiness for anticipated changes.

- ➔ Businesses can take steps so that they can effectively recruit, engage, and retain workforces from the different age groups.
- ➔ Non-profit organizations can take steps to develop the programs and resources often needed by people in the different age groups.
- ➔ Government agencies can consider strategic policy adjustments to better reflect the needs of residents of different ages.

### Observation about the Anticipated Changes in the Age Distribution of Rhode Island's Population:

Compared to national statistics, Rhode Island is expected to witness more significant decreases in two population groups: those between the ages of 35-44 and those 75 and older. In addition, the Rhode Island population will age slower than the country as a whole. That is, compared to the rest of the country, there will be a smaller percentage point change in the proportion of those 45 and older between 2006 and 2010.

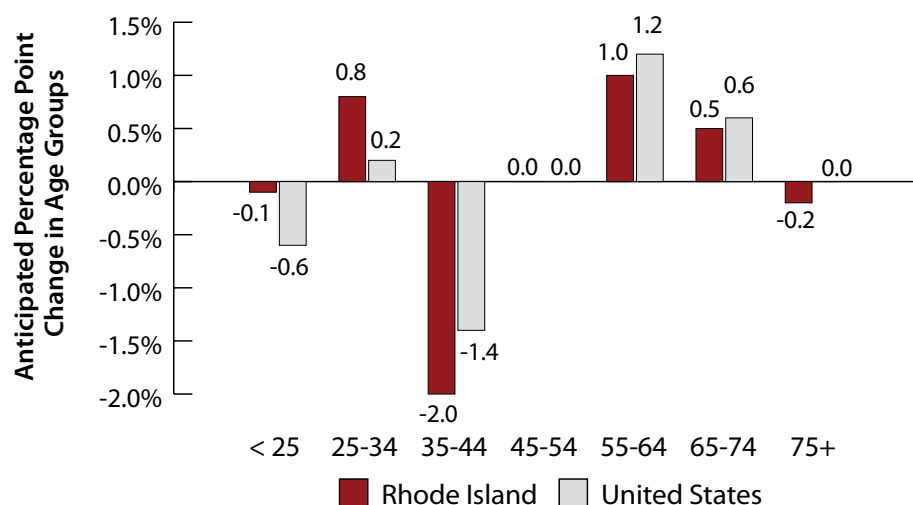
*Questions you might want to consider:*

*What implications might the aging of the populations have for government, business, and non-profit sectors?*

*Are there new opportunities for leveraging the assets that people of different ages might be able to contribute to the health and welfare of the state?*

*Are there opportunities for new pilots that either focus on population groups that are increasing in size as well as those that are decreasing in size?*

**Figure 4: Anticipated Percentage Point Changes in Population Age Groups in Rhode Island and the United States, 2006 – 2010**



Source: American Community Survey, 2006; Census, 2000; Census, 2005

## Section 2: Labor Force Participation Demographics and Age

### Introduction

One of the most profound changes tied to the aging of the population is the aging of the workforce. State leaders may want to consider the impact of several trends:

- As the workforce ages, employers might consider how they want to adjust their employee policies and practices to reflect the needs and priorities of older workers.
- Today's workers aged 50 and older report that they anticipate working past the traditional retirement years of 62-65.<sup>1</sup> This will augment the aging trends of the workforce.
- Older workers who are either entering the labor force for the first time or who are unemployed and looking for work may represent a segment of the labor force that is under tapped.

### Labor Force Participation: Distribution by Age

#### Importance of this Information:

The Census Department has established three categories relevant to labor force participation: employed, unemployed (and seeking paid work), and not in the labor force (and not seeking paid work). Variations in these categories may reflect life course events that are age-related. For example, young adults who are not in the labor force may be full-time students; adults at mid life who are not in the

*Questions you might want to consider:*

*How do the employment rates of people in different age groups in our state compare with national statistics?*

*Do state leaders have information and insight about the employment and work preferences of adults in the different age groups?*

