

**SkillWorks**<sup>SM</sup>  
PARTNERS FOR A PRODUCTIVE WORKFORCE

## **Working Toward Reinvention** *SkillWorks at Three*

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## About the Author

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# Working Toward Reinvention

## *SkillWorks at Three*

### **Executive Summary**

In 2003, a group of public and private funders launched an ambitious, five-year initiative to improve the way the workforce development system serves low-income adults and employers in Boston. SkillWorks: Partners for a Productive Workforce has since become a national model, inspiring San Francisco, Rhode Island, and other communities and states to launch similar initiatives.

Three years later, SkillWorks has much to tell us about the formation of partnerships, engaging employers, aligning public and private resources around a common goal, and the challenges in advancing low-skilled adults toward family-sustaining incomes.

### **Key Strategies and Interventions**

SkillWorks has three components that interact with one another in mutually reinforcing ways:

- *Support for “Workforce Partnerships”* that demonstrate improved service designs;
- *Advocacy for public policies* that remove the barriers to institutionalizing the improved service designs; and
- *Capacity building* of the many agencies, organizations, and institutions delivering workforce development services.

### **Accomplishments, 2003–2006**

***Five sectoral partnerships, each with three-year SkillWorks grants of \$330,000 per year, are demonstrating effective workforce development practices and promoting institutional and system changes within sectors.***

**SkillWorks has established Workforce Partnerships in industry sectors where labor and skill needs lead to good opportunities for low-skilled workers to move up: Allied Health, Hospitality, Automotive Repair Technicians, Building Maintenance Services**

- In their first three years, the Workforce Partnerships placed nearly 400 low-income residents in jobs in targeted industry sectors, with placement wages ranging from \$11.07 to \$12.22 per hour.
- Participants in pre-employment programs increased their wages in new jobs by 13 percent to 34 percent over their previous jobs.
- Over 1,700 employees received education, career coaching, or other services.
- More than 250 employees received promotions.

**Three \$50,000 planning grants to evolving collaborations helped them achieve the capacity necessary to receive full SkillWorks funding to forge Workforce Partnerships.**

**Planning Grant Industries: Automotive Repair; Building Maintenance Services; Community Health Work**

**With a five-year, \$1.5 million grant, the Workforce Solutions Group developed a SkillWorks policy advocacy agenda and raised the visibility of workforce development as a contributor to the 'economic well-being of Massachusetts.**

- A coalition of over 20 organizations has come together to advocate for the SkillWorks policy agenda.
- The Massachusetts Economic Stimulus Act of 2004 increased resources by \$6 million statewide for programming incorporating SkillWorks' workforce partnership design principles.
- The Massachusetts Economic Stimulus Act of 2006 increased resources statewide for workforce partnerships on the SkillWorks model by \$11 million, and it provided more than \$13 million in new funding for other workforce development services.
- The Massachusetts legislature established a Workforce Accountability Task Force to align state policies for workforce development programs operated by multiple state agencies.

**SkillWorks is building the capacity of community-based organizations and other workforce development stakeholders to advance low-skilled workers to family-sustaining jobs.**

In the first phase of capacity-building, technical assistance to five community-based organizations strengthened their structures and systems and improved workforce development services and outcomes. Four of the five capacity-building grantees joined SkillWorks Workforce Partnerships.

Current capacity-building efforts support networking, technical assistance, organizational development, and training workshops that help Workforce Partnerships provide career advancement resources to job seekers and low- and moderate-income workers.

# Introduction

In 2003, a group of public and private funders launched an ambitious, five-year initiative to improve the way the workforce development system serves low-income adults and employers in Boston. SkillWorks: Partners for a Productive Workforce has since become a national model, inspiring San Francisco, Rhode Island, and other communities and states to launch similar initiatives.

After SkillWork's first year, *Reinventing Workforce Development*, published by Jobs for the Future, documented the initiative's genesis, its strategies, and its goals. Since then, the participants in the initiative have learned much about forming workforce partnerships, engaging employers, aligning public and private resources around a common goal, and advancing low-skilled adults toward family-sustaining incomes. *Working Toward Reinvention: SkillWorks at Three* reports on the lessons and accomplishments at the initiative's halfway point.

## SkillWorks Design: The Three Legged Stool

SkillWorks seeks to reinvent the way workforce development operates in Boston. To do so, the initiative has organized a number of "best practice" design principles into a coherent strategy, and it works to bring them to scale and institutionalize them in the city's approach to workforce development.

Central to SkillWorks are Workforce Partnerships, sometimes referred to as workforce "intermediaries." Across the country, intermediaries have evolved in response to the dizzying proliferation of funding streams, target populations, performance standards, and service providers in the workforce development field. Their goal is to make workforce systems more accessible to their dual customers—employers and workers—by aligning resources, convening stakeholders around common interests, and brokering services to achieve shared goals. SkillWorks intermediaries focus on improving the success of low-skilled/entry-level workers and job seekers.

## SkillWorks supports three distinct arenas of activity to achieve its overall goal of sustained improvement to the workforce development system:

- Workforce Partnerships;
- Capacity building; and
- Public policy advocacy.

### Workforce Partnerships

SkillWorks invests in industry-sector partnerships that collaborate with workers and employers to develop career advancement opportunities linked to education and training for low- and moderate-income individuals. These Workforce Partnerships, as they are termed, are intermediaries: they organize financial, educational, and training resources for low-skilled adults and for employers. Each receives three years of funding, totaling nearly \$1 million.

SkillWorks also awards planning grants of \$50,000 to support the formation of new Workforce Partnerships. Planning grants support research into the workforce development needs of industry sectors, as well as into evolving program designs and the development of partnership governance and management systems.

### Capacity Building

SkillWorks seeks to strengthen alliances within, build the infrastructure for, and enhance the knowledge available to Workforce Partnerships and other workforce development providers in order to help them serve employers and low-skilled, low- and moderate-income workers and job seekers. In SkillWorks' first two years, five community-based organizations received organizational development and strategic planning assistance to improve their ability to manage workforce development programs. Currently, SkillWorks capacity-building efforts are helping Workforce Partnerships improve their outcomes, plan for sustainability, and learn from one another.

## **Public Policy Advocacy**

To achieve long-term, sustainable improvements, SkillWorks organizes stakeholders from many parts of the system to institutionalize successful innovations emerging through the activities of the Workforce Partnership and Capacity Building components.

The partnership that leads SkillWorks' advocacy activities is an intermediary: it plays a central role in brokering agreements among the various interest groups relative to state legislation to increase resources for workforce development. In addition, it is addressing system policy and procedural changes.

## **Putting Ideas into Practice**

Built around and integrating SkillWorks' three components are a number of additional design decisions and operating principles. Some of these, like agreements among the funders, emerged with the initiative and have evolved with it. Others, like an explicit statement of a "theory of change," emerged to fill gaps that appeared when grantees began giving shape and substance to the original conceptual framework.

## **The SkillWorks Theory of Change**

SkillWorks aims to improve the functioning of the workforce development system by supporting activities in each of the components that comprise its "three-legged stool": Workforce Partnerships, capacity building, and public policy advocacy. According to the SkillWorks theory of change, each component interacts with and informs the activities of the others, leading to sustainable, systemic progress.

Workforce Partnerships develop deep knowledge of the cultures, skill, competencies, and staffing requirements of groups of employers in an industry sector, as defined by its member firms' related workforce needs. As Workforce Partnerships demonstrate success in solving employer problems, they can directly influence and change employer policies and practices, improving the access of entry-level workers to advancement opportunities.

*For example: SkillWorks has funded courses in workplace ESOL and computer literacy, which have greatly improved the participation of entry-level workers in staff meetings at hotels participating in the Hotel Career Center. As a result, Hilton Hotels is investigating how to maintain these courses as an employee benefit after SkillWorks funding ends.*

## **The SkillWorks Core Principles**

Six core principles guide SkillWorks' investments and form the basis for its advocacy:

**Advancement to economic self-sufficiency:** Workforce development should help low-skilled individuals—both employed and unemployed—get the skills they need to earn enough to support their families.

**Dual customers:** The workforce development system should serve both individuals and employers.

**A continuum of career ladder services:** Individuals should be able to access education at the right point, given their skill levels and stages in their careers.

**Workforce partnerships:** Workforce systems are complex. Diverse entities must be organized and coordinated to meet customers' needs.

**Sectoral organization of services:** Certain industry sectors and occupations have labor and skill needs that provide the best opportunities for low-skilled workers to move up. These sectors and occupations also require common services from the workforce system.

**Systems change—for employers, service providers, and funding:** For SkillWorks, success means that innovative, high-quality services are institutionalized within the workforce development system.



The experiences of the Workforce Partnerships help identify practices that affect the success of the workforce development system in meeting the needs of employers and low- and moderate-income individuals. Some of these practices inform SkillWorks' advocacy, and some build the expertise of the field.

*For example: The Health Care and Research Training Institute brokered agreements among several community service providers and hospitals to simplify the screening and referral of residents to jobs. A "single point*

*of contact" connects each hospital with one service provider, and that provider processes referrals from the other organizations.*

Capacity building enhances Workforce Partnerships' expertise in organizing resources to meet the needs of employers, workers, and job seekers and in sustaining improved practices. Capacity building also builds the expertise of the workforce system in general to encourage the adoption of improved practices.

### ***Supporting Workforce Intermediaries: A National Context for SkillWorks***

SkillWorks is part of a national initiative to generate support for workforce intermediaries and to help seed infrastructure that sustains dual customer career advancement approaches to workforce development. The national initiative, launched in 2004, is a collaborative effort of the Annie E. Casey, Rockefeller, and Ford Foundations. It supports and highlights promising demonstrations in order to inform policies and practices in communities and states and at the national level.

