



CONNECTING LITERACY AND WORK

WITH FUNDING FROM THE DOLLAR GENERAL LITERACY FOUNDATION, *CONNECTING LITERACY AND WORK* ENCOMPASSES THREE STRANDS OF JFF WORK THAT ARE STRENGTHENING THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN ADULT LITERACY AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:

- > Connecting adult literacy to employment;
- > Building the capacity of literacy networks to partner with sector-based workforce development initiatives; and
- > Technical assistance and documentation.

Together, these activities will deepen and disseminate strategies that advance low-skilled adults in their careers through tighter linkages between adult literacy and workforce initiatives at the community level.

BACKGROUND

For the millions of working adults who lack literacy skills, it is nearly impossible to access and advance through educational and career pathways to jobs that pay family-sustaining wages. For the nation as a whole, large and growing literacy needs among the working-age population immediately threaten our ability to compete in the global economy. While these challenges are increasingly recognized, a “disconnect” persists in many communities that divides adult literacy organizations and networks on the one hand from workforce training providers and employers on the other.

Rooted at the intersection of education and workforce development, JFF creates and grows a range of strategies to leverage America’s human capital, with a strong focus on working adults and job seekers who need additional skills to advance in their careers. Several major JFF initiatives explicitly promote and expand pathways for low-skilled adults to get and advance in good jobs in growth industries:

- > The *National Fund for Workforce Solutions*, a funder collaboration with JFF as the implementation partner, is seeding and growing workforce development partnerships in multiple industry sectors in 20 to 30 regions across the country.
- > *Jobs to Careers*, a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation initiative that JFF coordinates as the National Program Office, is pioneering workplace-based education and training strategies that advance frontline health care workers at 17 partner sites.

- > *Breaking Through*, a JFF collaboration with the National Council for Workforce Education, is a network of more than 30 community colleges creating and growing pathways to postsecondary occupational credentials for low-skilled adults.

Building upon and bridging these three initiatives, the work funded by the Dollar General Literacy Foundation will enhance our knowledge about advancing low-skilled adults in their careers.

DOCUMENTING AND DISSEMINATING BEST PRACTICES AND KEY LESSONS FROM WORKFORCE INITIATIVES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

JFF’s national workforce initiatives are predicated on the development and functioning of multi-stakeholder partnerships, including representation from workforce development, higher education, employers, and adult education. Across the *National Fund*, *Jobs to Careers*, and *Breaking Through* networks, there are now a number of sites with mature partnerships that feature adult literacy as a core component of program design. JFF is documenting a set of lessons and practices that could significantly grow the knowledge base on adult literacy/workforce development linkages and build momentum for their expansion.

In addition to describing lessons and good practices, JFF is developing a set of recommendations that address the ways in which promising and effective strategies can be replicated and scaled. We are also using the documentation research to develop a set of benchmarks to guide adult education programs as they build their capacity and position themselves to succeed and remain relevant in the workforce development arena.

BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF LITERACY NETWORKS TO PARTNER WITH SECTOR-BASED WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

Networks across the country are providing infrastructure for local adult literacy services through building the capacity of member agencies, marshaling resources, leveraging new dollars, creating referral networks, training staff, and developing local literacy plans. However, relatively few of these networks have strong connections to local funder collaboratives and workforce partnerships that address the needs of industry sectors for skilled workers in frontline and middle-skill occupations—the core focus of the *National Fund*.

To bridge this gap, JFF is developing strategies that can grow such capacity among literacy networks, building upon JFF's presence and existing relationships in *National Fund* communities and regions. Specifically, JFF is creating and piloting a set of tools, trainings, and workshops that builds the capacity of adult literacy providers to partner with employers and training providers in key industry sectors.

In developing these products and tools, we are working in two communities that have strong adult literacy networks interested in connecting with local *National Fund* partners:

- > **The Literacy Coalition of Southeastern Wisconsin**, in the Milwaukee region; and
- > **The Workforce Solutions Collaborative**, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND DOCUMENTATION

Mature and strong workforce partnerships have emerged in all three of JFF's national initiatives. However, collaboration between adult literacy providers and workforce training agencies and employers can always be stronger. We believe outcomes for low-literacy adults in these initiatives can be improved through targeted technical assistance to adult education agencies that either are connected (or could be connected) with such partnerships.

In 2009-10, JFF is providing direct technical assistance to three such sites and creating and coordinating a peer learning community across the sites. In conjunction with this work, JFF will prepare a case study that highlights key lessons and strategies employed to strengthen adult literacy/workforce linkages.

The technical assistance sites are:

- > **Durham Technical Community College**, in Durham, North Carolina, a *Breaking Through* local partner;
- > **Metropolitan Community College**, in Omaha, Nebraska, a *National Fund for Workforce Solutions* site; and
- > **Mississippi Office of Nursing Workforce and Hinds Community College**, in Jackson, Mississippi, a *Jobs to Careers* local partner.

FUNDER

Dollar General Literacy Foundation

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