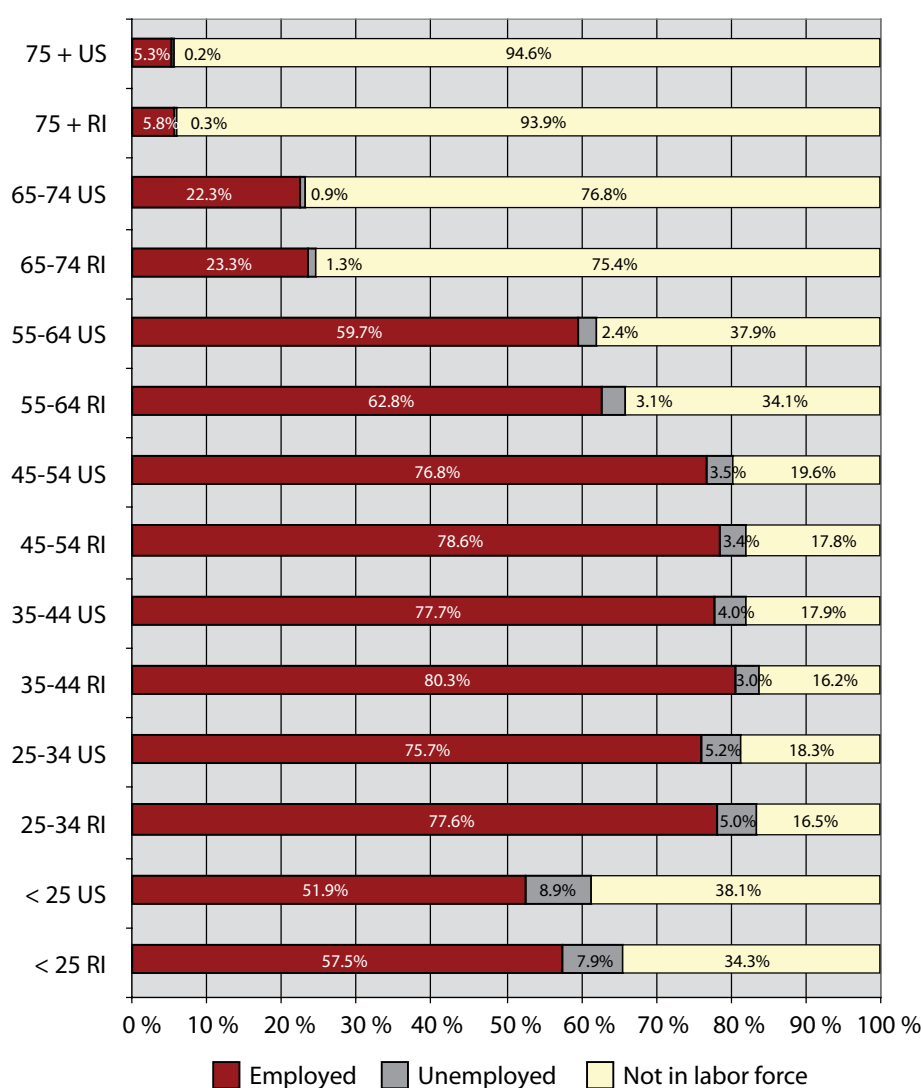
labor force may be parents raising children; and older adults who are not in the labor force may be retired. It is also true that adults who have been unemployed for a long time and are discouraged might report that they are not in the labor force, regardless of age.<sup>2</sup>

### Observation about Labor Force Participation in Rhode Island:

The median age for all Rhode Island workers over age 16 is 41.3 years, which is slightly higher than the national median age of 41.1 years.

Across all age groups, the labor force participation rates of Rhode Island adults are higher than national statistics.

Figure 5: Labor Force Participation by Age\*



Source: American Community Survey, 2006

\*Note: This is the percentage of unemployed within the age group and *not* the unemployment rate.



## Labor Force Participation in the Public Sector, Private Sector, and Self Employed by Age

### Importance of this Information:

Labor force participants may become employees for the government (at the local, state, or federal levels) or private organizations (either those that are for-profit or non-profit). Alternatively, labor force participants might be self employed (as contractors, consultants, or business owners).

The mix of labor force participation linked to each of these segments of the economy may affect emergent economic activity (such as “start-ups”) and sustained economic growth.