In Austin, Baltimore, Boston, New York City, and San Francisco, as well as in a statewide project in Pennsylvania, key stakeholders in workforce development have joined together in similar initiatives to help workers gain the skills they need and business to access the skilled labor they need. These stakeholders include private funders, public-sector leaders, research organizations, workforce boards, employers, advocacy groups, service providers, and others.

With support from the national funders, these six initiatives come together twice a year for peer learning meetings. They review promising practices in: building local capacity; seeding the development of new workforce partnerships; advocating for public policies that support workforce partnerships; demonstrating results; and evaluating progress.

What does it take for a community to serve significant numbers of low-skilled employees and employers? Communities involved in the national initiative have several key components in place or are building them:

- Civic actors and stakeholders are willing to change the way the workforce development is done.
- Local investors, private and public, will collectively target resources to support and grow a community wide system of workforce intermediaries.
- One or more labor market intermediaries provide or broker effective services for low-skilled workers and employers, and they can expand the numbers they serve.
- Local industries/employers have skill/labor shortages, opportunities for employees to advance to family self-sustaining wages, and a willingness to engage with and invest in creative workforce solutions.
- State or local public policy encourages and supports a changed workforce development system, and strong community advocacy will push effective public policy.

Not every community will build each of these components in the same way or in the same order. But investing resources to stimulate or support local investments in these components appears likely to lead to significant new workforce partnership capacity and scale.

*For example: Quarterly peer learning meetings among Workforce Partnership managers facilitate joint problem solving and the transfer of expertise on a variety of issues, such as building employer support for new human resources practices related to career coaching for new hires.*

Advocacy for the adoption of successful workforce practices and strategies takes place at the state level. Capacity Building and Workforce Partnerships inform this advocacy, which paves the way for the spread of intermediaries to other sectors/occupations and to other parts of Massachusetts.

*For example: Workforce Solutions Group, which leads the SkillWorks policy effort, successfully advocated for a new state funding source called the Competitiveness Trust Fund, which will support workforce partnerships, as well as for a Workforce Accountability Task Force, which will work on aligning state policies concerning workforce development.*

### **The SkillWorks Funders Group**

In an innovative arrangement, the SkillWorks Funders Group blends investments from fifteen foundations and public sources of workforce development financing into single public/private grants to service providers, providing a model for simplified, coordi-

nated program support (see the back cover for a complete list of funders). The merging of funds reduces the administrative burden on grantees for both fiscal and participant tracking, freeing up resources for services and for program improvements.

The Funders Group itself is an intermediary: it fosters a common systems change agenda among various public and private funders and encourages coordination among funding streams. Each SkillWorks funder may join the Funders Group, which meets bimonthly and serves as the initiative's policymaking and oversight body.

Each funder has one vote on initiative-related policy and funding decisions, regardless of its investment (although the public sector funders do not vote on, or provide financial support to policy advocacy activities). This strategy encourages participation by smaller funders, whose voice might otherwise be overwhelmed by larger investors. The proceedings of meetings are documented to provide accountability to each of the funders' own governing boards. In addition, the initiative provides special reports to meet the accountability requirements of its public funding sources, which treat SkillWorks (rather than the individual service providers) as a performance-based grant recipient.

### **Refining a Theory of Change**

A central proposition underlying SkillWorks is that synergies among its three components will make it more likely that "system changes" occur and are institutionalized.

This aspect of SkillWorks has yet to demonstrate its full potential. Initially, the Workforce Partnerships focused on start-up challenges and were too new to offer input to the policy agenda. At the same time, the Workforce Solutions Group was absorbed in building a statewide constituency, rather than on learning from the Workforce Partnerships. Capacity Building focused on improving the organizational structures of community-based organizations.

In 2004, an evaluation of SkillWorks, conducted by Abt Associates and Mount Auburn Associates, brought this challenge to the attention of the funders, which became more deliberate in seeking ways to foster synergies among the initiative's components. The funders developed the SkillWorks Theory of Change, which articulates more clearly how interactions among the three components would lead to systems change. In addition, they decided to use capacity building as the vehicle for convening the Workforce Partnerships and the Workforce Solutions Group in quarterly "peer learning" meetings to strengthen relationships and increase understanding of one another's work.

Members of the Funders Group have demonstrated a high level of coordination from an unusual coalition of local and national foundations with city and state agencies. This is especially important because the contributing foundations participate actively in SkillWorks, serving on committees that provide oversight to each component and providing financing for services.

Three standing committees oversee SkillWorks investments, corresponding to the three initiative components: the Public Policy Committee; the Workforce Partnerships Committee; and the Capacity Building Committee. Ad hoc committees respond to topics as they emerge. For example, the Communications Committee conducted market research in order to generate a “brand” for the initiative. This research included interviews with employers and potential workforce development funders. As a result, the provisional name of the initiative, the Boston Workforce Development Initiative, was discarded in favor of the permanent name: SkillWorks: Partners for a Productive Workforce.

The SkillWorks Funders Group has attracted attention from other communities and states. Its structure, with representatives from each of the funding sectors, provides an opportunity for long-term system change through the involvement of many of the key stakeholders involved in supporting workforce development. The collaboration of multiple funders provides a more flexible source of support for innovative programming over an extended period. It also has engaged these funders in a dialogue over a common model of workforce development practice that can have broader system change impact.

To align resources, the initiative must articulate the areas where its goals overlap with those of its investors. SkillWorks’ philanthropic partners developed a shared vision for the workforce development system, which was consistent with the goals of city and state policymakers. This aligned investment enhances clout. SkillWorks can fund activities that public or private funders on their own could not or would not support. For example, SkillWorks advocates for legislative systems change, an activity that public agencies could not support if they were the sole funding source.

Since its launch, SkillWorks has attracted new investors by matching what the initiative does to each funder’s priorities. Strong management systems, coupled with strong reporting and evaluation processes, also help SkillWorks to market itself to public and private investors.

### **Financing**

The members of Funders Group have committed over \$14 million to SkillWorks. Over five years, \$1.5 million will be invested in public policy advocacy, \$2.8 million in capacity building, and at least \$7 million in workforce partnerships. The balance supports evaluation and program management, with a contingency fund for special projects.

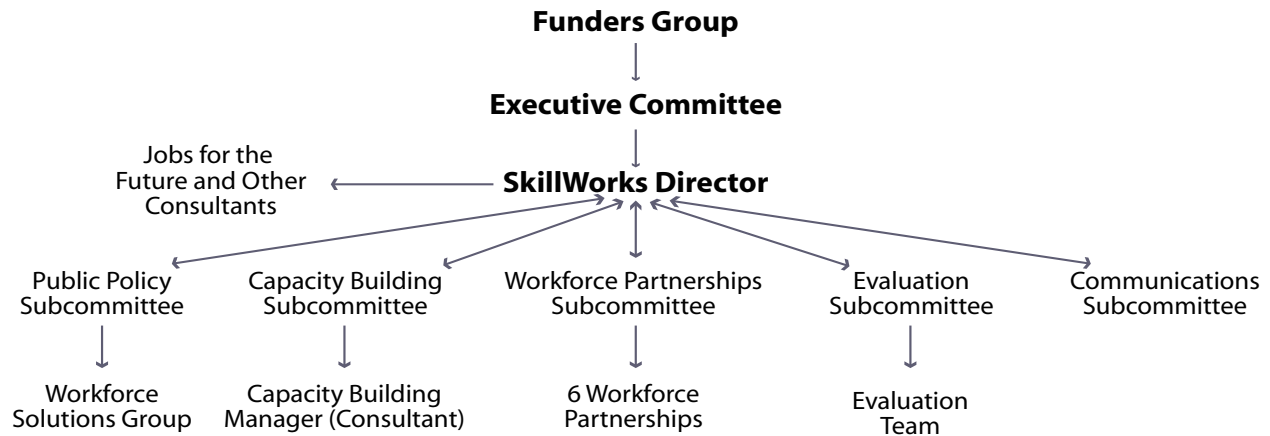
Most funders make multi-year commitments to the initiative, which are renewed annually. This approach allowed SkillWorks to develop a five-year financing plan.

The initiative continues to recruit new funders. For example, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation joined SkillWorks in 2005, enabling the initiative to expand into a new segment of the health care sector: community health work.

SkillWorks is creative in its use of private foundation funds to encourage public agencies to invest in bringing innovations to scale, integrating them into the workforce delivery system, and making them sustainable. The City of Boston’s Neighborhood Jobs Trust made an unusual multi-year pledge of flexible public funding. This may help institutionalize SkillWorks reforms within the city’s publicly funded workforce system. The city and SkillWorks negotiated a simple performance-based contract to transfer funds twice a year to the initiative.

The participation of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Workforce Development on the Funders Group has enabled the initiative to link to state expertise and resources, and it may form the basis for expansion beyond Boston in future years. Following the example of the Neighborhood Jobs Trust contract, a performance-based contract with the Commonwealth provides for the transfer of funds to the initiative, in part based on the accomplishments of the Workforce Partnerships.

# SkillWorks Organizational Structure



## Management and Staffing

SkillWorks is staffed by a full-time director. It contracts with Abt Associates and Mount Auburn Associates for evaluation, with Freeman Consulting for capacity building, and with Jobs for the Future for technical assistance on the initiative's structure and management. Additional consultants are retained as needed for capacity building and special projects.

The director facilitates the implementation of the three SkillWorks components as pieces of a coherent whole. She also advises the Funders Group on issues needing their attention, coordinates technical assistance to and monitoring of the grantees, and identifies policy issues that emerge from the activities of the Workforce Partnerships.

The director and management consultants together develop recommendations for the Funders Group on proposal specifications. They also review criteria to assist the Funders Group in selecting grantees and develop reporting systems to assess the initiative's progress toward its goals.

