



Workforce Intermediaries and Their Roles in Promoting Advancement

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ADVANCEMENT FOR LOW-WAGE WORKERS

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JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

CREATING STRATEGIES
for Educational and Economic Opportunity

Advancement for Low-Wage Workers:

A Series of Reports from Jobs for the Future

Jobs for the Future develops models, strategies, and policies that enable adults to advance toward economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their families. Drawing on innovative workforce development efforts around the country, our publications, tool kits, and other resources respond to the challenges to advancement for low-wage workers. With the series *Advancement for Low-Wage Workers*, JFF seeks to elevate discussion of this critical issue within and outside the workforce field. Elaborating upon the themes in the series introduction, *The Next Challenge*, these occasional papers address public policy and on-the-ground practice.

The Next Challenge: Advancing Low-Skilled, Low-Wage Workers (2004): The series introduction 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-skill workers move up to better jobs and family-supporting earnings.

Career Ladders: A Guidebook for Workforce Intermediaries (2003): The CD-ROM-based guidebook provides information and extensive resources on planning, developing, operating, and expanding the role of intermediaries in an approach central to many advancement strategies. The guide summarizes lessons learned from innovative work across the country.

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. This report reviews “what works” in providing workers and job seekers with income even as they improve their ability to advance in the labor market and meet employer needs for a modern workforce.

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.

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): Drawing on extensive interviews with innovative state officials and practitioners, this report describes ways to maintain efforts to advance low-wage workers in the face of exceedingly difficult conditions.

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 not just to sustain intermediary services but to expand such efforts 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.

Forthcoming reports will look at practices and policies for promoting advancement for low-wage workers and innovative approaches to advancement in the City of Boston. In addition, through Workforce Innovation Networks—WINs—Jobs for the Future addresses the specific challenge of engaging employers in efforts to advance low-wage workers. All JFF advancement resources are available on our Web site: www.jff.org.

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Intermediaries and Advancement

San Francisco Works, a nonprofit created to engage local businesses in the city's welfare-to-work efforts, launched an automotive-services program in 1999. Targeted to entry-level technician jobs, the program consisted of a one-week course in "life skills," followed by a five-week introduction to the automobile and its systems, delivered at City College of San Francisco. SFWorks placed graduates of the community college course in jobs at local service shops, then made sure that employers and employees had supports they needed to minimize turnover in the first few months of employment.

Program graduates who found jobs at Pennzoil Ten Minute Oil Change, one of SFWorks' employer partners, started at wages of \$8 an hour (plus commissions averaging \$1 to \$2), with the potential to advance to \$14 an hour (and higher commissions) over several years. One graduate of the program, which SFWorks has since repeated, now earns \$65,000 a year as a manager.

How did SFWorks get this program off the ground?

SFWorks looks for programs that result in entry-level jobs that both pay reasonably well *and* can be stepping stones to better-paid employment. Because SFWorks has regularly assessed labor market trends through its frequent contacts with employers, public agencies, and training providers, it knew that automotive service fit this requirement. So the organization, which is an affiliate of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, invited employers in the industry to a breakfast in order to find out their level of interest in a training program. These employers, who complained bitterly about the dearth of qualified entry-level workers, agreed to collaborate by identifying the skills of a "good employee."

The next step was to create a training program, and

for this SFWorks brought City College of San Francisco to the table. Existing automotive service training clearly did *not* suit employer needs: it took too long, the curricula were too abstract, and the programs were poorly linked to real job opportunities. Responding directly to the employers' guidance, City College administrators and faculty designed the introductory, five-week course.

The next challenge was recruiting students who were motivated and well-suited to automotive employment. To identify participants, deliver the life-skills class, and provide case management, SFWorks contracted with a community-based organization it trusted—the Northern California Service League, which works primarily with ex-offenders and former substance abusers.

A few more pieces remained to be put into place. SFWorks secured public and foundation funding for the program. It also made sure that employers who were likely to hire program graduates came to the classes, made presentations, and interviewed prospective employees. Further, it set up a system to collect and track data about program graduates. And, concludes SFWorks Executive Director Terri Feeley, "This may sound silly, but it is important: we also made sure that lunch came every day to the people in that training program."

SFWorks is one of a growing number of organizations that believe they can best help low-income workers advance to higher incomes and better career opportunities by serving the needs of "dual customers": employers in need of qualified workers *and* lower-skilled workers or job seekers. By addressing the needs of both groups, these "workforce intermediaries" succeed in helping low-income individuals not just to secure entry-level, minimum-wage jobs but also to prepare for and find family-sustaining work and careers.

Operating locally and regionally, workforce intermediaries aggregate the requirements of employers, and they promote and deliver effective advancement models for individuals. They have the potential to achieve advancement outcomes far greater than those of traditional workforce development programs and already play critical roles for both low-income individuals and employers.

However, workforce intermediaries, especially those focused on advancement, are still scattered across the country. Moreover, they are often small, underfinanced, and limited in their organizational sophistication.

This report is based on two chapters prepared by Jobs for the Future for the 102nd American Assembly: "Keeping America in Business: Advancing Workers, Businesses and Economic Growth." These papers, "What Do Workforce Intermediaries Do?" by Richard Kazis of Jobs for the Future and "Financing Workforce Intermediaries" by Jerry Rubin, Marlene B. Seltzer, and Jack Mills of Jobs for the Future, appear in Workforce Intermediaries for the 21st Century, edited by Robert Giloth (Temple University Press, 2003). For more information on the American Assembly and this book, see: www.opportunitiesatwork.org/forum.htm.

Workforce Intermediaries and Their Roles in Promoting Advancement explores the origins of these innovative institutions and the core elements of their strategies for advancing workers to family-sustaining careers. And it presents a major challenge for workforce intermediaries: securing financing not just to sustain their services to employers and jobs seekers but to expand such efforts to a scale that makes a real difference to communities, low-wage workers, and their employers.

