



# The Career Advancement

# Portfolio

**PART OF A SERIES OF REPORTS ON  
ADVANCEMENT FOR LOW-WAGE WORKERS**

**JULY 2006**



**JOBS FOR THE FUTURE**

CREATING STRATEGIES  
for Educational and Economic Opportunity



## **JOBS FOR THE FUTURE**

CREATING STRATEGIES  
for Educational and Economic Opportunity

**JOBS FOR THE FUTURE** seeks to accelerate the educational and economic advancement of youth and adults struggling in today's economy. JFF partners with leaders in education, business, government, and communities around the nation to: strengthen opportunities for youth to succeed in postsecondary learning and high-skill careers; increase opportunities for low-income individuals to move into family-supporting careers; and meet the growing economic demand for knowledgeable and skilled workers.

# The Career Advancement Portfolio

## Table of Contents

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<b>Focusing on Careers, Not First Jobs</b> .....	1
<b>Focusing on Models</b> .....	2
<b>A High Standard: Criteria for Portfolio Membership</b> .....	2
<b>The Founding Portfolio Members</b> .....	3
Community College of Denver .....	4
District 1199C, National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees .....	4
Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership .....	4
Workforce Alliance and Hospital Corporation of America .....	5
WorkSource Partners .....	6
Year Up .....	6
<b>The Future of the Career Advancement Portfolio</b> .....	7

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# The Career Advancement Portfolio

Jobs for the Future’s *Career Advancement Portfolio* is a collaborative effort to enhance, expand, and disseminate proven solutions for advancing low-income people to good jobs. Each of the organizations in the *Portfolio* operates advancement models that clearly demonstrate and document success, with well-delineated features that can be replicated or scaled up. JFF created the *Portfolio* as central to our commitment to developing, implementing, and advocating for models, strategies, and policies that enable adults to advance toward economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their families.

However, as workforce development practitioners and policymakers know all too well, it is difficult, time-consuming, and expensive to implement advancement programs, particularly for individuals with the lowest skill levels. In response, the *Portfolio* makes a compelling case for increasing both public and private investments in proven advancement solutions that help low-wage workers achieve family-sustaining incomes.

## Focusing on Careers, Not First Jobs

Workforce development programs targeting low-skilled workers often focus on “first job” placements. While gaining access to first jobs is beyond doubt critical, the employment and training field pays far too little attention to “next step” programs that lead from entry-level jobs to higher skills, better pay and, in time, opportunities for rewarding, lifelong employment. Practices and strategies that focus on advancement are essential, with their insistence that the first job is not a dead end but one step on a career track.

For low-skilled, low-wage workers, clear benefits follow from efforts that focus resources, activities, and public policy on generating opportunities to advance skills, incomes, and careers. Too many Americans who work hard cannot escape poverty through their wages alone. More than nine million working Americans—25 percent of whom work full time, year round—earn less than the official poverty level, and more than 40 million Americans earn below 200 percent of the poverty level, a widely accepted proxy for a minimum family-sustainable income. This might not be a problem if it were easy to advance over time, either in the same firm or outside it, through seniority or on-the-job training. Unfortunately,

large numbers of low-skilled workers are trapped in jobs that provide few if any opportunities to improve wages, skills, and career opportunities.

For employers, the benefits of an advancement framework for workforce development are just as significant. In fact, WorkSource Partners, a *Career Advancement Portfolio* member, has estimated that one of its employer customers, a long-term care provider, saves over \$500,000 each year in reduced employment agency



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fees and reduced turnover at its five nursing homes. In industries as diverse as manufacturing, hospitality, financial services, and construction, employers and independent organizations have documented persuasive returns on employer investments in advancement efforts.

Documented cost savings result from higher productivity, more efficient staff recruitment, and improved employee retention.

### Focusing on Models

The *Career Advancement Portfolio* brings together the most innovative workforce development practices for improving the lives of low-skill, low-income adults. It answers the need for effective, proven, replicable, and scalable models of approaches that advance low-income individuals to jobs with high enough wages to move families out of poverty.