## Evaluation

Abt Associates and Mount Auburn Associates are jointly conducting a five-year outcomes evaluation of SkillWorks. They are examining its success in institutionalizing its core principles into Boston's workforce development system, as reflected in changed practices by service providers, employers, and the decisions of policymakers (e.g., legislators, foundations) around funding and service design. The evaluators help

SkillWorks grantees refine their goals into measurable outcomes for workers and employers. They also help grantees articulate how their activities contribute to improving workforce development systems.

In 2004, at the end of SkillWorks' first year of on-the-ground work, Abt Associates and Mount Auburn Associates produced a baseline report. This helped the funders refine and articulate their goals for the initiative. In 2006, the evaluators worked with the funders evaluation committee to develop a framework that articulates the changes that SkillWorks hopes to accomplish in service provider practices, employer practices, and the workforce system in order to reach scale and sustain the initiative's core principles (see Appendix: Projected Outcomes).

The evaluators also prepare annual assessments of the progress of each grantee toward its goals. These assessments guide refunding negotiations, and they enable the initiative to assure current and potential investors that strong accountability systems are in place.

Ultimately, the SkillWorks evaluation will provide longitudinal documentation of:

- Which interventions produce advancement for low-income individuals;
- Which workforce development strategies are sustainable over the long term; and
- The ability of the "three-legged stool" of SkillWorks' theory of change to lead to sustainable improvements to Boston's workforce development system.

# ***The Accomplishments of SkillWorks, 2003–2006***

SkillWorks engages service providers, employers, policymakers, and funders in experimenting with new ways to help low-income residents progress toward economic sufficiency, and it engages the stakeholders in workforce development in analyzing “what works” at several levels: systems, services, and the workplace.

## **Workforce Partnerships**

SkillWorks applies two principal criteria for selecting industry sectors and programs for funding as Workforce Partnerships:

- The accessibility of jobs in the sector to low-skilled residents; and
- The strength of employer commitment to building career pathways with wage advancement opportunities for frontline workers.

Between late 2003, when the Workforce Partnerships began delivering services, and 2006, the Workforce Partnerships served over 700 unemployed individuals and 1,700 incumbent workers. Of these, nearly 400 unemployed Boston residents found jobs with career advancement opportunities, and over 1,000 incumbent workers took multiple steps toward career advancement, including 260 who have received promotions.

## ***Linking Pre-employment Training and Services to Incumbent Workers***

Workforce Partnerships have a powerful impact on participants, especially low-skilled, incumbent workers for whom career advancement is a stretch. Workforce Partnerships place career coaches and basic education instructors in the workplace to become acclimated to the business’ procedures and expectations. Several of the Workforce Partnerships primarily focus on workers with very limited English skills and with low literacy levels who are unlikely to participate in—or benefit from—employer-provided occupational training. These partnerships encourage entry-level workers to participate at staff meetings or make productivity suggestions to their supervisors. They also help workers set personal career goals, create a plan for achieving those goals, and gain access to resources for following the plan.

Workforce Partnerships engage employers in a qualitatively different manner than do traditional training programs. They go beyond inviting employers to serve on advisory boards or provide guest lecturers or internships. The Workforce Partnerships encourage employers to pay more attention to lower-skilled workers, and they have become advisors to their employer partners on better ways to train adult learners and help workers balance work, family, and

## ***Linked Worker Services***

Prior to SkillWorks, most workforce development programs in Boston either offered pre-employment activities or served incumbent workers. SkillWorks addresses both, within the same partnerships. Some incumbent worker efforts have expanded to more effectively reach community residents who lack jobs. And providers who previously focused primarily on pre-employment now also address the needs of incumbent workers.

The Workforce Partnerships have developed innovative strategies to improve the link between pre-employment and incumbent worker services. For example, the Partnership for Automotive Career Education has the same career coach assist participants before and after they get a job. Partners in Career and Workforce Development has separate coaches for incumbent workers and pre-employment trainees during their first six months on the job, but it arranges a hand-off meeting with the participant and both coaches.

## SkillWorks Outcomes

The chart below summarizes the services provided by and the outcomes of the five SkillWorks Workforce Partnerships. The data for 2004-2005, covering December 2003 through November 2005, has been validated by the SkillWorks evaluators.

The data for 2006 is preliminary; it covers December 2005 through November 2006. The total participants served is a non-duplicated count of people receiving any of the following training or non-training services: occupational training, coaching, literacy, ESL, placement assistance, retention assistance, referrals, tutoring, mentoring, and mapping career pathways. The number of participants completing training includes multiple counts based on incumbent workers who participate in multiple training courses. The Partnership for Automotive Career Education and the Building Services Industry Career Path Project began operations in 2005; the data reflect this.

In addition to the outcomes presented in the table, two-thirds of the incumbent worker participants received wage increases over SkillWorks' first three years. While many increases were due to cost-of-living adjustments and may not have related directly to completing training, they are important as a measure of job retention and of participants' economic progress. Many SkillWorks projects base their success on academic credentials and skill attainments, which may not result in immediate, short-term wage gains but nevertheless help participants advance to family-sustaining wages over the long term.

<b>Pre-employment Participant Services</b>		<b>2004-2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
<i>Participants</i>		478	259
<i>Completed served</i>	Building Services Industry Career Path Project	*	*
	Health Care and Research Training Institute	103	80
	Hotel Career Center	92	50
	Partners in Career and Workforce Development	89	36
	Partnership for Automotive Career Education	14	26
<i>Participants placed in new jobs</i>		240	156
<b>Incumbent Worker Participant Services</b>			
<i>Participants served</i>		1,040	657
<i>Completed training</i>	Building Services Industry Career Path Project	**	105
	Health Care and Research Training Institute	439	225
	Hotel Career Center	260	185
	Partners in Career and Workforce Development	36	43
	Partnership for Automotive Career Education	0	105
<i>Promotions</i>	Building Services Industry Career Path Project	**	17
	Health Care and Research Training Institute	97	**
	Hotel Career Center	12	14
	Partners in Career and Workforce Development	109	**
	Partnership for Automotive Career Education	0	11

\* The Building Services Industry Career Path Project has no pre-employment component.

\*\* Not applicable

training needs. For example, the Building Services Career Path Project provides janitors, who often work two or three jobs, with midnight classes in the office buildings where they work.

SkillWorks is explicit: it is not enough to have many small, isolated projects, even if those projects reflect best practices and career paths for low-income workers. Rather, partnerships aim for a larger scale, and, more important, SkillWorks seeks to ensure that improved practices are adopted broadly and institutionalized in both employer practice and the workforce development system.

Among the changes institutionalized through Workforce Partnerships are preferred-provider relationships between employers and nonprofit service providers, increased employer-paid release time for training, employer-supported career coaching, college courses offered at work sites, and the mapping of new employer-specific career ladders. These innovations, and others, are presented in more detail in the brief profiles of the five workforce partnerships established by mid-2006:

- The Boston Health Care and Research Training Institute;
- The Hotel Career Center;
- Partners in Career and Workforce Development;
- The Partnership for Automotive Career Education; and
- The Voice and Future Fund: Building Services Industry Career Path Project.

### ***Boston Health Care and Research Training Institute***

The Boston Health Care and Research Training Institute provides a comprehensive array of education, mentoring, and career advancement opportunities to low-income, under-skilled community residents and entry-level workers in Boston's Longwood Medical and Academic Area (LMAA), one of the nation's highest concentrations of world-class health care and research institutions.

The institute has three goals:

- Expand health care and research job opportunities and career advancement paths for Boston residents living in or near the LMAA;
- Provide entry-level workers with education and supports to enable them to build skills, earn higher wages, and advance along career pathways; and
- Support employers, by improving their bottom line through increased retention of current workers, filling critical skills gaps, and providing a well-qualified workforce.

The institute was established in 2000, when the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation and Fenway Community Development Corporation joined with four health-related employers to undertake research and then provide training and career advancement opportunities for entry-level workers. Two years later, the institute expanded to eight employers. In 2003, the collaboration won a SkillWorks grant to expand the opportunities it offers to entry-level health care and medical research workers and to add training and coaching that open up career opportunities to other residents of the community. It has grown into a partnership of eleven health care employers, one union, ten community organizations, and four educational institutions.

Each year, the institute serves over 400 job seekers and entry-level employees, high percentages of whom progress toward family-sustaining incomes: 98 percent of pre-employment participants earn higher wages at placement than their pre-enrollment incomes, and 83 percent of incumbent workers complete one or more courses each year.

Employers provide significant financial support for the institute's operations and for participating workers, including paid release time and tuition reimbursement. The institute has convinced employers that the community can be a source of qualified job candidates to meet shortages of skilled workers. Employers report an 89 percent retention rate for entry-level workers enrolled in services over the first two years; 97 participants received promotions; and 233 received merit wage increases to participants. Supervisors report saving from half an hour to two hours a week from the enhanced skills of participants.

## ***Making of a Role Model: Grace Toledo***

Born and raised in Boston's Roxbury neighborhood, Grace Toledo graduated from the Boston Health Care and Research Training Institute's pre-employment training in June 2006 and then completed an internship in the finance office of Harvard Medical School's Cell Biology Department. Ms. Toledo is interested in pursuing a career in the medical field and would like to earn a nursing degree.

"This health training program made a positive impact on my life, with the excellent instructors of YMCA Training, Inc., and the help from the Employment Specialists, as well as my colleagues. In the program, I learned a lot, such as medical terminology and conducting myself in a professional manner during interviews.

"The program impacted [not only] me but also my daughter Shayla. She watched her dedicated mother with grit determination to be successful, and I influenced her to 'reach for the sky.' She saw that I too was learning like her, and that school is very important no matter what [your] age."

The institute also has improved the process of referring job candidates from community organizations to hospitals, introducing the efficiency of a single-point-of-contact system. And it has collaborated with post-secondary institutions to make college courses and programs more accessible, with offerings at the Longwood area and at times convenient for the hospital workers.