The Economic Context for Workforce Intermediaries

The need for new institutions to promote career advancement is evident across a range of income and skill levels and in a wide variety of industries. One reflection of this is the large number of institutions trying to help U.S. workers navigate a more volatile and dynamic labor market, from temporary help firms and Internet job sites to industry consortia focused on high-skill technical workers. The impact of federal welfare and workforce reform legislation enacted in the mid-1990s has been particularly significant, stimulating new institutions at the low end of the labor market. Welfare reform pushed hundreds of thousands of low-skilled women into the workforce in a short period of time, spurring demand for intermediary services and providing new funding for some of the services intermediaries provide.

Any effort to help low-wage, lower-skill workers advance beyond entry-level jobs must address at least three major challenges:

Many full-time, low-wage workers are unable to earn enough to raise their families out of poverty.

Low-income and less-skilled individuals are losing ground in today's knowledge economy as skill requirements increase across all levels of work. Public policy has shifted to emphasize work as the route for low-income adults and their families out of poverty. Yet full-time work, and more, does not produce enough income for many families, and employer investments in enhancing the skills of entry-level workers are limited.

Few workforce development programs address strategies for advancement, focusing instead on initial job placement.

Once they are placed in a job, low-wage workers generally do not advance to positions that pay wages enabling self-sufficiency. Moreover, traditional career ladders within companies have largely disappeared, increasing the need for alternative opportunities for moving up. Yet

Who Serves as Intermediaries?

Many types of organization function as workforce intermediaries (see Kazis 1998 and Benner et al. 2001). These include community-based non-profit organizations, chambers of commerce and other employer associations, labor-management partnerships, community colleges, and governmental agencies, including some Workforce Investment Boards.

The origins and institutional bases of an intermediary often determine its particular priorities and relative strengths. For example, a labor-management partnership is well-positioned to address internal workplace practices and serve an industry's employers and incumbent workers. A community college is likely to focus on training more than placement and to align educational programs with employer needs. The relationships, interests, and strengths that community-based organizations bring to the work frequently focus on meeting the needs of neighborhood residents.¹

research clearly demonstrates the income payoff for higher skills.

The workforce development system pays too little attention to engaging employers and meeting their needs.

Because low-income workers advance primarily at the workplace, employer engagement in workforce development is essential, yet most employers are either unaware of or disappointed in publicly funded workforce development programs. Strategies to advance low-income individuals must have a dual-customer focus, addressing true business needs as well as the short- and long-term advancement needs of individuals. Dual-customer strategies treat job/skill seekers and employers as equal customers in the design and delivery of workforce development policies and models.

In addressing these three challenges, then, workforce intermediaries have evolved in response to powerful, global, economic changes as well as to the disappointing results of past workforce development policies. Indeed, the public workforce system itself has begun to change in ways that parallel and sometimes promote the priorities of workforce intermediaries (see "Intermediaries and the Public Workforce Development System," page 6). Evidence of this interplay can be seen in the evolving relationship between workforce and welfare systems, state incumbent worker training programs, the design of Workforce Boards and One-Stop Career Centers under the Workforce Investment Act, and federally funded demonstration programs such as Regional Skills Alliances and the H1-B visa grant program.

The Work of Workforce Intermediaries

Despite varying institutional origins, programmatic priorities, and long-term ambitions, workforce intermediaries tend to share several characteristics. Most important, they improve local and regional labor markets by pursuing two broad sets of functions:

Organizing and planning: Workforce intermediaries mobilize labor market stakeholders—employers, individual workers, government officials, and education, training, and other service providers—to improve outcomes for employers and low-income workers.

Providing or brokering services: Workforce intermediaries deliver job-matching, training, support, and other services to low-income job seekers and the employers who hire them.

Credibility and effectiveness derive from being able to combine the organizing and planning roles with targeted services, and success in one arena makes it easier to make progress in the other. “Successful intermediaries won’t all do the same thing,” notes Fred Dedrick of the Reinvestment Fund, a workforce intermediary in Philadelphia. “However, they all need to do more than one thing. We found that being a credible data source

and providing workforce development services makes our policy work more influential. On its own, the policy work would not have enough traction.”

Eric Parker, executive director of the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership, makes a similar argument: “Our value comes from two sources. First, we bring jobs to the table through our work with employers and unions. Second, we orchestrate the process of helping the partners get services they want.”

At the same time, each workforce intermediary concentrates its expertise. “Most workforce intermediaries start with a narrow agenda, trying to solve one specific problem facing a group of employers they work with,” says John Lederer of Shoreline Community College in Washington State. “Over time, as they build capacity and trust, they expand their horizons.”

There is little enthusiasm at the local level for duplicating services or creating a parallel workforce development system, even if there is some competition between workforce intermediaries and Workforce Investment Boards. “We don’t want two separate systems,” notes George Coulter of the Greater Cleveland Growth Association, an intermediary led by an employer association. “We want to have our members gain access to the public system and to be a conduit through which that can happen. We want to make sure our members are linked and are provided with the most detailed and current information around workforce services within our community and how that effectively links to the public system and any proprietary interests.”

Intermediaries and the Public Workforce Development System

The Workforce Investment Act has given legitimacy (if not much funding) to many strategies at the heart of workforce intermediary efforts: dual-customer approaches that engage employers and meet their needs; greater attention to retention and advancement; and the integration of multiple programs and funding streams. A Workforce Investment Board created under WIA can assume the organizing and planning roles of a workforce intermediary, bundling TANF, WIA, and other funding sources and organizing employers and other stakeholders to provide quality advancement services for low-wage workers.

For reasons of history, culture, staffing, and their role as public institutions, though, few Workforce Investment Boards become workforce intermediaries as defined here. Moreover, intermediaries vary greatly in their relationship to the publicly funded workforce development system.