Collectively, the models in the *Career Advancement Portfolio* point to ways to promote and benefit from practices and policies that improve the economic status of low-income, low-skilled adults:

- **The *Portfolio* provides “best practice” designs for communities, employers, and others interested in developing effective advancement models.** By capturing models that advance low-wage workers into better jobs, the *Portfolio* offers an important resource for practitioners, policymakers, and potential investors.
- **The *Portfolio* makes a compelling case for increased public investments.** Employers have invested, to some extent, in most of the models in the *Portfolio*, but all

the efforts depend to some extent on public funds. Public funding is particularly important in enlarging the scope of models that have demonstrated a substantial return on investment.

- **The *Portfolio* makes a compelling case for philanthropic and corporate investments in advancement models.** This documented, diverse set of promising models provides guidance for philanthropic and corporate investors seeking to advance low-wage workers.

### A High Standard: Criteria for Portfolio Membership

Every program in the *Career Advancement Portfolio* meets rigorous criteria, beginning with achieving key outcomes for low-income workers. JFF intentionally set the standards for inclusion high: for advancement programs, they create a goal worth aspiring to; for employers, foundations, and other public and private investors in workforce development, they are benchmarks that can be applied to other efforts.

Every *Career Advancement Portfolio* member, through one or more of its models, meets six criteria:

- **Advances low-skilled workers into well-paying, career-track jobs:** The model advances low-income, low-skilled individuals into jobs that pay at least 80 percent of the local, metropolitan-area, or state median wage. The jobs also come with health benefits and offer strong opportunities for continued wage and career growth.
- **Responds to strong employer or labor market demand:** The model develops skills for which there is high demand. Typically, the models assign employers an important program design role in identifying skill requirements.
- **Demonstrates results:** Data on outcomes or other evidence shows that the model is successful in advancing low-wage workers.
- **Shows strong potential for scale and replication:** The model is specific and clear. It includes standardized features and operational design, viable financing, high political or employer demand for the solution it represents, etc.

- **Offers a “best in class” approach to low-wage worker advancement:** Clear strengths or advantages set the model apart from current practice. It provides an innovative service delivery or design method that addresses traditional barriers to low-wage worker advancement.
- **Demonstrates interest by leadership in promoting and spreading the model:** The “owner” of the model works with Jobs for the Future to document and disseminate key features and outcomes. The owner is interested in expanding its own efforts or willing to help others adopt the model for replication.

## The Founding Portfolio Members

In 2006, Jobs for the Future selected six founding members of the *Career Advancement Portfolio*. These organizations are:

- Community College of Denver;
- District 1199C, National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees;
- Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership;
- Workforce Alliance and Hospital Corporation of America;
- WorkSource Partners; and
- Year Up.

Each organization operates one or more models that offer proven and scalable career advancement solutions for low-skilled workers. JFF has worked with each of these organizations in various capacities, providing strategic advice on growth, designing approaches to measuring individual and organizational outcomes, or assisting with marketing activities to potential funders and community partners.

Both WorkSource Partners and the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership were winners of JFF’s 2003 Career Advancement Strategy Competition, which was supported by U.S. Department of Labor as part of the WINs project. This competition identified advancement models demonstrating results for employers and incumbent workers.

In 2004, Community College of Denver received the *MetLife Community College Excellence Award*, which JFF administers, and it is a Leadership College in *Breaking Through: Building Effective Pathways to College Credentials*, a partnership of JFF and the National Council for Workforce Education to promote and enhance the efforts of community colleges to help low-literacy adults prepare for and succeed in occupational and technical degree programs.

JFF has worked closely with Year Up, providing strategic advice on business planning, program design, fundraising, and the development of a performance management system.

A small grant from JFF helped 1199C gain accreditation for its LPN program. Following that, the organization used JFF’s documentation of the LPN model to leverage additional funding.

The Workforce Alliance’s model for training people to become Licensed Practical Nurses was featured in JFF’s report, *From Entry Level to Licensed Practical Nurse: Four Case Studies of Career Ladders in Health Care*. The model has been widely publicized in an effort to raise the profile of advancement models in health care.







### **Community College of Denver**

Responding to employer needs for skilled nurses, the Community College of Denver operates a program that enables Certified Nursing Assistants and other entry-level workers to advance to become Licensed Practical Nurses. The training accommodates employed adults by offering coursework on a part-time basis and during evenings and weekends. In addition, the classes take place at employers' work sites. An accelerated remedial education component increases the academic preparedness of participants.