The institute's ultimate vision as a SkillWorks partner is to establish a permanent health care education and training center for entry-level workers and community residents. The broad partnership and educational and service offerings—combined with sustainable enhancements to the workforce systems of employers and education and service providers—lay a strong foundation toward achieving that goal.

### ***Hotel Career Center***

The hospitality industry relies on self-confident workers who have strong interpersonal skills and can communicate effectively with people of many cultures. Yet the industry also employs many recent immigrants with limited English and academic skills. The goal of the Hotel Career Center is to overcome this mismatch and help recent immigrants advance in hospitality careers.

The Hotel Career Center is a partnership of the International Institute of Boston, the Vietnamese American Civic Association, and Hilton Hotels

Corporation, Boston's largest hotel property management firm. It offers pre-employment training to job seekers and education and training for employees at five Hilton-affiliated hotels. Much of the education centers around English for Speakers of Other Languages: only 7 percent of pre-employment participants and 14 percent of incumbent workers in the program speak English as their first language. Training for job seekers also addresses job-readiness skills and includes an internship; pre-employment and incumbent workers benefit from computer courses, career coaching, and customized occupational training.

Since receiving a SkillWorks grant in late 2003, the Hotel Career Center has trained 219 job seekers and workers and posted high graduation rates: 88 percent of participants in the pre-employment program graduate, as do 98 percent of the incumbent workers in the computer workshops and English courses. To date, 79 percent of the job seekers have secured employment in hospitality, which is remarkable for recent immigrants who often have no U.S. work experience. Ninety-five percent of the incumbent workers in the program are still employed at Hilton, also remarkable in an industry with high turnover.

The program has made progress in convincing hotels to increase their investments in advancing the careers of entry-level workers. English courses based on hotel customer service for employees and training workshops for supervisors have helped bridge language



barriers that previously undermined promotional opportunities. For the first time, the hotel chain has paid entry-level workers to attend basic education courses and obtain career coaching at work, and it has offered these services on-site. The hotels also have instituted policies and programs to assist workers in gaining education and promotions.

### ***Partners in Career and Workforce Development***

The vision of Partners in Career and Workforce Development is to expand the tradition of learning among affiliates of Partners HealthCare to include entry-level workers and to enable low-income Boston residents to advance up the health care career ladder to jobs with family-sustaining salaries. PCWD is led by Boston-based Partners HealthCare, a not-for-profit network of hospitals, physicians, and community health centers that includes Brigham and Women's Hospital, Massachusetts General Hospital, and Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital. The vision emerged from workforce challenges faced by the Partners affiliates, specifically shortages of nurses, radiologic technologists, and allied health workers.

As an employer-led program, a key PCWD strategy for addressing staff shortages is to “promote from within,” providing opportunities for lower-level workers to advance into skilled positions. The program serves neighborhood residents and incumbent employees, providing a variety of career development activities that include one-on-one career coaching, recognition and support for managers and supervisors, and resources for human resources professionals.

In its first two years in SkillWorks, PCWD served 349 incumbent workers and 95 pre-employment participants. Ninety-three percent of the job seekers in PCWD's pre-employment training have graduated, and 85 percent have gotten jobs (most at one of the Partners HealthCare affiliates). Nearly half of those placed are still at Partners, and 234 incumbent workers enrolled in PCWD have participated in career exploration, pre-college courses, and college courses. Many have also taken GED and English for Speakers of Other Languages courses. Over half of the incumbent workers active in PCWD are interested in nursing careers, and over one-quarter are interested in radiologic technologist or surgical technologist careers.

### ***Polishing Skills, Changing Directions: Samira Elazraoui***

Soon after Samira Elazraoui arrived in the United States from Morocco in 2003, she found a job in retail sales. She interacted well with customers and showed strong sales skills but dreamed of a bright future that would be difficult to realize as a salesperson.

The hotel industry offered more promise and Ms. Elazraoui had solid credentials: she spoke excellent English, she had distinguished herself at her previous job, and she was comfortable with customers. But at her first job interview, Ms. Elazraoui became bashful. She spoke softly and avoided eye contact. “In my culture, it is impolite to look a man or a superior or an elder in the eye, so I wasn't used to this,” Ms. Elazraoui explains.

She didn't get the job, but intent on finding her way into the business, Ms. Elazraoui talked with a friend who had landed a position at the Park Plaza Hotel after graduating from the Hotel Career Center. With the friend's encouragement, Ms. Elazraoui signed up—and changed the direction of her life.

The six-week program at the Hotel Career Center addressed the entire process of applying for a hotel job. Ms. Elazraoui shadowed hotel staff, toured local hotels, and learned the computer and customer-service skills they needed. And every day, she allocated 45 minutes to preparing for the interview, enduring rigorous simulations. “The Hotel Career Center polished my skills,” she says.

Ms. Elazraoui is now the night audit supervisor at the Hotel @ MIT, earning \$13.75 per hour, and she is on her way in a career she loves.

PCWD has raised awareness of health care career options and career paths among job seekers and employees within the Partners network. It also has nurtured partnerships between employers and community-based organizations to make entry-level to health care jobs more accessible, and between employers and educational institutions to expand opportunities for entry-level workers.

### ***Partnership for Automotive Career Education***

The Partnership for Automotive Career Education helps low-income and low-skilled Boston residents earn family-sustaining wages and enter well-defined, lucrative career paths in automotive repair.

Simultaneously, the partnership collaborates with employers to understand the skill needs of current auto technicians and develop courses to address those needs. By better preparing candidates for jobs and by training incumbent workers, PACE improves retention and career advancement and reduces high turnover.

PACE's broad collaboration brings together four automotive service employers, three community-based organizations, two educational institutions, and the Massachusetts Automobile Dealers Association. It began in 2003, when the community organizations saw an opportunity to connect their constituents to good jobs in an industry with a high demand for skilled employees. All three were already providing pre-training in basic skills and job-readiness training in the biotechnology industry. SkillWorks enabled them to deepen an already strong relationship and launch a program of education, training, and career coaching for individuals seeking employment or advancement in auto repair.

After 10 months of SkillWorks planning, the program started in 2005 with Introduction to Automotive Maintenance, a set of training courses for job seekers and current workers in non-repair positions. It gradually phased into offering Intermediate Automotive Maintenance training for repair workers who, with additional training, could advance in their careers.

### ***It Can Be Done: Toddye Anderson***

Toddye Anderson had been homeless for nearly a year. She had lost her job and apartment due to medical issues—her own and her family's, and she was living in a shelter. But Ms. Anderson wanted to go back to school, and she knew she needed a good job. She also knew that while she had to rely on herself, she would need help.

That help came from Partners in Career and Workforce Development, which offered her training, placed her in a job, and started her on the path to a career in health care. PCWD also gave her an internship at a hospital and career coaching to help her define and stick to her goals.

Today, Ms. Anderson works full-time in the Pediatric Neurology Department at Massachusetts General Hospital. Her supervisor supports her ambitions, and Ms. Anderson has a flexible schedule that allows her to attend college. As a step toward studying to be a nurse, she has completed her first semester at Bunker Hill Community College. Ms. Anderson has also moved into her own apartment and won a college scholarship through a program to help homeless women and their families get back on their feet.

"Through PCWD, I was able to get the support I needed to succeed. Everywhere I went, there were people who were willing to take the time to help me and provide information and resources that I might not have seen and didn't have time to look for," says Ms. Anderson.

"There were five people at my homeless shelter who also tried to pursue education and training, but all of them have dropped out except for me. I worked hard, of course, but the support and resources I received also helped me overcome the many obstacles in my way. Today, I am a board member for Homes for Families, and I encourage others not to give up on their dreams and tell them to pursue education and training. I think I am an example that it can be done."

### ***Future Teacher: Edward Nixon***

Two years ago, Edward Nixon was asked if he would be interested in participating in an automotive training program. "It must have been divine intervention," says Mr. Nixon. "That was exactly what I needed." He called immediately to sign up and was told that PACE, the SkillWorks-funded Partnership for Automotive Career Education, would be starting in about a year. Sure enough, about a year later, he went down to the Urban League, filled out an application, interviewed, took tests, and entered the program.

Mr. Nixon had worked at an auto repair shop in Boston, but he felt was going nowhere and learning no new skills. PACE appealed to him because he would be able to build up his skills and eventually get a better job. Over the next year, Mr. Nixon completed two semesters of automotive training at Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology, and he landed a job at Sullivan Tire even before he finished the training.

"PACE motivated me and helped me learn. [It] helped me make connections between the classroom and the workplace and apply what I was learning in class on the job. I got to be more skilled and more knowledgeable, and I developed the drive to learn more. At my old job, I never thought about becoming ASE-certified [Automotive Service Excellence] or continuing my education. My boss wouldn't support me to do those things either. At PACE and at Sullivan Tire, they really support and push me to go to class and help me think about an automotive career path.

"I want to go back to school and get my Associate's and my Bachelor's degrees in automotive technology. I want to earn all eight ASE certifications and become a Master Technician. Maybe I'll teach automotive classes one day."

To date, 33 participants have enrolled in the introductory training, and 27 have completed it. Graduates placed in auto repair jobs earn significantly higher wages than they did in their old jobs: \$11.07 per hour to start, compared to previous wages of \$9.50 for full-time workers and \$8.50 for part-timers. As of mid-2006, 80 percent of the graduates still worked with the firms that hired them after the training.

Seventeen incumbent workers have enrolled in the intermediate training sequence, and 14 have completed it. Several of these workers have received wage increases and promotions as a result.

PACE also has made significant progress in engaging its employer and educational partners. Employers are much more committed to offering education opportunities and investing in their workers (e.g., offering paid release time for training, paying training fees). The education partners have collaborated closely with PACE to design and deliver the training, and they have changed an existing auto repair program to better fit these workers' schedules. And they now offer college credit for workers who complete the auto repair training course.