### Observation about the Age of Rhode Island’s Workforce by Sectors Groups:

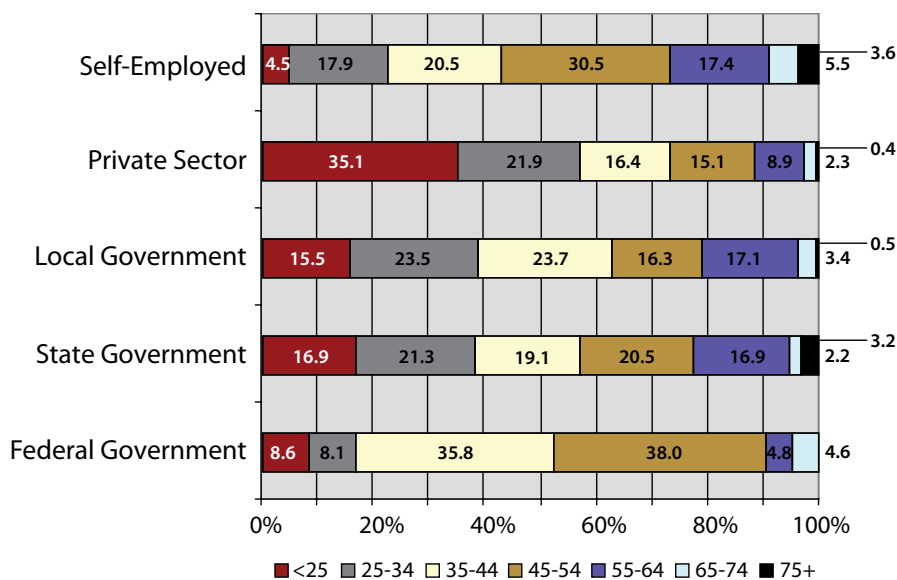
- Workers under age 25 comprise the largest percentage of labor force participants work in the private sector.
- Workers aged 45-54 comprise the largest percentage of labor force participants who work for the federal government and who are self-employed.

Questions you might want to consider:

*What motivates, incentivizes, or deters labor force participants to work in the public sector, the private sector (for profit or non-profit), or to be self-employed?*

*What steps could employers in the public and private sectors take to recruit, engage, and retain workers of all ages?*

Figure 6: Age of the Rhode Island Workforce in the Public Sector, Private Sector, and Self-Employed Groups



Source: McNamara, 2007 (data from Current Population Survey, January 2006 through June 2007)

## Unemployment Rates by Age

### Importance of this Information:

High rates of unemployment create personal hardship and are also public policy concerns. State leaders will want to consider the implications of variations in the unemployment rates by age. It may also be important to consider variations by age in the utilization of services and programs designed to help people find employment.

### Observation about Age and Unemployment:

The unemployment rates in Rhode Island reflect a U-shaped curve; that is, the rates are highest among the youngest and oldest groups of labor force participants while the rates dip for those who are in their mid-adult years.

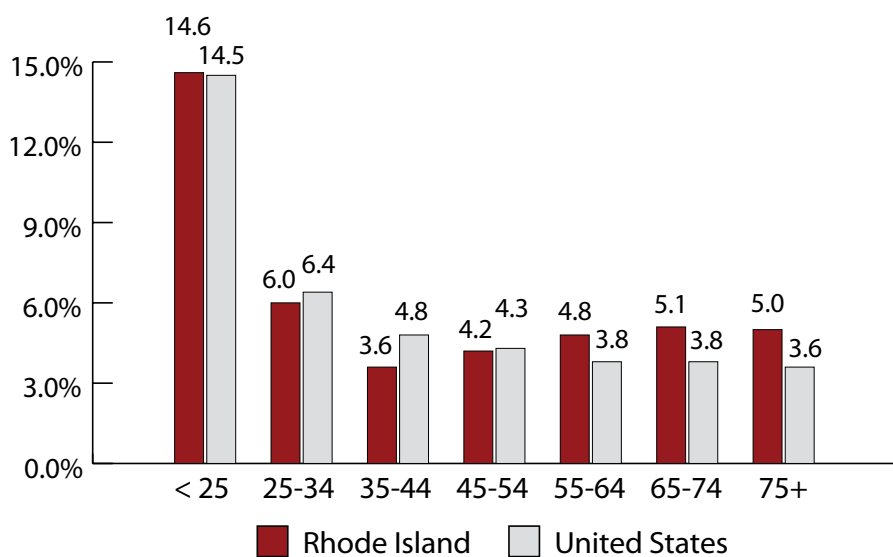
In the youngest and oldest age groups, Rhode Island has a higher unemployment rate compared to national statistics.