This worksite LPN training program is designed to meet employer needs for skilled nurses while providing a career advancement ladder for dedicated, frontline caregivers. As such, it relies upon employer support for its success, and they are key partners. Employers adjust the work schedules of participating employees to accommodate program demands. In addition, most employers help participants pay for tuition and fees; some provide paid release time.

The program began in 2002 with one cohort of twenty students. Since then, sixteen cohorts have begun the program, and seven have completed it. The program has a remarkable retention and completion rate, despite the low incoming reading and math levels of participants. Sixty-seven percent of those who began the program have either earned their LPN diploma or are still enrolled.

### **District 1199C, National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees**

The District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund offers an educational track leading to Practical Nursing jobs for nursing assistants and other entry-level health care workers. The program lasts 18 months, with classes held in the evenings and on weekends to accommodate work schedules. It is the only union-sponsored nursing program in the country and one of the few that meet the needs of working adults through a part-time schedule. The fund is jointly administered by District 1199C and representatives of approximately 55 contributing health care employers.

The fund opened the Practical Nurse training program in 1999, two years after the School District of Philadelphia closed its PN program. Since opening its doors with 31 students, the new program has grown steadily and now enrolls 120 students per year.

Between 1999 and 2005, 396 individuals entered the Practical Nursing program upon completing a preparatory "bridge" experience. Of those, 185 had completed the program by 2005, 85 were still enrolled, and 126 did not complete it; 81 percent of graduates passed the LPN licensure examination on the first attempt.

Everyone in the PN class that graduated in June 2005 passed the LPN licensure examination on the first attempt.

### **Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership**

In 2005, the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership, a workforce intermediary jointly led by labor and management, placed its 2,500th community resident into a family-sustaining job in the Milwaukee area. That same year, WRTP partnered with the BIG STEP apprenticeship preparation program to launch the Center of Excellence to address an unprecedented boom in construction and a skills shortage in advanced manufacturing. The center provides, for the first time, a single point of contact for the workforce needs of skilled trades and industries. It placed 348 community residents at an average starting wage of \$14.60 per hour plus benefits during its first year.

The center has obtained support from the governor, the mayor, and an unprecedented array of public, private, and philanthropic sector partners. These include the

Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, the Department of Transportation, and the Department of Corrections, the City of Milwaukee, national and local foundations, business and labor organizations, educational institutions, and community organizations. For employers and job seekers, the center has streamlined services, including the identification of training resources, the job referral process, employment projections for construction projects, training requirements, and the need to develop marketing materials related to career opportunities in skilled trades.

The pinnacle of center programs is BIG STEP, which increases access to the building and construction trades for women and minorities. BIG STEP focuses on developing the academic skills needed to pass the apprenticeship entrance exam required to work in the field. Between 2001 and 2005, BIG STEP placed 200 of its low-income graduates in skilled trade apprenticeships, more than all other programs in the area combined. Two-thirds were people of color and 14 percent were female. Earnings at placement were about \$12 to \$15 per hour, depending on the trade.

### ***Workforce Alliance and Hospital Corporation of America***

The Workforce Alliance (the Palm Beach, Florida, Workforce Investment Board) partners with three Hospital Corporation of America facilities to provide working adults with access to Licensed Practical Nurse training. The part-time, two-year program meets twice a week for nine hours. Participating employers offer flexible work schedules that enable employees to continue earning an income while in the program.

The training is delivered by the Academy for Practical Nursing and Health Occupations, an accredited, not-for-profit postsecondary institute that specializes in serving less-formally educated, low-income adults. ACS State and Local Solutions provides case management services to the students, and the Palm Beach County Literacy Coalition provides remedial reading, writing, ESL, and math instruction that helps candidates prepare for entrance exams.

The program enrolled its first class of 36 LPN trainees in January 2002; 23 of them successfully completed the LPN training. Since then, the program has launched two additional classes, one in December 2003 and another in December 2004, enrolling a total of 73 students. Of these, 56 were still enrolled in the program in 2005 and on target to graduate by December 2006.

Across the three classes, over 150 employees have participated in remedial literacy and math instruction. Of those who attended at least 25 hours of instruction, 30 percent subsequently passed the TABE and qualified for admission into the LPN program. An additional 78 students raised their reading and math levels.