### ***Voice and Future Fund: Building Services Industry Career Path Project***

The Building Services Industry Career Path Project is a labor-management partnership between Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 615 and seven employers, including both building owners and maintenance contractors. The project's purpose is to catalyze the creation of permanent, sustainable career pathways in the industry—from part-time building cleaners to skilled maintenance workers—by improving both English and occupational skills and strengthening human resource practices and policies. The Workforce Partnership attends to the concerns of workers, maintenance contractors, and building owners as it develops pilot services and policy improvements that affect industry practices "locked in" through formal policies or collectively bargained contracts. The Voice and Future Fund, an industry-based non-profit, staffs the project.

Many entry-level janitors are recent immigrants, with limited English skills and little formal or vocational education. On the employer side, job descriptions are rare and, when they do exist, do not describe job

requirements accurately or thoroughly. Few job openings are posted, and there are few formal human resources personnel or practices. Natural career ladders that might enable workers to advance are rare in this industry.

The Building Services Industry Career Path Project has set out to change all this. In 2002, following an acrimonious strike, SEIU Local 615 created the nonprofit Voice and Future Fund to expand opportunities for working janitors. In 2004, the VFF received a SkillWorks planning grant to create a new Workforce Partnership, and in 2005, it received funding to implement career advancement services for part-time building cleaners by building worker skills and revising human resources policies. Ultimately, the union hopes to develop an education and training fund similar to those created by service unions in other cities, including New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

In early 2005, the VFF began the Building Services Industry Career Path Project, a career pathway model of education, training, and career coaching. The project offers education in basic English, a 108-hour building maintenance course, and “clean room” training for employees cleaning biotech labs. In its first two years, 138 workers enrolled in an education or training course; 76 percent of the students who took the ESL course completed it; and 95 percent of the partici-

pants in the first building maintenance class graduated in 2006.

Project staff work closely with employers on “promotion projects” to improve the companies’ internal human resources policies and career advancement opportunities. The VFF has collaborated with OneSource and Unicco, in particular, to develop tools and processes for career advancement programs that define job descriptions and the competencies needed for better jobs. Moreover, some of the building owners for whom contractors work have become engaged in this win-win project.

The project has gained the commitment of maintenance contractors and building owners to education and training, as well as to providing career advancement opportunities. And against the backdrop of the contentious 2002 strike, it has demonstrated the value of a shared commitment to good jobs and career paths.

### ***Planning for New Partnerships***

SkillWorks devotes substantial funding for planning activities leading to the creation of new Workforce Partnerships. Many stakeholders consider that this feature is critical to achieving the initiative’s goal.

To date, three new Workforce Partnerships have formed as a result of this design feature. Each operates

### ***New Leaders: Margarita Restrepo***

Almost 20 years ago, when Margarita Restrepo immigrated to Massachusetts from Columbia, she went to work immediately, cleaning office buildings in downtown Boston. Because most janitorial jobs are part time, Ms. Restrepo worked two jobs to support her family. She had neither time nor money to take classes that would improve her skills and help her get a better-job.

Ms. Restrepo was ready when the janitors’ union, SEIU Local 615, began offering English as a Second Language classes and building career pathways for cleaners. She enrolled in the English classes, which were offered at 10:00 p.m. in the building where she worked, and soon she could answer questions, give directions, and read instructions.

With her improved language skills, Ms Restrepo now supports her family working only one job, for Evergreen Management as a cleaner at Everett’s Whidden Hospital. The Building Services Industry Career Path Project also provides leadership training for janitors, and Ms. Restrepo’s fellow workers have elected her to the executive board of her union, which represents 16,000 cleaners, maintenance workers, and security officers in higher education and commercial buildings.

### **Expansion: A New Workforce Partnership**

In 2006, with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, SkillWorks awarded \$50,000 to Action for Boston Community Development to form and lead a Workforce Partnership to design a career advancement initiative for community health workers. The partnership, in collaboration with several hospitals and community health centers, the Massachusetts Association of Community Health Workers, the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, and two community colleges, will:

- Develop academic and career counseling resources;
- Work with employers on credentialing standards for community health workers; and
- Work on a public information and advocacy plan.

Based upon a successful planning process, SkillWorks will make a three-year commitment, totaling nearly \$1 million, to the initiative's sixth Workforce Partnership.

in an industry sector that was not targeted in either the state's or the city's economic development or workforce development plans: automotive repair, building maintenance, and community health work (see box on this page).

SkillWorks' selection criteria for planning grants emphasize active employer participation in the design and work plans of a Workforce Partnership. Employers in automotive repair, building maintenance, and community health work were experiencing critical workforce challenges in the local labor market, and they were strong leaders in supporting the nascent intermediaries. The planning process enabled service providers and employers to customize curricula, deepen their understanding of each other's work cultures, and develop work plans with the assurance that their efforts would result in services.

Even with planning grants, Workforce Partnerships experience steep learning curves in the transition to implementation. Start-up challenges range from hiring staff, to recruiting participants, to customizing SkillWorks design features. The partnerships "learn by doing" how best to implement new kinds of services, such as providing career coaching to low-skilled incumbent workers in a manner that is both cost effective for the partnership and respectful of the workplace culture of the employer.

### **Public Policy Advocacy**

While other groups in Massachusetts address public policies to improve particular aspects of the workforce system, SkillWorks is unique in its strategic approach, the resources it can focus on policy reform, and its "organizing" activity that seeks to deepen the constituency advocating for workforce development resources and system change.

The Workforce Solutions Group, a partnership of the Crittenton Women's Union, the Massachusetts AFL-CIO, the Massachusetts Communities Action Network, and the Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board Association, leads a broad-based coalition of more than 20 organizations that is:

- Developing and promoting a common advocacy agenda based on SkillWorks' core principles and innovative design features; and
- Raising the visibility of workforce development as a contributor to the economic well being of the Commonwealth.

Several priorities reflecting SkillWorks' core principles guide advocacy activities:

- Building a broad continuum of services;
- Creating industry-responsive career ladders aimed at the advancement of low-wage workers;
- Coordinating the funds and policies of all agencies involved in workforce development;

- Reducing the barriers to effective implementation of Workforce Partnerships; and
- Developing systems to institutionalize the successes of Workforce Partnerships throughout the publicly funded workforce development system.

SkillWorks supports a statewide policy strategy, rather than focusing at the federal or city levels, on the premise that state governments not only support their own programs, they also interpret and apply federal regulations that are implemented on the local level. The members of the Funders Group believe that the greatest opportunity for effective input by a local or regional initiative is at this level. This has proven to be a successful strategy. The Workforce Solutions Group has conducted forums and organized stakeholders—including the SkillWorks Funders Group—in every Massachusetts legislative district, and it has mobilized people to testify at legislative hearings, community meetings, and other venues.

The meetings across the state provided important input on workforce challenges, surfacing common concerns that have led to potential legislative policy

ideas. Twice the legislature has included workforce development in its Economic Stimulus Acts, with broad support from legislators across the state (see box on this page).

Through its work on the 2004 and 2006 legislation, the Workforce Solutions Group won a high degree of credibility within the workforce development arena and among labor and business organizations. This credibility has been key to strengthening the constituency for public policy changes, and it may have long-term implications for improving the workforce development system in the Commonwealth.

For example, as a result of the 2006 Economic Stimulus Act, the Workforce Solutions Group worked with the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (the state agency that manages TANF and Food Stamps) to increase the state's use of Food Stamp Employment and Training resources. This federal matching grant was under-used due to restrictive language in the state's Food Stamp plan and in the legislation supporting the department's budget. The Workforce Solutions Group helped revise the plan and

### ***The Provisions of the 2006 Massachusetts Economic Stimulus Act***

The 2006 Massachusetts Economic Stimulus Act incorporates a number of provisions from the proposed "Workforce Solutions Act," which was developed through meetings throughout Massachusetts with a variety of stakeholders in workforce development:

\$11 million for a Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund to provide job training in high-demand occupations, with authorization to continue through 2010

\$3 million in additional funds for adult basic education and English for speakers of other languages

\$2 million in additional funds for One Stop Career Centers

\$3 million in additional funds for school-to-career connecting activities

\$1.5 million for Educational Rewards Grants, which provide funds to community or state colleges for adults studying part time

\$4 million for STEM Pipeline funding for science, technology, engineering, and math education

Provisions to procure as much as \$20 million in additional federal workforce training funds under the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program

A Workforce Accountability Task Force that will work to align public workforce resources from multiple funding sources

*For the complete text of the Massachusetts Economic Stimulus Act, go to: [www.skill-works.org/resources](http://www.skill-works.org/resources).*

to craft legislation that will enable service providers working with Food Stamp recipients to receive a 50 percent match of the non-federal dollars spent on them.

Another SkillWorks advocacy accomplishment with potential for long-term impact is the establishment of the Workforce Accountability Task Force, which will develop policies that advance skills and workforce development opportunities for incumbent, unemployed, and underemployed youth and adults whose lack of skills may limit their successful employment. Further, the task force is charged with evaluating inter-agency governance and coordination and recommending policies to improve coordination and oversight and to maximize resources for workforce development. This task force will be appointed by both the legislature and the administration, thereby bringing broad-based political and stakeholder attention to the challenge of improving the workforce system.

A further indication of SkillWork's impact came during the 2006 Massachusetts gubernatorial campaign. All six candidates participated in a public SkillWorks *Forum on Jobs and Opportunity*, and committed to supporting the Workforce Solutions Act in the face of a gubernatorial veto (see box: The Provisions of the 2006 Massachusetts Economic Stimulus Act.) This is the first time that workforce development has had such a high level of visibility in a Massachusetts governor's campaign. (The forum transcript is available at [www.skill-works.org](http://www.skill-works.org).)