*Questions you might want to consider:*

*Do the unemployment rates among workers of different ages reflect the economic stress experienced in particular industries or occupations?*

*Do the unemployment rates among workers of different ages reflect individual employment experiences, education, or marketable skills and competencies?*

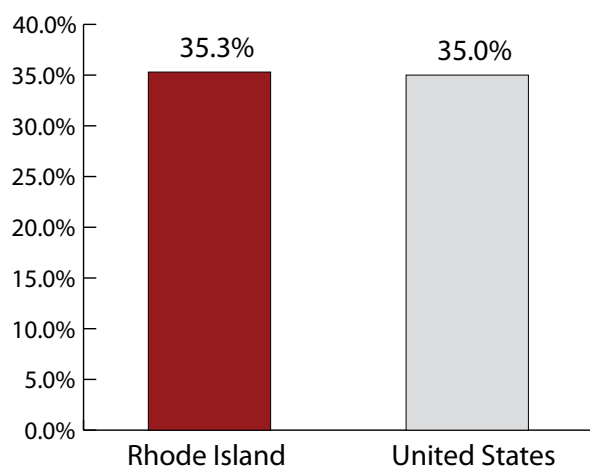
Figure 7: Annual Unemployment Rate by Age, 2005



Source: American Community Survey, 2006

The employment rate among people age 55 and older in Rhode Island (35.3%) is slightly higher than in the country as a whole.

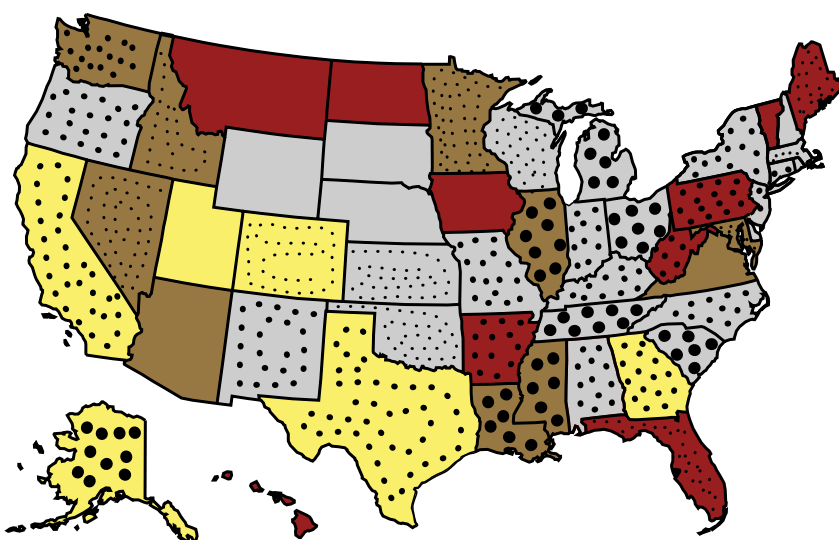
**Figure 8: Employment Rate of Those 55+**



Source: American Community Survey, 2006

The map below indicates that Rhode Island has relatively low unemployment rates and an average percentage of people aged 55 and older.

**Figure 9: Nationwide Unemployment and Population 55+**



Source: American Community Survey, 2006

**Key:**  
**Population Age 55+**

- 25% +
- 23 - 24.9%
- 21 - 22.9%
- < 21%

**Unemployment Rate:**

- Large dots = 7.0% +
- Medium dots = 6.0-6.9%
- Small dots = 5.0-5.9%
- No dots = < 5.0%

## Section 3: Industry Sector and Occupational Groups

### Introduction

It is important to make the connection between workforce development and economic activity. Job expansion may be located in those industry sectors that make significant contributions to states' economies and those that are expected to grow.