*For organizations engaged in workforce efforts serving low-income, low-skilled adults, the Career Advancement Portfolio models provide insight into effective practices with demonstrable results. They can also help guide public investment in effective workforce strategies—resources that are critical for such programs.*

### **WorkSource Partners**

WorkSource Partners provides and coordinates workforce development training, career counseling, and hiring services for companies such as CVS/pharmacy, Genesis HealthCare, Gillette, and Partners HealthCare System. It helps its clients invest in their entry-level workers and address the significant “skill gaps” in today’s workforce through the delivery of career initiatives for entry-level employees.

WorkSource Partners addresses workforce shortages in long-term care through Regional Advancement Centers. This innovative training model brings career advancement services, including career counseling and community college courses, to the work site. By partner-

ing with local community colleges, WorkSource Partners can provide a full sequence of preparatory educational courses, as well as a customized evening LPN program on site. Regional Advancement Centers are helping low-skilled Certified Nursing Assistants and other entry-level workers in nursing homes to advance to become Licensed Practical Nurses.

By bringing pre-college and college education to the workplace in conjunction with career counseling and case management, the Regional Advancement Center offers employers a “grow your own” career advancement model. Through reduced staff turnover and lowered job vacancy rates, this strategy has both yielded significant financial benefits to employers and improved patient care. One long-term care firm ended its use of agency nurses to fill LPN vacancies at five facilities—saving more than \$500,000 per year since January 2001. The firm has reduced turnover among nursing assistants significantly. Facilities at another firm have enjoyed similar benefits; CNA turnover rates dropped by 30 to 40 percent in two years.

### **Year Up**

Year Up prepares low-income, urban young adults for, and places them in, entry-level jobs in information technology and investment operations, while also preparing participants for college. The program targets recent high school graduates and GED recipients between the ages of 18 and 24 who are either unemployed or trapped in minimum-wage, dead-end jobs. It provides them with an intensive year of technical, professional, and business communications training. It also provides an apprenticeship experience, college credit, and a high degree of personal and academic support.

Year Up’s corporate customers include large financial services companies, technology firms, hospitals, and state government. They pay the program a fee of \$685 to \$785 a week per intern. This provides Year Up with a funding stream that covers more than 45 percent of its operating expenses.

Year Up has placed 87 percent of its graduates in jobs, at an average pay of \$14.92 per hour; roughly 44 percent of graduates have gone on to college. The model is in place in Boston, Providence, and Washington, DC; a fourth site is opening in New York City in September 2006. Plans are to expand to additional locations and industries.

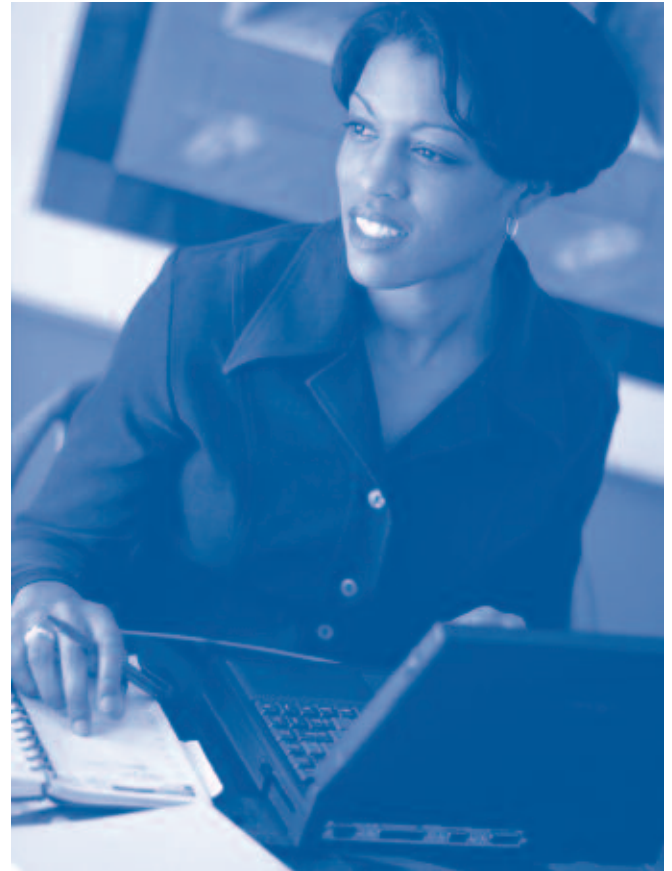


## The Future of the Career Advancement Portfolio

Jobs for the Future is committed to making the *Career Advancement Portfolio* a valuable resource for those concerned about improving the lives of low-income, low-skilled adults. The models included in the *Portfolio* meet stringent criteria and present “best in class” designs for practitioners, funders, and employers. For organizations engaged in workforce efforts serving this population, the *Portfolio* models provide insight into effective practices with demonstrable results. It can also help guide public investment in effective workforce strategies—resources that are critical for such programs.