## Capacity Building

Capacity Building is designed to increase the ability of Boston-area workforce development providers to meet the needs of employers and low-income individuals. This SkillWorks component has evolved from an initial investment in strengthening a few community-based organizations to a broad strategy supporting professional development for the staff of Workforce Partnerships and workforce development providers.

## Capacity Building, 2003–2005

SkillWorks' capacity-building strategy began with a three-year investment in organizational development and strategic planning for five small and mid-sized community-based organizations: the Asian American Civic Association, the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation, La Alianza Hispana, Project Place, and the Vietnamese American Civic Association.

This work began a year in advance of the other SkillWorks components, as part of a Rockefeller Foundation initiative aimed at intensive interventions with Boston community-based organizations. The focus was on building the skills of the CBOs' staff and on strengthening their alliances with community colleges and other players in workforce development. Activities included organizational and program assessments, the creation of work plans focused on workforce development, the identification and selection of technical and management consultants, and training for staff to enhance services and strategic planning.

Capacity building helped sharpen each CBO's organizational vision and enabled them to be more selective and strategic in developing programs and pursuing funding to serve their constituencies.

Four of the CBO grantees, competing against some of Boston's biggest and most experienced service providers, received SkillWorks Workforce Partnership grants in 2003:

- The Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation became the fiscal agent for the Boston Health Care and Research Training Institute.
- The Vietnamese American Civic Association partnered with the International Institute of Boston and Hilton Hotels in the proposal that resulted in the Hotel Career Center.
- The Asian American Civic Association and La Alianza Hispana formed a partnership with the Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts and the Automotive Dealerships Association that landed one of two SkillWorks planning grants to develop a new sectoral workforce partnership, competing against twenty-one other proposals.

## **Capacity Building, 2006**

Today, capacity building is integrated into the overall SkillWorks strategy: it focuses on helping Workforce Partnerships and their partners accomplish the goals they set out under SkillWorks and cultivating their ability to function as peer experts to Boston's wider workforce development community.

Beginning in 2005, SkillWorks has conducted an ongoing needs analysis of each of the Workforce Partnerships, comparing their proposals and monthly reports to the SkillWorks goals and their own work plans, reviewing the technical assistance provided by consultants, and interviewing staff at each grantee. Based on this analysis, SkillWorks invests in technical assistance, peer learning meetings, and mini-grants for special projects. These investments have significantly increased the potential for Workforce Partnerships to achieve their goals, institutionalize program innovations, and plan for sustaining themselves beyond the SkillWorks initiative.

*Technical Assistance:* Each Workforce Partnership receives individualized, direct technical assistance. In the first two years, the Boston Private Industry Council helped the grantees accomplish their work plans and directed them toward resources that would help them do so.

For example, the Boston Private Industry Council linked the Building Services Career Path Workforce

Partnership to the Boston Adult Education Department of Madison Park Technical Vocational High School. As a result, the school made its facilities available to the Workforce Partnership for occupational training on nights and weekends. Technical assistance resources have also helped: the Health Care and Research Training Institute apply for state funds; Partners in Careers and Workforce Development understand how to negotiate with community-based organizations for a preferred-provider relationship for pre-employment referrals; and the Partnership for Automotive Career Education to apply for Individual Training Account vouchers from One Stop Career Centers to supplement the tuition for automotive training.

SkillWorks now delivers technical assistance through a variety of consultants engaged by the SkillWorks director. Assistance is delivered at partnership meetings, as well as through the sharing of research on local and national promising practices around career pathways, program designs, employer engagement strategies, and similar issues. In addition, SkillWorks convenes meetings that connect grantees to the broader workforce development system's career centers and other organizations in order to develop and refine intake, assessment, and referral processes.

*Peer Learning:* SkillWorks facilitates peer learning among the Workforce Partnerships, bringing grantees together every quarter, sometimes for training and sometimes to exchange information.

## **Planning Grants**

SkillWorks awards planning grants of \$50,000 for up to ten months to support the formation of new Workforce Partnerships. This is one of the initiative's most important capacity-building resources.

The formation of new Workforce Partnerships is facilitated by planning grants, supplemented by technical assistance coaching. The grants provide members of a potential Workforce Partnership with resources and time to strengthen relationships between employers and service providers, map career ladders, align curricula and programs with industry demands, and analyze human resources challenges. Coaching helps assure that program designs are well aligned with the initiative's vision and take advantage of lessons from similar projects.

After two of the community-based organizations that would later form the Partnership for Automotive Career Education completed a capacity-building period, they received a planning grant. This enabled them to get a head start when they later received full funding to forge a Workforce Partnership that included automotive repair employers.



Sharing information about collective experiences and lessons helps SkillWorks grantees to anticipate challenges and develop strategies to address them. In one session, for example, the Workforce Partnerships brainstormed on the role of career coaching within each of their programs and identified the skills and competencies needed to perform the job. A second meeting, on the topic of career coaching, focused on how the partnerships manage the coaching function within the workplace and make it more cost effective as workers

begin to make progress with their career advancement plans.

*Mini Grants for Special Projects:* SkillWorks awards mini-grants for special capacity-building projects, such as updating a database or writing a business plan for sustainability. Workforce Partnerships may apply for grants of up to \$30,000 at any time. Applications must demonstrate how the resources will strengthen their ability to achieve their goals.

# The Lessons of SkillWorks

Since 2002, when the funders first came together, and 2003, when SkillWorks awarded its first grants, the initiative partners have learned a great deal about how the Boston workforce development system can do a better job of advancing low-income individuals to family-supporting incomes, while meeting the needs of employers for skilled workers. These lessons concern capacity building, advocacy, Workforce Partnerships, and the overall initiative.

## Lessons about Capacity Building

### ***Planning grants encourage the creation of new Workforce Partnerships.***

Planning grants enable new Workforce Partnerships to recruit members, analyze employer needs, design career advancement pathways, and develop work plans. For example, SkillWorks' three newly formed Workforce Partnerships experienced the challenges typical of launching an initiative (e.g., delays in identifying and hiring staff, delays in program implementation, conflicts between program principles and service designs). The investment in planning paid off in the consistent support of employer partners through the roll-out of plans they had helped to develop. Thus, the three employer partners in the Partnership for Automotive Career Education stayed on board despite disappointing job placements from the first round of training. They actively worked with project staff to analyze the cause of the problem (poor applicant screening), *and* they contributed time and resources to a revised process. The result: a 90 percent placement rate in the second round, providing the employer partners with motivated, screened, and trained new employees.

### ***Technical assistance is important to the formation of a system of workforce partnerships.***

Even strong service providers need help in carrying out the comprehensive activities of the Workforce Partnerships. SkillWorks' grants have gone to existing workforce development efforts with a track record in serving employers, enabling these programs to add

employer partners, engage service providers, and develop or expand program elements. When these activities strained capacity of a partnership's core staff, technical assistance has eased the research involved in finding promising models.

Technical assistance sponsored by the funders also has generated credibility for partnership staff in advocating for improved practices. For example, Partners for Careers in Workforce Development, an employer-run partnership, struggled to balance SkillWorks' focus on advancement for low-income/low-skilled individuals with employers' need to provide access to benefits (such as training) to all workers and with policies requiring a supervisor's recommendation before an employee could obtain employer-provided training. A technical assistance provider attended partnership meetings with department supervisors to help explain SkillWorks, researched strategies used by similar employers, and worked with the partnership team to develop guidelines acceptable to management and consistent with SkillWorks principles.

### ***Capacity is transferable.***

SkillWorks encourages community-based organizations to ally with community colleges and technical schools, build referral relationships with other service providers, and partner with employers. These relationships allow each organization to work from its strengths and lead to higher quality services for participants and employers. Several organizations involved in Workforce Partnerships have built on these models and relationships and transferred them to non-SkillWorks programs. For example, WorkSource Partners, which provides career coaching for the two health care workforce partnerships, has taken its experiences in building internal career pathways to a project that is independent of SkillWorks: helping CVS build a career advancement program for entry-level retail workers.

## **Lessons about Advocacy**

### ***The state is an effective level at which to direct initiative policy strategies.***

The SkillWorks funders debated the relative merits of a national, local, or statewide focus for policy advocacy. Some noted that national policies drove state policies, while others pointed out that Workforce Partnerships were local. In the end, the funders concurred that they were unlikely to be heard very effectively at the national level and that state funding priorities strongly influenced local practice. The state became the target for SkillWorks public policy advocacy.

This strategy has paid off. The Workforce Solutions Group has mobilized diverse constituencies—employers, unions, faith-based groups, adult literacy providers, workforce investment boards—all across the state to form coalitions in support of a common agenda. The statewide organizing reached legislators from every district, resulting in broad enough support to override two gubernatorial vetoes of valuable workforce development provisions in the 2004 and 2006 Economic Stimulus Acts.

### ***A broad-based constituency promotes broad-based legislative victories.***

Massachusetts is rich with advocates for improving the economic conditions of low-income residents. Many of these groups have legislative agendas, ranging from the AFL-CIO's efforts to increase the minimum wage to the Adult Literacy Resource Initiative's efforts to reduce the multi-year waiting lists for adult basic education. In a typical year, the legislature might address one such issue, leading advocates to compete with one another. The Workforce Solutions Group's constituency building has provided a forum for advocacy groups to find common ground and build a common agenda. In 2006, the coalition crafted a single, broad legislative bill that was enacted with the support of multiple stakeholders.

### ***An effective intermediary can negotiate advocacy compromises.***

At times, the SkillWorks policy agenda has conflicted with that of individual members of the Workforce Solutions Group. The Workforce Solutions Group

requires its members to inform the group of a potential conflict, and they work out compromises. For example, the Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board Association strongly supported a provision in 2006 legislation requiring WIBs to be the lead applicants in workforce partnerships. Other members of the group were equally committed to allowing any institution to be the lead. In a compromise, any institution can apply to be lead the partnership, but the local WIB must be involved in it. This broadened support for what became the 2006 Economic Stimulus Act and avoided in-fighting that could have undermined legislation for workforce development initiatives.