Still, some entrepreneurial Workforce Investment Boards directly operate intermediaries—for example, the Boston Private Industry Council, which is also the city’s Workforce Investment Board, describes itself as “a nonprofit workforce intermediary that builds connections between employers, labor, schools, training providers, and public agencies. We bring these groups together to help employers find and train workers, to help young people prepare for success, and to help adults locate appropriate training and job opportunities.” Other Workforce Investment Boards have close ties to local intermediaries and have effectively sorted out their respective roles.

Organizing and Planning

A critical but almost invisible role of workforce intermediaries is the task of organizing stakeholders in a regional labor market, often along industry or occupational lines, to create workforce development programs and strategies that improve outcomes for low-wage workers and employers. Intermediaries bring together employers, educational institutions, government leaders, social service agencies, and other service providers to design and implement programs and policies that improve labor market outcomes.

Without consensus-building, strategic planning, and mobilizing—which are much of what a good workforce intermediary does—it would be very difficult to overcome the funding constraints, institutional misalignments, and weak implementation that frequently plague the workforce field. In particular, given fragmented, categorical funding streams managed by multiple governmental agencies, intermediaries frequently must organize

not just the partners but also the resources needed to turn an idea into a real program.

Among intermediaries' most important organizing and planning roles are:

- Engaging multiple employers with similar needs;
- Organizing key stakeholders;
- Collecting and using good information;
- Organizing and negotiating with providers;
- Managing connections to other public systems;
- Conducting research and development; and
- Advocating for public policies.

Engaging Multiple Employers with Similar Needs

The publicly funded workforce system has tended to address the needs of one worker or employer at a time. In today's more volatile labor market and competitive business environment, where new technologies can change employer skill demands overnight across whole industries, this "retail" strategy is too slow, laborious, and inflexible. Moreover, it misses opportunities to link workforce investments with economic development approaches designed to strengthen a cluster of firms in an industry or occupational sector.

In response, intermediaries build working partnerships within an industry to identify and address employers' common needs. They aggregate employer demand for services or training, typically within the same or related industries, so employers can have greater influence in the marketplace.

Employers frequently share workforce development interests but lack effective mechanisms for finding a collective voice. Workforce intermediaries help identify opportunities for collective action and collaborate with employers to develop strategies that respond to those opportunities. "We act as a consolidator for employers," says John Fitzpatrick, executive director of the Capital Area Training Foundation in Austin, Texas. "We simplify their task by linking them with others who have a similar need."

What individual employers lack the time, capacity, or desire to do alone—for example, to fund upgrade training for a small number of employees—they might participate in if a third party lowers the transaction costs. Daniel Berry of the Greater Cleveland Growth Association puts it this way: "Our strategy is to aggregate demand for services among employers in particular high-growth occupations. If we have a committed group of employers ready to go, that gives us both access and influence with education and training providers."

Organizing Key Stakeholders

Coordinating and organizing stakeholders in a local labor market "is the least glamorous, most time consuming, and most necessary work we do," according to SFWorks' Terri Feeley. Or, as Rebekah Lashman, WIB policy manager at the Boston Private Industry Council, puts it, "The more you slog through it together, the more you commit to staying at the table, the more opportunities you'll have to make things happen." Through ongoing, labor-intensive relationship building and by creating a venue for discussing needs and opportunities, intermediaries learn what the stakeholders need and package resources, partners, and ideas in response.

Getting the "governance" issues right is critical, according to Eric Parker. For the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership, that means restricting membership to employers and unions and ensuring that other stakeholders who come to the table—service providers, community colleges, and other organizations—do not determine WRTP's direction and priorities. It also meant starting with a single industry—manufacturing—and expanding into other industries only after cementing deep relationships among key manufacturing partners.

Collecting and Using Good Information

Workforce intermediaries collect and use up-to-date, finely grained, industry-specific data on local labor markets. Reliable information is a prerequisite for improving program design and implementation. The Greater Cleveland Growth Association produces a biannual information technology "Barometer" based on a survey of local firms. This ear-to-the-ground information helps GCGA mobilize employers and negotiate with service providers for more responsive training programs. GCGA has also created a novel feedback mechanism on a Web site that inventories training options in northeast Ohio: employers can provide their own experiences on providers' quality and responsiveness.

Labor market information can help partners design "career ladder" programs by identifying both the steps up the ladder from the lower rungs and the skills employers want to see in those looking to advance.² It also helps politically: documenting skill shortages can promote employer involvement and influence policymakers. Well-timed, neutral reports on labor market trends, such as those conducted by GCGA, WRTP, and Philadelphia's Reinvestment Fund, increase credibility and become a basis for advocacy around public policies and funding priorities.



Organizing and Negotiating with Providers

Having established close relationships with employers and service providers, intermediaries can mobilize the latter to respond to demand from the former—and in ways that the public sector traditionally cannot. When a major Cleveland bank had to fill fifty jobs in three or four predominantly entry-level job categories, it called the Greater Cleveland Growth Association on Wednesday. By Thursday, the association had communicated with its network of service providers and identified a few to take the lead in a job fair. By the end of the following Tuesday, the providers had recruited people to apply, and bank personnel had held first and second interviews at the job fair. Thirty-two qualified candidates were identified. The bank hired twenty by the end of the week.

In another example, Project QUEST learned that the local community college was planning to shorten a 12-month Licensed Practical Nurse course by one month, reducing geriatric training. Knowing that nursing homes were having trouble finding people trained to work with geriatric patients, QUEST staff advocated for the 12-month program. The college reversed its plans.

Managing Connections to Other Public Systems

Until quite recently, the public workforce system stood on its own, with few connections to economic development at the national or state levels or to mainstream educational institutions, social service systems, or the welfare system. The Workforce Investment Act, with its One-Stop Career Centers, has encouraged co-location and the integration of referrals to services within and outside the workforce system. The workforce and education systems are also moving closer, as evidenced by the growing importance of community colleges in public workforce and economic development strategies nationwide.

However, traditions die slowly; varying rules, regulations, eligibility requirements, and funding cycles make it difficult to overcome the fragmented, multiple-silo structure of public systems. Workforce intermediaries recognize the need for greater integration and the bundling of funds and services. They see the opportunity to act as integrators for their dual customers, working across public systems to simplify the services available to individuals and employers and to make them more transparent.