### Economic Output

#### Importance of the Information:

Measures of economic output provide insight into the business productivity.

#### Observation about Economic Output by Industry Sector in Rhode Island:

As an industry sector, real estate, rental & leasing contributes the most to the state economy, as measured by gross domestic product.

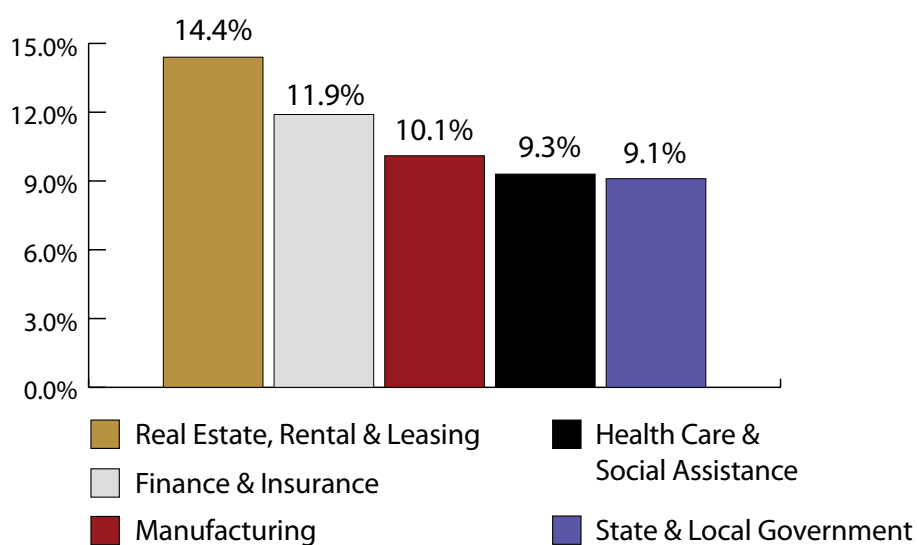
*Questions you might want to consider:*

*Which industry sectors anchor the state's economy?*

*Which industry sectors are in growth mode?*

*Which industry sectors show signs of being in decline?*

**Figure 10: Rhode Island Economic Activity (GDP) by Industry Sector, 2005, Top 5 Industries**



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce, 2005

# Employment by Industry Sectors

## Importance of Information:

There can be significant variation in the age demographics of workforces in different industry sectors. Older workers employed in industry sectors expected to decline in their economic output may find career opportunities constrained.

## Observation about Employment in Rhode Island's Industry Sectors:

In comparison to Rhode Island, across all age groups in the United States, the five industries that employ the highest percentages of the workforce are: real estate, rental & leasing (14.5%); manufacturing (13.9%); state & local government (9.8%); finance & insurance (8.8%); and professional & technical services (7.9%).<sup>3</sup>

Within each age group, different Rhode Island industries employ high percentages of workers. The information in Table 1 indicates the industry groups that employ the highest percentage of workers in each of the age categories. For example, employees aged 50-59 comprise 29.1% of the workforce in the textile, apparel & leather manufacturing industry in Rhode Island.

**Table 1: Industries (top 3) Employing Highest Percentages of Workers (as % of the workforce in that industry) by Age Group\***

• 20-29 years	Food services & drinking places	63.5%
	Arts, entertainment & recreation	51.5%
	Retail trade	48.3%
• 30-39 years	Repair & maintenance	36.9%
	Chemical manufacturing	35.5%
	Wholesale trade	29.2%
• 40-49 years	Computer & electronic product manufacturing	34.8%
	Chemical manufacturing	30.1%
	Public administration	28.9%
• 50-59 years	Textile, apparel & leather manufacturing	29.1%
	Primary metals & fabricated metal products	25.7%
	Miscellaneous & not specified manufacturing	25.0%
• 60+ years	Health care services, except hospitals	14.6%
	Personal & laundry services	13.8%
	Arts, entertainment & recreation	13.1%

Source: Current Population Survey, April 2006 - July 2007

\*Note: Industries accounting for less than 1% and fewer than 25 respondents were omitted.

