

# U.S. Navy Talent Pipeline Program

*"Changing the Way the Defense Industrial Base "Thinks & Acts" about Talent Acquisition and Retention"*

Joseph C. Barto, III  
Program Leader, U.S. Navy Talent Pipeline Program



*"The American industrial workers are as important to our national defense as the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines are at the "pointy end" of our national defense."*

*- RADM Scott Pappano, PEO Strategic Submarines*

## The Strategic Setting

As the Navy seeks to grow and modernize its fleet over the next 30 years, the power of American Manufacturing will again answer the "call to arms" to ensure we can defend our nation and protect our way of life. This "no fail" task will challenge American manufacturing in magnitudes and ways last seen during World War II when Freedom's Forge gave our armed forces the equipment and tools to fight and win. America is a different country than it was in 1941, yet today's security challenges are placing pressure on our nation's Defense Industrial Base (DIB) not faced in over eight decades. Whitney Jones, Director,

Submarine Industrial Base (SIB), a component of the Navy's Program Executive Office (PEO), Strategic Submarines, highlighted one of these challenges in the December 2023 edition of The Submarine Review:

"The SIB is orienting towards a 5x increase in new construction submarine capacity, resulting in a SIB trade skill hiring demand of more than 100,000 workers over the next 10 years just to support new construction submarine shipbuilding. Given the magnitude of the challenge, workforce investments must focus on enterprise shortages vice singular vendor shortfalls, and the submarine community must reimagine traditional approaches to manpower constraints, rebuild the connective tissue between industry and the surrounding academic ecosystem, and connect more people more closely to the Navy mission."

To confront these obstacles head-on, the Navy has launched the Talent Pipeline Program (TPP) — an ambitious nationwide initiative to train, coach, encourage, and recognize small and medium-sized employers on how to improve the performance of talent acquisition and retention systems to run a better business and increase their manufacturing and sustainment capacity to meet the Navy demand. Its mission is paramount: empowering the defense industrial base to meet unprecedented submarine and defense production demands over the next three decades and beyond. The then PEO Columbia used a data-driven approach to identify States and regions with large numbers of submarine industrial base suppliers. With the highest concentration of small/medium sized manufacturers supporting Navy shipbuilding, Philadelphia was selected as the pilot region.

## Overview

Recognizing the severity of the industrial base constraints, the U.S. Navy and the Department of Defense's Office of Industrial Base Analysis and Sustainment (IBAS) Program partnered with TMG, Inc. to formally launch the Talent Pipeline Program in March of 2021. For our first Demand Signal Round Table, Matt Sermon, Executive Director, PEO, Strategic Submarines, Bruce Warner, who would become the Philadelphia Flag Leader, and I traveled to Philadelphia and met with a small group of employers, training providers, and facilitators, including Rhoades Industries, Philly Shipyard, Kingsbury, and the Navy Surface Warfare Center, Philadelphia Division. At that meeting, we presented the TPP concept and asked those in attendance whether or not they thought the model could be customized to the Philly region; they believed. The new program represented an ambitious public-private partnership

to provide employers with the skills to overhaul their talent acquisition and retention systems across the maritime industrial base.

At its core was a novel model addressing an inefficient supply and demand marketplace, by focusing on employers, who own the problem, to create and sustain demand-driven talent pipelines to run a better business and provide more industrial capacity to the Navy. Today - three years later — 293 employers from Philly, joined by employers in Pittsburgh & Hampton Roads (2022), and in Boston & Long Island (2023), are taking advantage of Navy-funded services to improve the performance of the talent acquisition and retention systems, providing data to prove it, and sharing their experience with the other partners.

### **The Mission**

The TPP seeks to identify, engage, assess, and support employers in this partnership on the journey to improve partner employers' talent acquisition and retention (TA&R) systems, to help them run a better business, and provide more manufacturing and sustainment capacity for the Navy.