### ***Supporting the priorities of each stakeholder generates support from those stakeholders for SkillWorks priorities.***

The Workforce Solutions Group incorporated an important recommendation of the Reach Higher Initiative—the “Education Rewards Program”—into proposals for the 2006 Economic Stimulus Act, and thereby won funding for a higher-education grants program for working adults. The Reach Higher Initiative was led in part by Commonwealth Corporation, which manages most of the state's workforce development initiatives. Following the passage of the 2006 act, it has been much easier for the Workforce Solutions Group to collaborate with Commonwealth Corporation on incorporating some of the lessons from SkillWorks into guidelines for the state's new Competitiveness Trust Fund, including the benefits of planning grants and the need for ongoing funding of successful projects.

### ***Competing stakeholder priorities may dilute the potential for sweeping change.***

SkillWorks seeks legislation that aligns all public workforce development resources in Massachusetts around the SkillWorks principles of dual-customer approaches to promoting career advancement for low-income residents. However, some members of the broad-based coalition mobilized by the Workforce Solutions Group were concerned that such an aligned system might adversely affect their programs or undermine portions of their missions. For example, advocates for adult literacy programs were reluctant to support

provisions that integrated literacy with workforce skill development, which they considered inconsistent with the holistic literacy development goals of adult basic education.

Instead of proposing comprehensive reform of the workforce development system around SkillWorks principles, the 2006 Economic Stimulus Act offers “something for everyone” by creating a trust fund to support workforce partnerships across the state and increasing funding for a number of workforce-related programs, such as adult literacy and One Stop Career Centers. The act also mandates a “Workforce Accountability Task Force” to develop recommendations to improve the alignment of workforce development policies, thereby avoiding direct, inter-agency reorganization issues.

## **Lessons about Workforce Partnerships**

### ***Successful Workforce Partnerships balance competing interests.***

Workforce Partnerships actually have more than two customers whose interests they must consider. In addition to serving employers and workers, they also must answer to their funders and their partner members.

Each partner—whether an employer or a service provider—has its own work culture and its own motivations for collaborating with others. The Workforce Partnership as an intermediary offers flexible strategies in its work with each partner, while maintaining a common base of values and expectations.

An illustration of this balancing act is provided by the Partnership for Automotive Career Education. Employers join PACE because they are encountering shortages of skilled mechanics. Community-based organizations join the partnership to provide opportunity for their constituents, particularly young men. The funders are attracted by the unusual nature of the partnership, as well as by the potential to support a new career ladder resource. And workers are attracted by opportunities to get better-paying jobs.

As the project has evolved, employers have shown more interest in the entry-level, pre-employment training than in incumbent worker training for advancement, while the funders have focused on

linking entry-level workers to training that would lead to higher wages. The intermediary has balanced these competing preferences by seeking common ground: employers *do* want to help some of their long-time employees pass certification tests, so PACE developed short-term test preparation and technical review classes that accommodate adult learning styles.

### ***The work of Workforce Partnerships needs financial support.***

Workforce Partnerships do more than traditional training programs—even those that offer good programs with comprehensive education, training, case management, placement and retention services. Workforce partnerships build close working relationships with the staff of employer partners at several levels: attending department meetings, consulting with human resources staff, obtaining buy-in from senior staff. They also build relationships between community-based organizations and educational institutions to develop customized curricula, arrange for workplace course offerings, and integrate support services with education. And workforce partnerships develop long-term relationships with participants that provide them with multiple services over a period of years.

These convening, brokering, and aligning functions are all essential, yet they are over and above the actual delivery of high-quality training. Such activities are labor intensive, and their costs are rarely covered by the meager administrative caps of public funders or by an employer’s purchase of fee-for-service training or retention supports.

## **Lessons about Employer Engagement**

### ***Workforce Partnerships can influence employer practices concerning their entry-level workers.***

SkillWorks Workforce Partnerships have engaged employers in active collaborations with community-based organizations and colleges to design curricula, assess applicants, and evaluate worker competencies. A high level of engagement around the entry-level workforce has led to employer support for human resources practices that increase opportunity for entry-level workers (e.g., paid release time to partici-

pate in training, recruitment through community organizations, support for internships).

Employers served by Workforce Partnerships report improvements in worker morale and retention, worker willingness to contribute to staff meetings, and communications between workers and supervisors. Participating employers surveyed by one of the partnerships reported that supervisors saved measurable amounts of time each week in explaining job expectations and following up on or redoing work assignments. Supervisors have shown increased willingness to send entry-level workers to training.

### ***Employers are unlikely to fully fund Workforce Partnerships.***

Most employer contributions to Workforce Partnerships have been in-kind donations of management time and training space, along with paid release time for participants. While valuable, these do not help Workforce Partnerships meet their day-to-day operating expenses. Even the SkillWorks partnership most successful in obtaining cash support from employers has raised less than a third of its total budget from them.

Experience and economic theory raise doubts about employer incentives to pay for basic literacy, ESL, and job-readiness training that are not directly linked to technical job skills. On the other hand, employers often will pay for training that improves workers' technical job skills. To the extent that Workforce Partnerships can demonstrate the expected return-on-investment for worker training, employers will be likely to provide cash support. Workforce Partnerships that focus on very-low-skilled workers will have a more difficult time building the case for employer investment in basic skills.

### ***Commitments from actual employers may be a better predictor than labor market data of advancement opportunities for low-wage workers.***

The sectors in which SkillWorks supports Workforce Partnerships overlap somewhat with those identified in state workforce development plans—particularly in health care—but automotive repair, building maintenance, and hospitality do not lead the state's list of preferred sectors based on labor market projections.

Despite this, employers in each of these sectors have experienced significant labor market disruption in finding, training, and retaining skilled workers. They are highly motivated to explore alternative approaches to meeting their needs—even to the extent of adopting practices that run counter to conventional wisdom in their sector, such as the belief in hospitality industry that high turnover is a basic cost of doing business. Employers have joined Workforce Partnerships and stayed with them for years.

In industries that rank high on the state's list of targeted industries for economic development (e.g., financial services, biotechnology), employers may have limited need for workers with less than a Bachelor's degree or limited interest in career advancement plans for low-skill workers. If the initiative had built employer engagement exclusively around labor market data, it is questionable that it would have achieved the same level of impact on employer human resources practices.

## **Lessons about Initiative Management**

### ***By collaborating, funders can extend their impact beyond that achieved even through the sum of their grantmaking.***

The SkillWorks Funders Group is distinctive. Every two months, senior program officers from twelve foundations, the city, and the state review progress and discuss potential innovations and improvements. As they discuss issues, each funder shares its experiences with grantees from other initiatives and with similar challenges from other funding programs, contributing to the collective know-how at SkillWorks for guiding performance.

In addition to shared learning, the Funders Group facilitates the sharing of resources for non-SkillWorks events. This is particularly evident in Capacity Building: the chair of the SkillWorks Capacity Building Committee has convened several state agencies to think strategically about jointly delivering professional development workshops for workforce development staff who are supported by several funding streams.

Over and above these aligned resources and programmatic improvements, the Funders Group, by its very existence, raises the visibility and prestige of career advancement efforts for low-skill workers. With almost

every Boston workforce development funder participating in SkillWorks, the initiative has generated media attention for workforce development and attracted the notice of the legislature. And the combined prestige of the members of the Funders Group makes it easier for grantees to talk to employers about the importance of addressing the needs of their entry-level workforce.

***Funders need to use several strategies to reinforce their vision with grantees.***

The SkillWorks funders are motivated by a desire to improve the functioning of the workforce system so that employers look to it as a resource and low-income residents prepare for jobs with high-paying potential. An important vehicle for achieving this ambitious, systemic goal are the grantees: the Workforce Solutions Group and the Workforce Partnerships.

The funders have set out SkillWorks' goals clearly and continuously, so applicants for funding know that grantees are expected to do more than simply operate good training programs. Nevertheless, as programs were implemented, the grantees found that their individual goals sometimes diverged from the funders' goals. The funders learned the value of communicating frequently with grantees and jointly planning strategies to reinforce the initiative's goals. The funders also provide a technical assistance liaison to the grantees, and they support peer learning meetings among the grantees and the SkillWorks staff to

exchange information and discuss strategies for reaching the goals.

***Advancement for very low-skilled individuals is slow.***

The SkillWorks funders initially expected that Workforce Partnerships would accelerate wage increases and promotions for significant numbers of low-skilled workers each year. In practice, comparatively few very-low-skilled workers have been promoted each year, although many have improved their skills.

In some cases, particularly in health care, advancement requires an academic credential that takes years to achieve. Employers may make these credentials accessible through college-readiness programs, but they are less interested in creating in-between job steps that make the rungs on the career ladder less steep.

In other cases, some participants have been reluctant to apply for promotions, despite their improved skills. Participants have told Workforce Partnership staff that they are concerned that added workplace duties would interfere with family responsibilities. Family needs may easily derail a worker's adherence to an advancement plan. Labor market progress requires multiple interventions, as well as co-investments from a support services system.

## ***Next Steps: 2006–2008 and Beyond***

At its mid-point, SkillWorks is taking stock of its accomplishments, making corrections, assessing its theory of change, and reaffirming its commitment to forging sustainable improvements to the Massachusetts workforce development system. At the same time, major challenges remain to be addressed regarding:

- Fundraising;
- Success measures;
- Sustaining Workforce Partnerships;
- Institutionalizing human resources reforms;
- Sustaining systems reform; and
- Scaling up.

