



SkillWorksSM

PARTNERS FOR A PRODUCTIVE WORKFORCE

Working Toward Reinvention *SkillWorks at Three*

By Geri Scott, Jobs for the Future

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.

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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.