Conducting Research and Development

Intermediaries frequently experiment with the design of new programs that might be effective and replicable. The Boston Private Industry Council sees part of its role as testing models, then advocating for the state to take over

some of the best ones. “Having a concrete project to work on forces you to get into the mindset of the partners and to understand their interests and constraints,” says the PIC’s Rebekah Lashman.

For example, SFWorks, which has an explicit advancement agenda, is piloting a career ladder model for the legal services industry in San Francisco. In the future, it seeks to expand the model to other industries and to increase the number of participating job and skill seekers.³

Advocating for Public Policies

At their core, all workforce intermediaries are mission-driven, guided by strongly held views on what firms and their employees need to prosper. An important part of this work is to mobilize other local institutions to join efforts to create a more efficient and equitable regional labor market with varied advancement paths for low-skill workers.

Many strategies for promoting the advancement of low-skill workers require changes in public policy—securing additional resources for activities that are underfunded through traditional public sources and removing policy obstacles to innovation. Many workforce intermediaries engage with policymakers regularly and with determination—and such efforts can yield significant payoffs. “Neither employers nor service providers have the time to focus on policy and identify opportunities to promote advancement strategies that serve both constituencies,” notes Terri Feeley of SFWorks. “We simplify the process, identify opportunities, and help connect spokespeople with the legislature and the media.”

WRTP aligns its policy advocacy with Wisconsin’s two-year budget cycle. A few years ago, WRTP helped convince state legislators to set aside \$20 million of surplus TANF funds for a Workforce Attachment and Advancement Fund that would support incumbent worker training for low-wage workers. While the fund did not prove as easy to tap for incumbent workers as WRTP had hoped, it has been renewed by the legislature.

In Boston, the Private Industry Council went to the state legislature when TANF rules and regulations, rather than customers, were driving customer service in the local One-Stop Career Centers. According to the PIC’s Rebekah Lashman, because of the advocacy campaign, “The state created a budget line item that enables the centers to manage a more flexible set of core services—to manage the system as they think can best serve their customers.”



Advocacy for advancement does not always mean seeking more funding. It can also involve efforts to change rules or revise performance standards (see “Changing the Terms of Trade,” page 9). To promote advancement, Project QUEST and the city of San Antonio negotiated a contract that requires the intermediary to place graduates in jobs paying at least \$10 an hour; the contract also specifies wage progression for those who are placed.

Providing or Brokering Services

Workforce intermediaries address identifiable labor market problems, sometimes providing services directly and sometimes arranging for others to provide them. They often target specific industry or occupational sectors, seeking those with potential jobs that offer good pay and real career opportunities.

The provision of labor market services to employers and employees or job-seekers—whether directly or as a broker—is often the most visible intermediary activity and the easiest one to describe and assess. These activities, which tend to be specific and quantifiable, are what is typically meant by workforce development: reaching out to employers and individual job-seekers; assessing individuals’ skills or employer hiring needs; training employees in technical, basic, or “soft” skills; placing people in jobs, either without training or following it; referring people to important support services, such as child care, transportation, and social services; and, less frequently, providing on-the-job support, career counseling, and training to help workers adjust to a new job, stay employed, and advance.

While workforce intermediaries see the importance of improving the fit between job seekers and the jobs employers seek to fill, their efforts go beyond job matching. They recognize that this service has limited impact on advancement unless accompanied by strategies that assure the job-readiness of low-income job seekers and pay attention to the quality of jobs and advancement opportunities offered by employers.

Innovative and well-designed job matching, training, and post-employment supports can be provided by organizations other than workforce intermediaries. However, the provision of such services is a primary focus for most intermediaries, encompassing both traditional, pre-employment services and the less-common, and more-difficult-to-fund, post-placement supports and training for employed workers.

Job Matching

Historically, the publicly funded workforce system focused on job placement, delivered through the Employment Service as a passive, job-posting service. The theory was: get people into the labor market and they will advance as they accrue seniority and gain skills. That approach may have made sense at one time, but today it is inadequate: many of the jobs listed with the Employment Service are temporary, low-skill, and at the bottom of the labor market (Osterman 1999).

In reaction to the public sector’s poor record, today’s workforce intermediaries pursue more active job-matching strategies, seeking out better-quality jobs that require low to moderate levels of skill. They try to place their clients in jobs that represent a step on a clearly defined pathway to advancement.

WIRE-Net, a workforce intermediary targeting manufacturers on Cleveland’s West Side, created Hire Locally in 1989 to help match local unemployed workers with manufacturing jobs that could pay relatively decent starting wages. WIRE-Net balances its mission of helping residents advance with the imperative of delivering consistent, high-quality service to employers. The program, upgraded in 2002 and renamed WorkSource, now offers a job-referral service, three types of orientation workshop, job-readiness assessments in math and reading, and referrals to child care and other services. Only upon successfully completing all aspects of the orientation does a

Changing the Terms of Trade

MIT human resources professor Paul Osterman (1999) distinguishes between two kinds of intermediaries. One works to meet employer and low-wage worker needs, serving customers on both sides of the labor market but without changing the “terms of trade” in the labor market. A more ambitious kind of intermediary, of which there are few, goes further. These organizations use their credibility and support in the community and in workplaces to prod employers to change their human resources practices in ways that improve job quality and open up opportunities for advancement.

The Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership has worked with several employers to change more than 100 temporary jobs into permanent positions with benefits and better integration into the firm. WRTP demonstrated the negative impact that a large temporary staff has on quality and productivity.

In California, the Economic Development Department funded the California Association of Health Facilities to change the structure of jobs as well as develop worker skills. According to EDD director Mike Bernick, the association, made up of long-term health care facilities, convinced employers to create a position between Certified Nurse Assistant and Licensed Vocational Nurse and provided training to make it possible for CNAs to move up.



candidate qualify for job-matching and placement assistance and some post-placement support.