Questions you might want to consider:

What are the variations in the employment rates of younger workers, workers at midlife and older workers in different industry sectors?

Do those industry sectors expected to experience growth in the future tend to hire proportionate percentages of workers across the age groups?

## Employment by Occupational Groups

### Importance of this Information:

The occupational choices made vary from generation to generation. As a consequence, the age distribution within occupational groups varies.

### Observation about Employment by Occupational Groups in Rhode Island:

Within each age group, different occupations employ different percentages of workers. The information in Table 2 indicates the occupational groups with the highest percentage of workers in each of the age categories. For example, individuals aged 50-59 comprise 22.7% of people in the production occupational group.

**Table 2: Occupations (top 3) with the Highest Percentages of Workers (as % of the workforce in that occupation) by Age Group\***

• 20-29 years	Food preparation & serving related	65.8%
	Personal care & service	47.5%
	Construction & extraction	45.7%
• 30-39 years	Installation, maintenance & repair	37.7%
	Community & social service	26.0%
	Architecture & engineering	24.4%
• 40-49 years	Management	33.2%
	Production occupations	29.6%
	Architecture & engineering	26.5%
• 50-59 years	Production occupations	22.7%
	Education, training & library	22.5%
	Management	20.5%
• 60+ years	Life, physical & social science	17.2%
	Protective service	12.9%
	Personal care & service	12.8%

Source: Current Population Survey, April 2006 - July 2007

\*Note: Occupations accounting for less than 1% and fewer than 25 respondents were omitted.

Questions you might want to consider:

What is the age distribution in occupational groups anticipated to grow in the next decade?

## Section 4: Education & Workforce Preparedness

### Introduction

Education and training continue to be the most effective path to sustained employment. The highest level of education attained by the majority of Rhode Island residents of all age groups was high school graduate.

### Educational Attainment by Age Group

#### Importance of Information:

Education is a predictor of employment rate and income. Employers want to hire employees with relevant and current education and training.

#### Observation about Educational Attainment by Age Group:

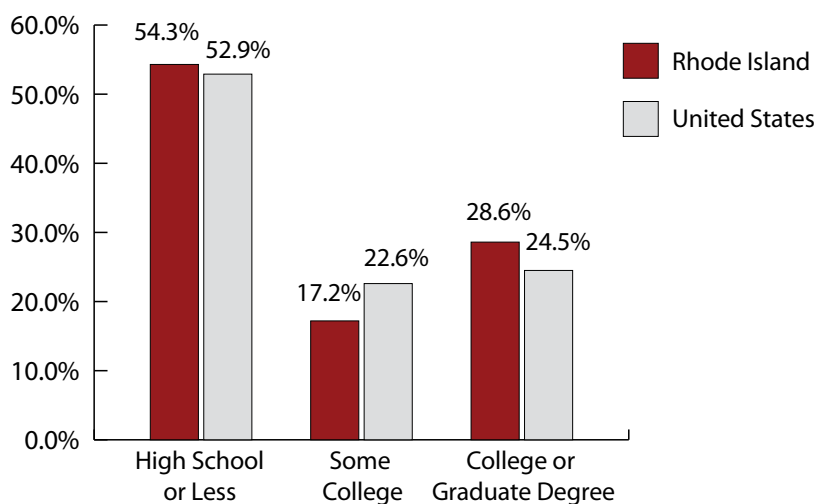
Compared with the nation as a whole, Rhode Island residents aged 55 and older comprise a higher percentage of those with a college or graduate degree.