Every year, the program conducts a strategic review to inform its future expansion plans, resulting in the TPP establishing regional "Flags," regional DIB supplier hubs. Each "Flag" execution plan is customized to the operational circumstance of the region in terms of the labor market and resources available, taking into account the general economic landscape. In addition to the regions listed above, a Southern California Flag was established this year. As of this writing, 293 employers from five regions are joining forces with Training Providers and Facilitators to make the TPP vision come to life.

The U.S. Navy TPP TEAM goal is to energize and engage the American industrial economy by creating and sustaining a maritime and defense industrial base-focused talent pipeline enabling employers to re-capitalize their workforce through recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining skilled workforce members for one year as productive and engaged new employees.

### **Talent Pipeline Model**

The TPP is an integrated and synchronized partnership that transforms traditional TA&R processes by redefining customer, supplier, and product relationships. In the traditional model, employers follow a "post and hope" strategy, posting job requisitions outlining required education/training and years of experience, and then waiting for candidates to apply. Employers are often their worst enemy in this, as they seek an 18-year-old with 20 years of experience who will work for \$10/hour. Training providers, the supply side of the equation, often use a "train and pray" strategy: the student is the customer, and the product "sold to employers is the successfully trained and certified graduate seeking employment. The essence of the challenge arises when resource-constrained small/medium-sized employers' "post and hope" processes meet training providers' "train and pray" educational/training programs, resulting in what we too often see today — frustration and blame by all parties, leaving the small/medium sized employers with "big" company challenges without "big" company resources. This is the gap the TPP was designed to close.

In the TA&R pipeline solution model, the customers are the employers, and the result is a continuously improved customized employer demand-based talent acquisition and retention system in which Partnering Employers operate a more profitable and productive business by hiring and retaining better employees, thus providing more industrial capacity to support the Navy ship construction and sustainment industry. The suppliers of employees are the talent pipelines that access talent in many ways, including Training Provider programs that enroll students and produce skilled candidates primarily for entry-level positions. At the same time, Employers are encouraged to build their own Talent Pipelines to meet their overall TA&R demand for experienced tradespeople and professional/salaried positions.

The TPP offers partnering employers: 1) training, 2) coaching, 3) access to resources, 4) encouragement to change, and 5) recognition 4) encouragement to change, and 5) recognition for improving their TA&R systems performance. The model uses industry best practices and state-of-the-art theory to meet current and future hiring and retention needs by creating and operating Talent Pipelines customized to the individual employer talent demand.

This program is designed for employers desiring to improve their business performance through improved TAdiR system performance, thus increasing productivity and cost, schedule, quality, and safety performance, while reducing cost to hire, acting with the belief that re-capitalizing their workforce with Training Provider graduates should be part of that effort.

## The “Why”

The program's "why?" is to change how employers "think" and then "act" about developing a consistent and reliable employer TA&R system to produce high-performing employees to improve their business performance.

Time and time again, the program discovers that employers' current ineffective talent acquisition and retention systems are operating exactly as designed. Yet employers keep working harder and harder expecting a different outcome — the definition of insanity. At the end of the day, TPP helps to provide leaders who want to lead a high-performance team, the courage to lead, to own the problem, and to change their hiring processes by recognizing the realities of the existing business and labor environment.

## The Employer Experience

The first step is employer identification, recruiting, and assessment. During this phase, the employer agrees to support the TP mission and meets the Employer Partner qualification criteria. Next, the employer is trained on the TA&R Best Practice Model. This training assembles the employer's key stakeholders who are then trained on the Best Practice Model's end-to-end process that includes 12 potential Talent Pipelines, and the 10 TA&R system tools. Next a current state process map is created, describing how the employer currently defines demand, then recruits, hires, on-boards, and retains new hires; this is followed by a "gap analysis." Then, the employer develops a list of performance improvement actions, including Talent Pipelines the employer wants to either improve or create, along with implementing TA&R "tools to improve the process. An agreement is then made between the employer and the TPP Network Coach on what the employer will do for themselves, and on the assistance to be provided by the TPP. A 10- to 12-month performance improvement plan of action and milestones is agreed to, a data capture plan is put in place, and work begins.