In addition to WorkSource, WIRE-Net offers intensive skill training through its Precision Machining Program, which links training providers with employers and with training candidates recruited and screened by WIRE-Net. Other employer partnerships include a nationally recognized, pre-apprenticeship, machining program for NASA's Glenn Research Center and a number of incumbent-worker training programs in areas such as supervisory training, workplace safety, and employee retention.

Training

The publicly funded workforce system got involved in training for low-skill workers in the early 1960s, but the results generally were disappointing. Conceived primarily as a social program, publicly funded training was connected only loosely to employer demand or to growth industries. With limited funding, programs trying to serve hard-to-employ individuals were typically short-term and of limited intensity. Not surprisingly, they resulted in, at best, modest gains in employment and income (Grubb 1996). Funding was earmarked primarily for pre-employment training, delivered by service providers who had little connection to mainstream educational institutions or their credentialing programs.

Today, nine out of ten new jobs require a postsecondary credential, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals depends upon striking a reasonable skills-wage "bargain." Rewards for workers who develop their skills go hand in hand with rewards for employers from increased productivity. The benefits of such investments in skill development must be clear to both workers and employers.

Many workforce intermediaries partner with community colleges to provide training, linking it to educational credentials valued in the labor market. For example, Shoreline Community College in Seattle leads a regional Job Ladder Partnership that engages employers and six

other community or technical colleges in operating career ladder programs in four occupational clusters. Employers commit to hiring qualified participants, who receive customized training and support services from the colleges.

Post-Employment Supports

Workforce intermediaries build close working relationships with employers, and they look for ways to balance investments in pre-employment training with work-based learning, on-the-job training, and an array of post-placement services that can be tailored to the needs of each participant and employer customer. These supports cover a wide range of needs, such as: assistance in accessing child care, transportation, and housing; counseling and support to resolve personal and workplace conflicts; supervisor support and employee/supervisor mediation; budgeting and contingency planning; career- and life-planning classes and workshops; and service referrals (including assistance accessing substance abuse, physical abuse, and mental health services) (Freeman and Taylor 2002).

Project QUEST in San Antonio provides post-placement assistance for individuals making the transition to employment. This assistance includes: paying for licensing or certification tests; continuing child care and transportation subsidies for a minimum of thirty days after placement; re-employment assistance for those who need it; and six months of follow-up assistance and monitoring of employment and wage progress.

The Elements of Quality

The power of workforce intermediaries derives in part from the range and combination of roles they play in local labor markets. Yet some organizations are better able to achieve ambitious goals than others. *How* these organizations do their work is often as important as the activities themselves with respect to their ability to grow and have an impact.

Successful intermediaries are entrepreneurial to their core, flexible in their agenda setting, and able to seize opportunities. And they are politically savvy: they understand that the ability to achieve their goals frequently requires support and intervention from private- and public-sector leaders. In a fluid regional economic and political environment, the preconditions for successful workforce initiatives come and go quickly. Organizations must be ready to move quickly—and to change direction with industry needs. "You rarely know the design of your

Intermediaries rise and fall on their ability to win trust—trust of employers, first and foremost, but also of other stakeholders, including organized labor where it has a presence, workforce service providers, educational institutions, and local and state officials.

next initiative ahead of time. It's like a puzzle that you put together as you find the pieces," explains Rebekah Lashman of the Boston PIC. "And you can only find the pieces by being in a lot of places over time, talking to people, and listening to their needs."

Perhaps most important, intermediaries rise and fall on their ability to win trust—trust of employers, first and foremost, but also of other stakeholders, including organized labor where it has a presence, workforce service providers, educational institutions, and local and state officials. That trust must be built up over time. It is fueled by personal relationships, deepened by proof of commitment, and cemented by visible outcomes.

To win employer trust, workforce intermediaries develop and maintain an intimate knowledge of the industry or industries with which they work. They try to stay abreast of industry trends in real time and at a level of detail that can be acted upon. "Programs cannot afford to settle for a bird's eye view of the industry and the occupations they target," explains an Aspen Institute (2002) study on industry-specific approaches to workforce development. They must find varied ways to connect with industry and develop relationships that enable them to understand the practical functioning of the industry.

Ultimately, it is personal relationships and the regular contacts with employers that enable intermediaries to design new and better services. Some intermediaries regularly survey employer needs. Most hire staff with private-sector experience. To this end, some union-based and community-based intermediaries also enlist the input of people who have been trained and placed in the industry.

Being "bilingual" is critical to building trust, according to Margaret Berger Bradley of the Reinvestment Fund: "Public systems speak their own languages. But we speak the employers' language as well as the language of the public workforce system."

Intermediaries also build trust by demonstrating their long-term commitment to an industry and its well-being. AFSCME District 1199C, a union local in Philadelphia, created a Training and Upgrading Fund that has worked for over 30 years to improve training for low-wage workers in health care. Employers have gradually moved from hostility to skepticism to recognition of the union as a dependable partner in the quest for productivity and employee skill development. The Boston Private Industry Council attributes its success in developing health care career ladder programs to relationships initiated over a decade ago when the organization launched a major school-to-work effort.

Moving Fast

Speed, responsiveness, and flexibility distinguish workforce intermediaries from the more-constrained institutions of the public system. In 1997, the Eaton Corporation in Milwaukee's central city wanted to fill 100 new electronics assembly jobs paying \$12.50 an hour. The public system simply could not move fast enough: when Eaton initially gave the jobs to the public system to fill, the technical college had to submit a proposal to the local Private Industry Council for funding for a training course; then application for funds had to be reviewed and approved; and trainees had to be recruited, trained, and placed. "It was just too slow," says Eric Parker of WRTP. "In the end, it took a year for the public system to train 12 people. That led us to try to streamline recruitment, training, and placement."

WRTP moved from being a broker between the Workforce Investment Board and the technical college to being the financial intermediary for manufacturing training. With the technical college, WRTP developed a standardized entry-level training program, making it easier to launch new training classes. WRTP has also taken advantage of WIA's individual vouchers to speed up that inefficient, sequential process that failed Eaton.