JFF will build the *Career Advancement Portfolio* in the coming years, adding two to four new sites per year, cultivating models in identified industries, and expanding to new ones, such as manufacturing and automotive technician. JFF also anticipates that several of its projects and partnerships will contribute to the *Portfolio* in the coming years. *Breaking Through: Helping Low-Skill Adults Succeed in College and Careers* may identify community college-based advancement models in manufacturing, health care, and the construction trades. *SkillWorks: Partners for a Productive Workforce* is fostering innovative partnerships between workforce development practitioners and employers in the automotive and hospitality industries. *Jobs to Careers: Promoting Work-Based Learning for Quality Care* is designed to lead to new models for advancing frontline workers in health care while also improving the quality of care.

Moving forward, JFF will help each *Portfolio* member promote its visibility among potential investors and in the workforce field. Potential activities include assistance with public relations, financial support, advice on strategic planning, the documentation of practices, and the facilitation of connections with potential partners and investors. JFF’s goal is to continue supporting, promoting, and identifying exemplary advancement activities—and to disseminate their achievements and examples broadly in order to improve the prospects of low-income workers across the nation. The *Portfolio* models represent demonstrated innovations that stand to significantly improve the design of workforce development strategies for low-wage and low-skilled workers.



***JFF’s goal is to continue supporting, promoting, and identifying exemplary advancement activities—and to disseminate their achievements and examples broadly in order to improve the prospects of low-income workers across the nation.***

## Jobs for the Future's Career Advancement Portfolio

The *Career Advancement Portfolio* grows directly out of several JFF activities to identify, support, and promote on-the-ground workforce development programs with clearly delineated operational features that help low-skilled adults move up skill and wage ladders.

### JFF Projects

*Breaking Through: Helping Low-Skill Adults Succeed in College and Careers:* This multi-year demonstration project promotes and enhances the efforts of community colleges to help low-literacy adults prepare for and succeed in occupational and technical degree programs. The project is a partnership of JFF and the National Council for Workforce Education.

*Career Advancement Strategy Competition:* With support from the U.S. Department of Labor, JFF identified over 400 employer-led advancement models around the country. JFF provided direct technical and financial support to four programs as a result of the competition.

*Community College Advancement Project:* The Annie E. Casey Foundation provided JFF with support to identify advancement models that are based in community colleges and focus on moving low-skilled working adults into and through occupational certificate and degree programs tied to career advancement. Following on that research, JFF provides technical and financial support to two community colleges to scale up their advancement models.

*Investing in Workforce Intermediaries:* The Annie E. Casey, Ford, and Rockefeller foundations, working with JFF, have launched this effort to seed a national support infrastructure for workforce intermediaries. The six project sites are changing the way communities meet the skills needs of workers and businesses.

*Jobs to Careers: Promoting Work-Based Learning for Quality Care* supports partnerships to advance and reward the skill and career development of incumbent workers providing care and services on the front lines of our health and health care systems. The project is a national initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, in collaboration with the Hitachi Foundation. Jobs for the Future, as the National Program

Office, manages the initiative and provides technical assistance to the grantees.

*SkillWorks: Partners for a Productive Workforce* is the largest effort in Boston's history to substantially improve workforce development services for both low-skill/low-income residents and for business. The initiative brings major new investments from a coalition of Boston and national funders, including state and local public-sector resources, to lay the foundation for sustained improvements in the city's workforce development services.

*Skill Up Rhode Island* is an economic development initiative based on the SkillWorks model. This effort, a fresh approach to job training for low-income, low-skilled Rhode Islanders, engages both job seekers and employers who hire them.

### Selected JFF Publications on Advancement for Low-Wage Workers

*The Next Challenge: Advancing Low-Skilled, Low-Wage Workers* (2004): This brief argues for placing not just employment but also advancement at the center of employment and training policy. It defines career advancement as a goal, explores key challenges and opportunities, and highlights strategies to help significantly more low-skilled workers move up to better jobs and family-supporting earnings.

