

**Media Contact:**  
Holly Vogel  
617-871-1406  
hvogel@mnreb.org

## **Metro North Regional Employment Board Receives \$400,000 Grant to Strengthen Retail Industry Career Services in the Metro North Region**

*Funding is part of a \$10.9 million grant awarded to The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership from the Walmart Foundation*

**Cambridge, MA, Sept. 7, 2016** – Today, the Walmart Foundation announced that the Metro North Regional Employment Board (REB) has been selected to receive a \$400,000 grant from The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (The Partnership) as part of an effort to increase the economic mobility of workers in retail and adjacent sectors in the 20 cities and towns that comprise the Metro North Region, and around the U.S.

The Metro North REB is one of 10 Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) selected across the country to collectively form and implement new models of career services specific to retail – models that will serve as best practices for the approximately 550 WDBs in the U.S. that already provide career services, such as career coaching, soft skills training, specialized skills training and referrals to other resources. The funding is part of a \$10.9 million grant the Walmart Foundation made to The Partnership in March 2016.

“Our collaborative effort with The Partnership, Metro North business leaders and government officials, and the nine other selected WDBs will allow us to foster workforce training innovation in a sector that WDBs have not traditionally focused on – retail,” said Sunny Schwartz, Executive Director of the Metro North Regional Employment Board. “With the retail industry supporting one in four American jobs, this grant presents a tremendous potential for impact, from entry-level to middle skills jobs. The goal of this grant is to create clear career paths in retail for hundreds of workers, providing skills training and new approaches to accelerate career advancement.”

The funding provided to the Metro North Regional Employment Board from The Partnership will provide a variety of services to job seekers, including:

- Job readiness training customized to the retail sector, including helping jobseekers acquire the "soft skills" that are critical for workplace success such as teamwork, leadership, communication and conflict resolution.
- Job placement assistance, resume writing help and interviewing skills workshops.
- Post placement services to promote job retention.

Among the services the Metro North REB will offer employers are:

- Serving as a point of contact for retail employers in the area for recruiting and training opportunities, including career tracks such as sales, customer service, logistics, merchandising/buying and management.
- Customized recruiting and screening and assistance in writing job descriptions for new positions.
- Employee retention assistance and improving the supply of qualified job candidates.

The Metro North Program for Retail Opportunities is a collaboration of the Metro North REB and its One-Stop career centers, Career Source and The Career Place. The primary goal of this program is to meet the workforce needs of the region's retail employers. Approximately 350 job seekers, and 50 employers from throughout the region will benefit from The Partnership grant.

"As one of the largest provider of jobs for the American workforce, the retail industry presents many opportunities for workers to grow and thrive," said Kathleen McLaughlin, president of the Walmart Foundation and chief sustainability officer for Walmart. "Through our work with The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, we are helping ensure that retail workers have the skills, training and education needed to build long-lasting careers."

In February 2015, Walmart and the Walmart Foundation committed \$100 million over five years to strengthen the skills of the broader U.S. workforce by funding programs to create career paths in retail and related industries and train thousands of workers outside of Walmart. The two-year grant to The Partnership is the largest investment to date as part of Walmart and the Walmart Foundation's Opportunity initiative, which aims to increase the economic mobility of workers in retail and adjacent sectors by working with nonprofits, educational institutions and government agencies to make it easier for frontline workers to move faster into middle skills roles.

For more information about the grant awarded to the Metro North REB, please visit: [www.mnreb.org](http://www.mnreb.org).

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The Metro North Regional Employment Board (REB) is a public-private partnership whose mission is to enable area residents to gain the skills to maximize their economic self-sufficiency and provide employers with the workforce they need to effectively compete in the changing world economy. As one of 16 local Workforce Development Boards established in Massachusetts by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (recently superseded by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014), the REB was formed to: set local workforce policy, determine how state and federal funds are best used for workforce development, develop partnerships to align the needs of employers to the needs of area residents, and oversee the Metro North One-Stop Career Centers where both job search and employer services are provided.