Workforce intermediaries tend to look for staff who can function effectively in a less bureaucratic and more employer-responsive environment. When Mary Pena of Project QUEST is hiring industry liaisons, she looks beyond those who worked in the public welfare or workforce systems: they tend to be insufficiently entrepreneurial and flexible. "Staff the organization well," advises Eric Parker of WRTP, "because performance is the key to developing trust and clout."

In the end, the commitment to helping low-income individuals advance in the labor market is more important than any particular set of services or activities. These organizations are *committed to achieving outcomes* that matter for their dual customers. They are driven to perform in ways that yield better labor market results for low-income individuals and their employers than did traditional workforce development programs and systems.

This commitment is what motivates workforce intermediaries—and they tend to set higher standards for themselves than those that guide the publicly funded system. SFWorks looks for partnerships that result in full-time, benefited positions. SFWorks convinced one employer to change the probationary period for benefits from 150 days to 30 days. According to Terri Feeley, the organization will not get involved in projects where wages are under \$9 per hour: "We talk with our employers about job quality and career pathways. If jobs are temporary, pay no benefits, or are low-wage, we discuss ways to improve job quality. If the employer isn't interested, we may refer them to another organization for help."

When workforce intermediaries consciously take on the challenge of improving labor market outcomes for low-income individuals and their employers, they address not just economic trends but also a public policy objective: ensuring that those who work have adequate incomes *and* opportunities to advance. These intermediaries are therefore critical to broader efforts to improve the ability of the workforce development system to move its intended beneficiaries into the mainstream of the nation's economy and society.

Bringing Workforce Intermediaries to Scale

Early evaluation data (see McGahey 2003) suggest that workforce intermediaries are producing better advancement results for low-skilled, low-wage workers. But, for the most part, they are small, operating small innovative programs, and reaching a tiny percentage of the workers and employers who need their services. While the centrality of new workforce intermediaries to many innovative, regional strategies for advancing low-wage workers has gained them some support from foundations and federal and state governments, most financing for intermediaries is ad hoc and unpredictable, the result of entrepreneurial success. To achieve significant scale and become major players in labor markets across the nation, workforce intermediaries will need predictable, stable, and significant financing sources.

To understand financing options that could sustain strong workforce intermediaries and their advancement

efforts, Jobs for the Future conducted in-depth interviews with eight leading intermediaries about how they now finance such activities. We also drew on the National Network of Sector Practitioners (NSSP) 2002 survey of 243 workforce intermediaries. All the organizations surveyed and interviewed provide services to advance low-income workers and meet employers' needs, and all create and organize advancement programs.

The primary funding for intermediary activities comes from a variety of sources (*Table 1*). These include public funds under the federal Workforce Investment Act: WIA Governors' Discretionary 15 percent funds, Dislocated Worker funds, and WIA Individual Learning Accounts (or vouchers). TANF, foundation, and state Department of Labor and Education funds are secondary sources of public financing.

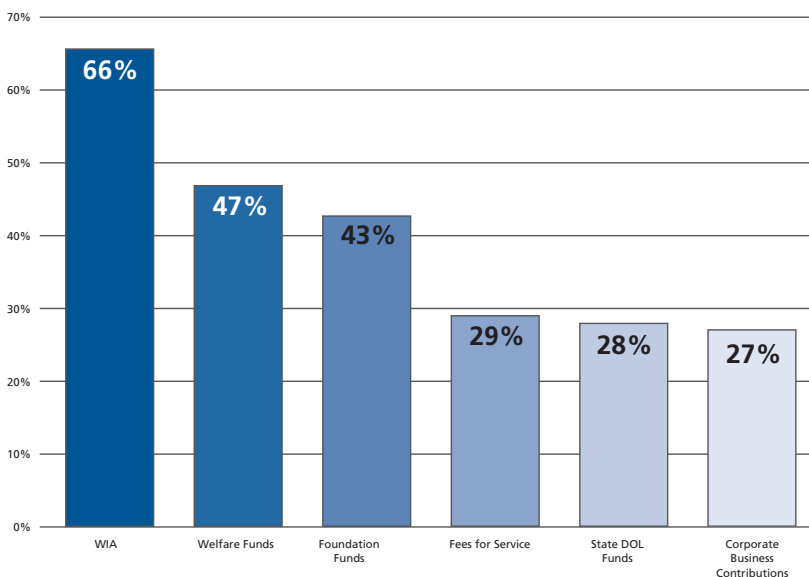
Some workforce intermediaries demonstrate an impressive ability to bundle public funding for direct training services in order to pay for a range of planning and program development activities, such as identifying and aggregating employer demand. One example of this kind of leveraging is the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership, which covers some of its R&D activities by running a broad array of training offerings.

Foundations play important roles in promoting workforce intermediaries, providing venture capital and leveraging other resources. Foundation dollars typically leverage public sources of money, finance activities not currently funded through other sources, and provide organizational start-up money. According to Margaret Berger Bradley, director of the workforce services division at the Reinvestment Fund, "Private foundation funding is flexible. It's critical for leveraging public funding. The strategy of TRF, an intermediary that serves as a community development financial institution and workforce intermediary, is to go to the public system as a co-investor."

WIRE-Net in Cleveland also relies on flexible foundation funding. "Mott and several local foundations provided the funding in 1998 for pay for the development of our precision machinist program, including networking, strategic planning, and institution-building," says John Colm, director of WIRE-Net. "Now, we receive \$100,000 annually of member dues, and we also have \$1.2 million of Department of Labor funding over two years."

Many workforce intermediaries raise funding from employers through fee-for-service and corporate contributions, although this tends to represent a small share of overall budgets. Corporations are motivated to con-

TABLE 1: Predominant Funding Sources



tribute by a number of factors, including membership in employer-led intermediaries like Greater Cleveland Growth Association, proven returns on investment as in the case of Shoreline Community College in Seattle, or collective bargaining agreements as in the case of the labor/management partnership between Philadelphia hospitals and the AFSCME District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund.