*Building Skills, Increasing Economic Vitality: A Handbook of Innovative State Policies* (2005): This handbook for policymakers and practitioners highlights some of the most promising and exciting developments in state workforce and skill development policy.

*Career Ladders: A Guidebook for Workforce Intermediaries* (2003): This CD-ROM-based guide provides information and extensive resources on planning, developing, operating, and expanding the role of intermediaries, an approach central to many advancement strategies.

*The Center of Excellence: Meeting the Workforce Needs of the Milwaukee Construction Industry* (2006): The center, launched in 2005 by the Wisconsin Workforce Training Partnership and BIG STEP, provides a single point of contact for meeting the workforce needs of the Milwaukee area's skilled trades and industries.



*Earning While Learning: Maintaining Income While Upgrading Skills* (2004): A number of programs and practices encourage skill development by providing income and supports to those pursuing further education and training.

*Education and Skills for the 21st Century: An Agenda for Action* (2005): In September 2005, *The Fate of the American Dream* brought together top corporate, education, and workforce policymakers to address the failure to prepare the nation for the demands of the knowledge-based, global economy of the 21st century. The *Action Agenda*, which JFF released at the forum, looks at how the nation can take advantage of today's best innovations and new models to rebuild and extend the education pipeline for tomorrow's needs.

*Employer-Led Organizations and Career Ladders* (2003): This issue brief reviews key elements and processes involved in creating career ladders that meet employers' needs for a workforce with the right skills and low-wage, low-skilled workers' needs for advancement opportunities.

*Engaging Employers to Benefit Low-Income Job Seekers: Lessons from the Jobs Initiative* (2005): Employers make choices that are key to the ability of low-income people to get and keep jobs and to advance in the workforce. This issue brief asks which kinds of employers are more likely to collaborate with workforce intermediaries that seek to connect low-wage workers with employers. It also looks at factors that promote employer practices and policies favorable to the hiring, retention, and advancement of low-income workers.

*From the Entry Level to Licensed Practical Nurse: Four Case Studies of Career Ladders in Health Care* (2005): These innovative training programs focus on advancing low-income, entry-level health care employees, fueled in part by government funding and increased employer investment in "grow your own" strategies to address the severe shortage of nurses.

*Low-Wage Workers in the New Economy* (Urban Institute Press, 2001): In this collection of original essays, an impressive line-up of experts describes the extent and contours of the challenge facing our nation's working poor. The authors look at how federal and state governments can help the men and women for whom the American dream remains out of reach.

*Opportunity in Tough Times: Promoting Advancement for Low-Wage Workers* (2003): This report describes ways to maintain efforts to advance low-wage workers in the face of exceedingly difficult conditions. It draws on interviews with innovative state officials and practitioners.

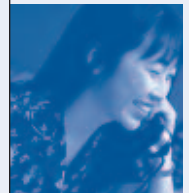
*"Our Success Is Our Graduates": Case Study of Year Up: A Career Advancement Model for Low-Income Young Adults* (2005): Year Up, an innovative technology training program, prepares and places low-income, urban young adults in entry-level IT jobs while also preparing them for college.

*Reinventing Workforce Development: Lessons from Boston's Community Approach* (2004): The experience of SkillWorks, a public/private initiative in Boston, offers start-up lessons for workforce development reform efforts throughout the nation—and for any community that recognizes the need for new approaches to workforce development.

*The Right Jobs: Identifying Career Advancement Opportunities for Low-Income Workers* (2005): *The Right Jobs* provides policymakers and workforce development programs with a methodology to: identify the most promising employment opportunities within reach of low-skilled workers; determine the postsecondary training and career preparation routes that will yield results; and make the case for investments by public and private funders.

*Workforce Intermediaries and Their Roles in Promoting Advancement* (2004): This report explores the origins and core elements of workforce intermediaries, their strategies for advancing workers to family-sustaining careers, and the challenge of securing financing to sustain intermediary services and expand them to a scale that makes a real difference to communities.

"Getting Ahead: A Survey of Low-Wage Workers on Opportunities for Advancement" (2003), "Public Views on Low Wage Workers in the Current Economy" (2001), and "A National Survey of American Attitudes About Low-Wage Workers and Welfare Reform" (2000): JFF periodically commissions surveys of and about low-wage work in America.





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