During the pipeline and tools development implementation, the employer reports their TA&R system performance metrics monthly, including monthly headcount, new hire demand, # of New Hires, and # of Departs. As the talent pipelines and tools are implemented, employers should see an improvement in the core metrics. Annually, each employer and its TPP coach update the performance improvement plan, reset the support agreement, and continuously improve the process.

Programmatically, Employers participate in an annual Kick-Off meeting to share plans, a Mid-Year Networking and Sharing meeting, and a Signing Day Event during which they share the results of their effort while pledging to participate the next year. Each Employer, along with training providers and facilitators, is part of the regional TPP network within their regional Flag, meeting two times in the fall and two times in the spring to share, learn, and give each other the courage to do something different. These events are where the “secret sauce” happens. One of the true strengths of the program is the programmatic structure that our teammates value, because they can “see” the next steps and progress, all supported by the TPP program management team — “the connective tissue.”

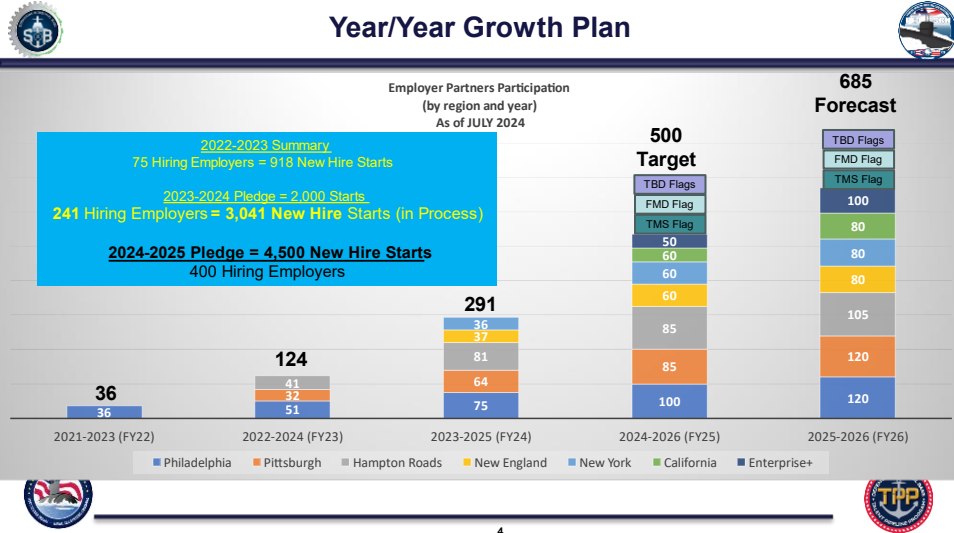
## Core Success Metric

High performance Employers know it is not how many you hire; it is how many you keep and how you are implementing a data driven, continuously improving Talent Acquisition and Retention system.

For the TPP Program, the core metric is the number of EMPLOYERS with reliable year-over-year TA&R Pipelines to run a better business and increase defense industrial capacity.

## Key Performance Metrics – Highlights as of 31 March 2024

- Cohort 2021-2023: 29 Hiring Employers from the Philly Flag reporting 259 New Hires with 165 retained, for a 64% first year retention rate.
- Cohort 2022-2024: 75 Hiring Employers from the Philly, Pittsburgh and Hampton Roads Flags, reporting 905 New Hires with 615 retained, for a 68% first year retention rate.
- Cohort 2023-2025: 241 Employers from the Philly, Pittsburgh, Hampton Roads, Boston, and Long Island Flags, reporting 2,404 New Hires with 2,011 retained for a 87% first year retention rate.



### National Roll-Out Strategy

In April 2023, in Boston, the senior TPP leadership team approved the strategic planning assumptions and the TPP National Roll Out concept of operations.

#### PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS:

1. Navy demand for DIB capacity growth will continue through 2040.
2. American economy full employment condition is a constant for the foreseeable future.
3. ~ 80% of the DIB (~17,000 businesses) are Small to Medium Sized (defined as < 1,000 Employees at a single site).
4. Talent Acquisition and Retention is the sole responsibility of the DIB Employers.
5. The Talent Pipeline model is PROVEN, and model integrity will be retained during the national rollout.
6. Supplier Development Funding will support the Talent Pipeline Program over the Program Transition, Sustainment, and Expansion Life Cycle.

### Path Forward

Looking ahead, all signs point toward the Navy's Talent Pipeline Program continuing its expansion and deepening its influence in fortifying Employers to build and sustain Talent Pipelines to effectively recruit, hire, onboard, train, and retain productive and engaged teammates to improve overall business performance. With billions of dollars in planned submarine production programs, sustainment activities for existing fleets, and continual technological advances, workforce availability will continue to represent one of the most significant challenges facing these critical defense priorities over the next three decades.

To meet projected demand signals, the Navy directed that in cohort 2024-2026, TPP is to have a National Reach, enabling any small/ medium sized employer who asks for support from anywhere in the country to take advantage of the TPP services as an Employer Partner supporting the now 140,000 new hires over the next ten years. While an ambitious target, the foundations established by the TPP's unique Employer-focused development model provide an architecture to make this objective attainable, by starting on the demand side of the equation and pulling from the Talent Pipelines most appropriate to meet the specific employer's demand.

In our world, a 20-person machine shop that needs two new teammates a year is as important as a 750-person manufacturing plant needing 150 new hires per year. Our employer focus drives our expansion strategy as more and more of our "customer" employers see value in the Navy-provided services that they will share with their suppliers, customers, and peers to continuously generate new employers and connect them with "believers," which will drive increased DIB manufacturing and sustainment capacity to meet the Navy's requirements. The TPP will continue to incorporate lessons learned and best practices as it expands to ensure employers have the necessary talent pipelines and tools to reach and retain the manufacturing workforce of the future.

Whitney Jones has described SIB's efforts as "...a movement, not a moment." The TPP is an integral part of that movement to assist small and medium-sized employers in improving the performance of their TA&R systems. Over the last three years, we have confirmed that the key to our success is focusing on employers who want and accept help, do something different, and realize positive results.

The program's significance extends far beyond just filling open roles. At its core, the Talent Pipeline Program represents a strategic investment in the manufacturing and industrial capabilities that have long catalyzed American economic power and technological preeminence globally. Recentering the pursuit of these skilled trades careers as noble lifetime callings with immense purpose is vital to refresh the backbone of the domestic labor force continually.

At its base, the TPP develops and strengthens relationships, one employer at a time:

One Relationship  
One Employer,  
One Job,  
One Candidate,  
One Lifelong, Productive, Engaged Teammate at a time.

This program has proven that the U.S. Government can provide support and services to Employers in an area that is truly and traditionally the employers' sole responsibility. We have proven that a "teach employers how to fish" approach, not a "fish for them" approach, works. We have also defined two categories of employers: those who "own" the problem and want help, and those who "blame" others for their problems. The strength of this program has been the discipline to focus on the ones who own it, want help, are open to changing their processes, and in the end see that often the changes required are not hard to understand, yet are often just very hard work to implement, requiring the commitment of the entire leadership team - NOT just Human Resources. Over the last three years, we have confirmed that focusing on the employers who want and accept help, and see positive results, is the key to our success. In the war for talent today, Employers have two choices to make: 1) Be a victim of the talent war — getting up every morning looking for something bad; you will find it and it will suck every ounce of energy out of you and the organization, or 2) Own the problem and do something about it; be an employer who has proven that, if you get up every morning looking for something good, you will find that, too, and a lot of it. Our choice is #2. The best companies in America choose #2 as well.