At Shoreline Community College, employers play an important role in paying tuition fees for career ladder programs, which are key to many advancement strategies. According to Shoreline's Joe Renouard, hospitals are developing career ladders, but they can't provide the training themselves. "They've committed to paying tuition for students. They send the employees to Shoreline, and it's a win-win. That's huge. Those dollars can then be used to support organizing, planning, and development of new resources."

Many intermediaries are exploring other fee-for-service activities to achieve long-term sustainability. Several interviewees noted that they are considering, or actively engaged in, developing placement firms. These businesses, focused on temporary or permanent placements or both, would generate income to help support the intermediaries' other advancement activities.

When private dollars leverage public investments, intermediaries can develop their knowledge of their dual customers, bring stakeholders together, aggregate and clarify demand for workforce services, and design those services. Private funding can also support the policy advocacy that unlocks the door to more effective use of public funds.

Financing Gaps

To achieve ambitious goals for advancement, workforce intermediaries must grow to a substantially greater scale. What are the challenges to and strategies for creating a sustainable, efficient, and scaleable financing system for workforce intermediaries? JFF's interviews and NSSP's survey identified major gaps in financing in both areas of workforce intermediary activities: organizing/planning and brokering/providing services to their dual customers (*Table 2*).

Services to Advance Low-Income Workers

The full range of advancement services is very difficult to fund. Particularly difficult to fund are post-employment services delivered at the workplace. In the NSSP survey, 69 percent of respondents found it difficult to secure enough funding for post-placement, career-advancement

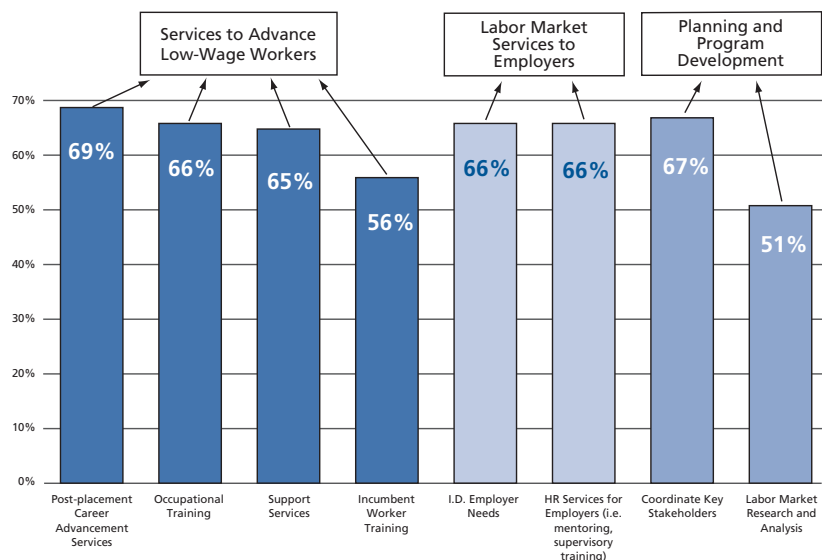
services; 66 percent found it difficult to secure enough funding for occupational training; 65 percent found it difficult to secure enough funding for support services; and 56 percent found it difficult to secure enough funding for incumbent worker training. Several interviewees noted that restrictions on employee eligibility often hinder efforts to provide advancement services, particularly with regard to activities that must be closely tied to the operations of participating employers: incumbent worker training, on-the-job coaching, and mentor programs.

There is often a mismatch between the requirements of public funding and the requirements of a mission centered on advancement. For example, the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership influenced state legislators to redirect some TANF funding to employer-based advancement activities, but the eligibility restrictions made for a very narrow and awkward set of services. "Funding streams are driven by individual eligibility," explains Eric Parker of WRTTP. "When you're working with employers, you want to address the needs of the enterprise; you don't want to provide training based on TANF eligibility. You need to approach it from a workplace standpoint, not an eligibility standpoint."

Other interviewees noted that the fragmentation of public funding—including variations in reporting requirements, eligibility criteria, allowable uses, and performance standards—make most public funds difficult to use to develop a continuum of services in support of advancement. Moreover, this fragmentation creates an overly burdensome administrative and coordination challenge, particularly when employers are involved.



TABLE 2: Where Are the Financing Gaps?



Yet the success of workers depends upon their ability to meet the needs of employers for a skilled workforce. According to the NSSP survey, 66 percent of intermediaries surveyed found it difficult to secure enough funding to identify employer needs, such as skills, specific training, and curriculum; 66 percent of those surveyed found it difficult to secure enough funding to provide human resource services for employers, such as supervisory and mentoring training. “Nobody on the public side sees [sector work] as something they want to pay for,” says John Colm of WIRE-Net. “They all want to see it result in a placement. Putting six months into building a relationship or a set of relationships with other industry associations so that their members’ training needs could be met isn’t really in the cards.”

Organizing and Planning

Intermediaries can play their organizing and planning roles because they stay close to and have deep credibility with workers and employers. Yet they find it challenging to finance these activities. In the NSSP survey, 67 percent of intermediaries found it difficult to secure enough funding to coordinate key stakeholders, and 51 percent found it difficult to secure enough funding to undertake labor market research and analysis.

Several interviewees stressed the difficulty of financing their organizing and planning role, even though intermediaries add enormous value at the program development stage as brokers, providers, or contractors of services. “The public resource streams are tied to outcome meas-

ures for individual clients—wage gains, placement rates, and advancement,” says Daniel Berry of the Greater Cleveland Growth Association. “While those are very important, the Individual Training Accounts and performance indicators don’t allow for a lot of flexibility in creating capacity, because you generally can’t recapture the development costs in the training.”