### **Fundraising**

The SkillWorks funders began with a courageous step: they launched a multi-million-dollar, multi-year initiative with pledges in hand only for about two-thirds of the total budget. They opted to start making a difference in Boston while continuing to raise funds. Since 2003, they have brought additional funders to SkillWorks, yet some investors have yet to commit funding for the initiative's fourth and fifth years. This has affected planning for the next two years, and the original design has been scaled back, from seven Workforce Partnerships to six. It also affected the scale of Capacity Building, as well as the flexibility to consider additional planning grants.

At this point, SkillWorks has raised over \$14 million and is providing "step down" continuation grants to Workforce Partnerships at the end of their three-year awards. As additional revenue is raised, the Funders Group will support sustainability activities for Workforce Partnerships and the initiative.

### **Success Measures**

Advancement in many skill-shortage occupations that pay family-sustaining wages requires an Associate's degree. Comprehensive services make it more likely that low-income working people will achieve that goal, but it takes a very long time, and workers will

rarely realize significant earnings increases until the process is complete. The initiative needs to develop interim benchmarks—other than annual salary adjustments—that demonstrate progress in a way that public sector funders can support. As noted, the evaluation committee is working with the evaluators on a set of projected interim and long-term outcomes to address this need.

### **Sustaining Workforce Partnerships**

The SkillWorks goals involve moving the workforce development system toward partnerships as the vehicle for organizing resources for Boston residents and for employers. Pilot grants, capacity building, and advocacy all focus on making the public workforce system more hospitable to these intermediaries.

However, SkillWorks has yet to tackle the question of how to integrate the successes of the Workforce Solutions Group in generating additional state funds for career ladder programs into the sustainability plans of Workforce Partnerships and the overall SkillWorks initiative. The 2006 Economic Stimulus Act brought new resources to workforce development, but will state policymakers seek to institutionalize the successful models of the SkillWorks Workforce Partnerships?

### **Institutionalizing Human Resources Reforms**

SkillWorks has helped employers improve many practices that promote advancement for entry-level workers. While employers recognize the contributions these practices make to the quality of the work environment, most have yet to commit to institutionalizing them in corporate policy.

Participating employers have frequently noticed increased worker confidence, higher participation in staff meetings, and reduced supervisory time for entry-level workers who engaged in the partnerships' career advancement services. There are signs that some employers (e.g., Hilton Hotels) will continue to provide paid release time for training, but SkillWorks

and the Workforce Partnerships have yet to identify a consistent, easily usable method to convert work environment improvements into a strong business case for employers to institutionalize them. Some Workforce Partnerships are examining the Aspen Institute's Business Value Assessment tool, and SkillWorks has offered training in its use.

### **Sustaining Systems Reform**

SkillWorks set out to realign Boston's workforce development system on a number of fronts, including funder priorities, provider capacity, and employer practices. The initiative gave itself five years to address its goals through the interactions of the three components of capacity building, advocacy and Workforce Partnerships.

In the original SkillWorks vision, the Workforce Partnerships would function as "agents of change" within an industry sector and coordinate with the policy advocacy grantee. In practice, systems reform is

primarily the responsibility of the Workforce Solutions Group, while the partnerships deliver dual-customer advancement services. The initiative is seeking ways to integrate these two components more strategically to assure that lessons from the partnerships inform the policy advocacy agenda.

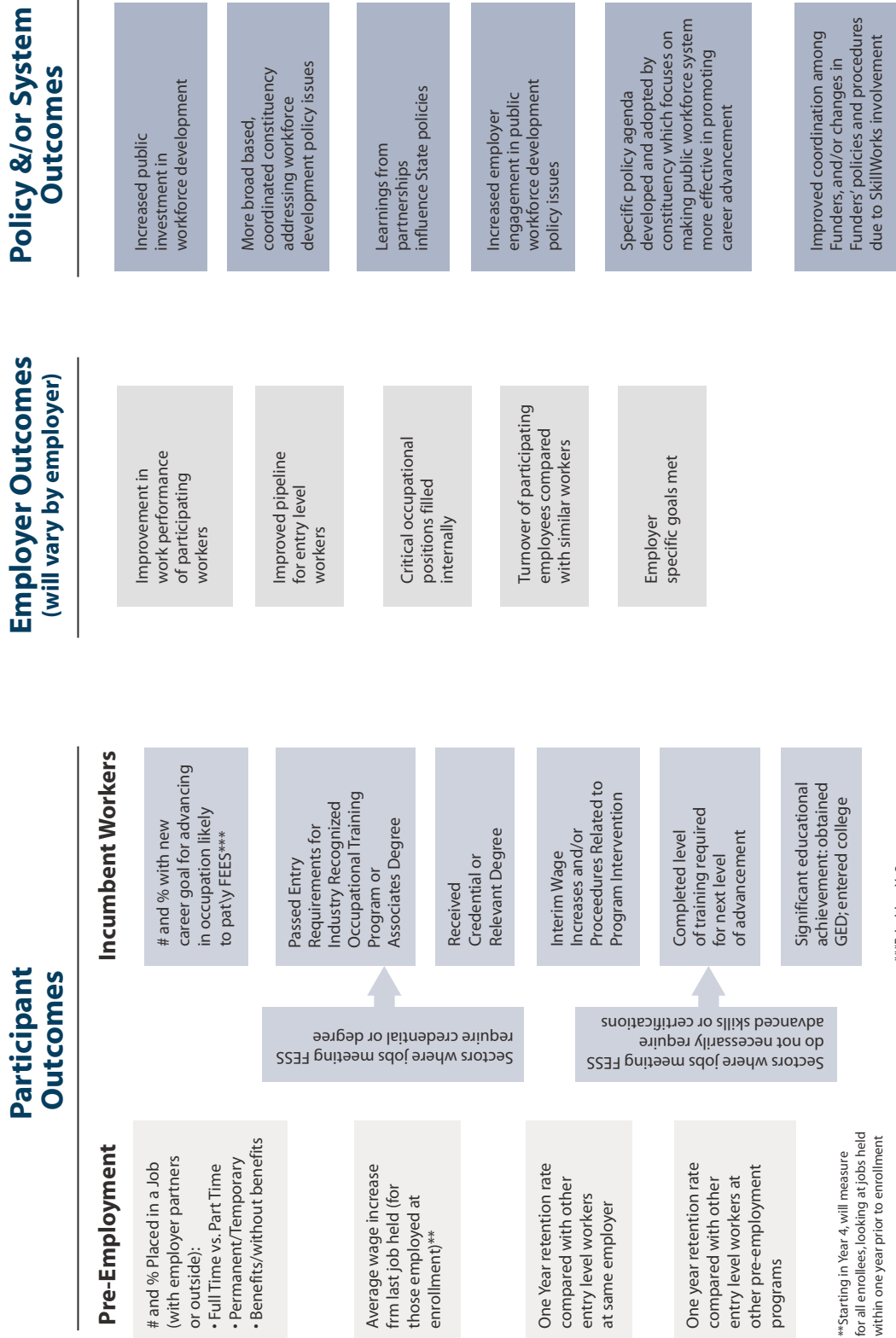
### **Scaling Up**

In addition to advocating for policies that generate resources (e.g., the Competitiveness Trust Fund) around the lessons learned by the Workforce Partnerships, the Funders Group is considering how to support the formation of—and capacity building for—additional partnerships in new industry sectors. One plan may be to look to public-sector resources to support implementation partnerships, focusing philanthropic resources for the remaining years of SkillWorks on new partnerships. SkillWorks will ultimately measure success by how pervasively its workforce partnership, career advancement model characterizes Boston's workforce development system.



# Appendix: Projected SkillWorks Outcomes

## Interim Outcomes: 1 – 3 Years (and continuing year 4 & 5)



## Longer Term Outcomes: Years 4&5 Reaching Scale

### Participant Outcomes

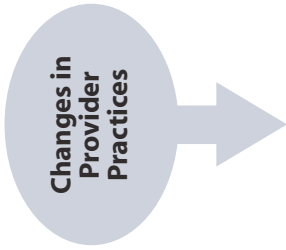
Number and % of Pre-Employment Participants Still Employed

Number and % of Program Participants Receiving Occupational Credential or Degree

Number and % of Program Participants Advancing to a Job Meeting FESS standards

Note: Partnerships are likely to have difficulties maintaining contact with many clients in Yrs 4 and 5; therefore, reporting on the above indicators likely will be for a subset of participants

### System Outcomes



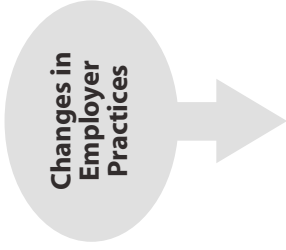
Increased use of and effectiveness of career coaching

Increased employer engagement

Improved information systems and use of data for program improvement

Development of new and effective curriculum for skill enhancement

Sustainability of improved capacities (re: funding, staffing, practices)



Increased investment by employer in career advancement for workers

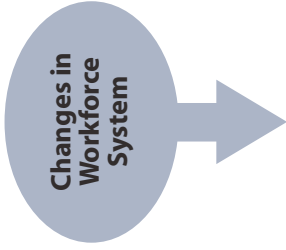
A significant number of entry level workers come through new or improved pipelines

Significant increase in the number of supervisors and managers committed to career advancement for employees

Improvements in human resource practices within participating employers

New and sustainable relationships build with learning providers and CBOs

Sector-wide changes in any of the above



More effective & integrated pipelines and referral mechanisms, particularly for entry level workers

Learnings from partnerships and SkillWorks institutionalized and supported by State policies

Increased number of employers participating in career advancement projects

State funding streams more streamlined, coordinated and efficient

State funding increases have been institutionalized

SkillWorks model emulated in other regions



## SEEING OPPORTUNITIES. CREATING SOLUTIONS.

**SkillWorks**, a five-year public/private partnership, is addressing the needs of employers for more skilled workers and of workers for more and better access to jobs that pay a family-supporting wage.

The generosity of these funders makes **SkillWorks** possible:

- The Annie E. Casey Foundation
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