*Questions you might want to consider:*

*Do the residents in our state have the education and training sought by employers currently located in the state?*

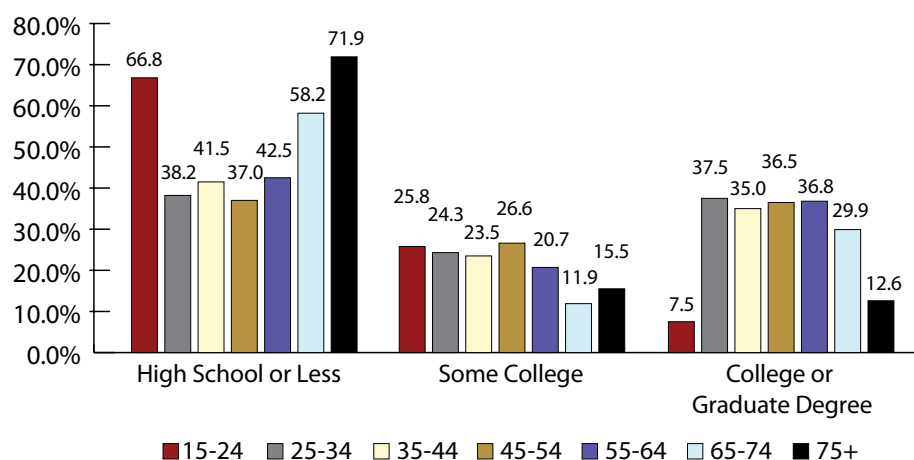
*Do the residents in our state have the education and training needed by businesses that might have an interest in locating in the state?*

Figure 11: Education Levels for the Population 55+



Source: Current Population Survey, 2007

Figure 12: Rhode Island Educational Attainment by Age



Source: Current Population Survey, 2007

## Section 5: Legislative Readiness

### Introduction

One way of evaluating states' readiness to address the aging population is by looking at legislation and legislative committees relevant to older workers. Policies that expand the employment opportunities available to older workers can complement the efforts of employers interested in recruiting, engaging, and retaining older workers.

There are ample opportunities for states, as both policy-makers and as employers, to facilitate the employment of older workers, including:

- Raise awareness about the aging of the workforce by providing information to residents, community-based organizations, and employers.
- Establish employment standards to guide employer decision-making.
- Provide services to older residents and to employers, such as training.
- Recognize the efforts of model employers who work to expand the quality employment opportunities to older workers.
- Being model employers themselves and utilizing "best practices," such as expanding the availability of flexible work options or providing training.

### Current Legislation

Legislative activity is one indicator of the state's level of preparedness to respond to the aging of the workforce.

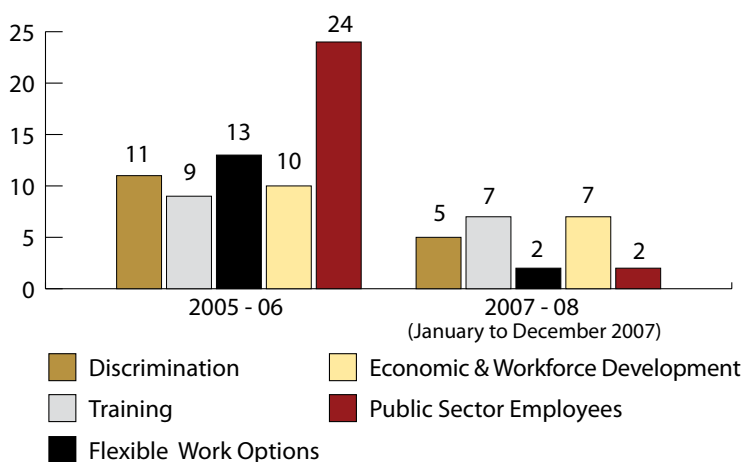
Figure 13 indicates that most of the state bills in 2005-2006 addressed issues related to the employment of older workers who work in public sector agencies and departments.

Questions you might want to consider:

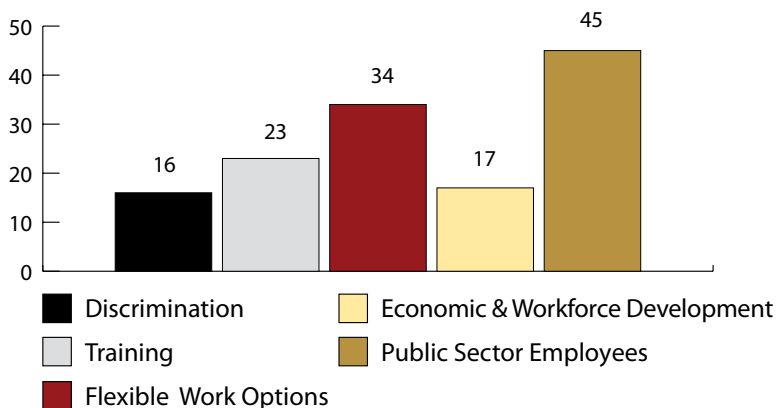
*Have state agencies considered how the aging of the population will affect the expectations for state services?*

*Have state agencies considered how the aging of the workforce will affect their ability to recruit, engage, and retain talented employees?*



**Figure 13: State Bills Related to Older Workers by Content Area**

Source: Center on Aging and Work, 2007<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 14: State Statutes Related to Older Workers by Content Area**

Source: Center on Aging and Work, 2007<sup>5</sup>

To date in the 2007-2008 session, there have been no bills relevant to older adults proposed in the Rhode Island legislature. There were also no bills proposed during the 2005-2006 session.

### Legislative Committees:

The presence of legislative committees is another indicator of a state's readiness to respond to aging because these committees channel much of legislators' discussion and dialogue.

At present, Rhode Island has no legislative committees relevant to older adults but has one relevant agency: the Rhode Island Department of Elderly Affairs.

## References:

- <sup>1</sup> Brown, S. K. (2005). *Attitudes of individuals 50 and older toward phased retirement* (research report). Washington, D.C.: AARP Knowledge Management. Retrieved November 21, 2007 from [http://www.aarp.org/research/work/retirement/Articles/attitudes\\_of\\_individuals\\_50\\_and\\_older\\_toward\\_phase.html](http://www.aarp.org/research/work/retirement/Articles/attitudes_of_individuals_50_and_older_toward_phase.html)
- <sup>2</sup> Maestas, N., & Li, X. (2006). *Discouraged workers? job search outcomes of older workers*. (Working Paper No. 133). Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Retirement Research Center, University of Michigan. Retrieved November 21, 2007 from <http://www.mrrc.isr.umich.edu/publications/Papers/pdf/wp133.pdf>
- <sup>3</sup> Bureau of Economic Analysis. (2005). *Industry Economic Accounts*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved November 21, 2007 from <http://www.bea.gov/industry/index.htm>
- <sup>4</sup> Center on Aging and Work. (2007). [Analysis of records from LexisNexis State Capital database, 2007]. Unpublished data.
- <sup>5</sup> Center on Aging and Work. (2007). [Analysis of records from LexisNexis State Capital database, 2007]. Unpublished data.

## The State Perspectives Institute

The State Perspectives Institute at the Boston College Center on Aging & Work partners with state leaders across the country to examine impacts of the 21st century age demographics on economic and workforce development. The Institute gathers and analyzes information about employment at state agencies, as well as workforce demographics in the states' primary industry sectors.

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## Appendix A: List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1:	Population Distribution by Age: Rhode Island and the United States
Figure 2:	Percent of the Population Aged 55+ by State
Figure 3:	Percentage Point Change in Population Age Groups 2000-2006
Figure 4:	Anticipated Percentage Point Change in Population Age Groups 2006-2010
Figure 5:	Labor Force Participation by Age
Figure 6:	Age Distribution of the Rhode Island Workforce in the Public Sector, Private Sector, and Self-Employed Groups
Figure 7:	Annual Unemployment Rate by Age: 2005
Figure 8:	Employment of Those 55+
Figure 9:	Nationwide Unemployment and Population 55+
Figure 10:	Rhode Island Economic Activity by Industry Sector: Top 5 Industries
Figure 11:	Education Levels for the Population 65+
Figure 12:	Rhode Island Educational Attainment by Age
Figure 13:	State Bills
Figure 14:	State Statutes
Table 1:	Industries: Highest Percentages of Workers by Age Group as % of Workforce by Industry Sector
Table 2:	Occupations: Highest Percentages of Workers by Age Group as % of Workforce by Occupational Category