New Approaches for Sustaining Workforce Intermediaries and Their Advancement Work

Existing strategies for financing workforce intermediaries and their advancement activities are limited, incomplete, and insufficient. New financing approaches must promote two distinct priorities:

- *Strengthening organizational capacity*, expanding and sustaining workforce intermediary organizations as stable, local institutions; and
- *Providing financing explicitly for the advancement for low-wage workers*, expanding and strengthening the ability of workforce intermediaries and the workforce system to support advancement activities for low-wage workers and their employers.

Strengthening Organizational Capacity

The NSSP surveys and JFF interviews with intermediary staff members suggest the need for dedicated, predictable, and long-term financing if workforce intermediaries are to expand their capacity, achieve significant scale, and generate solid advancement outcomes for low-income job and skill seekers. Recent financing innovations in several states point to vehicles that can help provide such financing. So, too, does recent experimentation, by the U.S. Department of Labor, with innovation financing for workforce partnerships that play intermediary roles. California, Washington, Massachusetts, and several other states have turned to varied funding sources, including direct appropriations, Governor’s Discretionary (15 percent) funds under WIA, and Unemployment Insurance diversion funds to support intermediary functions and activities. U.S. Department of Labor demonstration programs, including the sectoral initiative (\$3.8 million), the Faith-Based Intermediaries initiative (\$5 million directly to intermediaries, \$11.9 million through the states for such activities), and the Skills Gap Panel Initiative (\$10.2 million), have provided program and operating support for a number of intermediaries.

Three mechanisms for financing would increase the number and capacity of workforce intermediaries in the near term:

Foundations and Workforce Intermediaries

By providing early support, foundations have enabled some workforce intermediaries to gain access to state and federal funding for demonstration grants and different types of training programs. Yet implementation and sustainability remain serious challenges. “It’s fairly easy to get the pilot money,” notes the director of Shoreline Community College’s career ladder program. “But then the funding dries up,” even when the pilot is effective.

As practitioners and policymakers grapple with the challenges of how to scale up and sustain workforce intermediaries, foundations might consider a number of collaborative investor models. One approach would be to establish an interest-free revolving loan fund to help high-performing intermediaries build their capacity to expand models to other cities or locations. Another option is to explicitly support, in multi-site, community-wide initiatives, the development or enhancement of local workforce intermediaries.

Over the long term, foundations can support a wide range of activities that build public demand and promote a public policy agenda and financing system for the advancement of low-income workers. These activities might range from sponsoring surveys, to holding public forums, to convening key stakeholders.

- Expanding and regularizing existing federal and state demonstration projects;
- Providing federal resources to match state incumbent-worker-training dollars that fund advancement services for less-skilled workers; and
- Creating voluntary, state-run, workforce intermediary investment funds that would provide operating and program support for effective advancement intermediaries.

Providing Explicit Financing for Low-Wage Worker Advancement

In the long-run, advancement will require greater attention to post-employment services, workplace-based training and supports, and education and training credentials that are portable and have meaning in the labor market across firms and industries. Advancement in today's economy depends upon the ability to keep learning and earning valued credentials over time. For this reason, it will be necessary to address two related but distinct challenges regarding advancement activities and services and their financing.

Adapt federal workforce-related funding streams to promote advancement more aggressively: A number of changes to existing workforce development programs could provide incentives to substantially improve advancement outcomes. These changes primarily involve the Workforce Investment Act and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families.

Both WIA and TANF missions should emphasize advancement toward family-supporting wages for low-income adults. To achieve this goal requires easier and broader access to intensive, job-specific education and training services. For reasons noted above, WIA implementation has limited the provision of training. At the same time, current TANF policy makes it difficult to provide training services and skill development to those who need them to move up in the labor market.

WIA could promote greater attention to advancement by eliminating the strict requirement of sequential services and enabling communities to develop individualized service plans that mix core, intensive, and training services as needed for particular job seekers and low-income workers. This flexibility must still be guided by the broad goal of helping job seekers and low-income workers advance toward an income that allows for self-sufficiency, and the services should be tied closely to employer needs.

WIA and TANF performance standards should be aligned with each other and emphasize advancement. WIA performance measures emphasize employment,

retention, and earnings gains. This was a deliberate effort by Congress to begin to redirect the workforce system toward retention and advancement goals and outcomes. A more aggressive way to improve performance goals would be to include a measure that captures the progress of those served by WIA toward self-sufficiency. This must be done carefully, both to avoid penalizing states for economic changes that are beyond the power of the workforce system to affect and to make it possible to track progress over time. Still, some quantifiable guide to progress toward the stated goal of the act is needed.

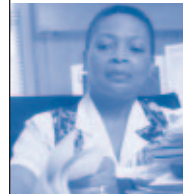
TANF performance measures should replace caseload reduction and participation rates with performance measures similar to those used in WIA. This would focus states and localities on employment and wage advancement as goals for TANF recipients. It would also make it easier for agencies working with both WIA and TANF funding to simplify their data collection and reporting and to pool funding from different agencies to serve those in need.

Finance lifelong learning for low-income adults: Ultimately, advancement along career pathways to family-supporting income requires skill development and the acquisition of credentials that employers value and reward. Three distinct financing proposals for lifelong learning are: lifelong learning accounts, Unemployment Insurance reform, and improved access for working adults to higher education student aid.

These are ambitious and controversial proposals. What they have in common is the recognition that advancement for most workers will require on-the-job learning and the earning of educational credentials—and that financing for this kind of system must be portable, compatible with learning that takes place at the worksite, and relatively free from the income-eligibility requirements that keep less-skilled adults from qualifying for needed public supports and services as they start their climb up career ladders.

These proposals have something else in common: they are financing mechanisms—strategies for making more money available for advancement services. Financing mechanisms and steadier funding streams are critical, but they do not eliminate the need for workforce intermediaries. In fact, adequate funding for advancement services would put new demands upon intermediaries to do the laborious and difficult work of bringing employers, educational institutions, service providers, and government leaders together to design, assess, improve, and manage training and advancement programs that work for low-wage workers and their employers.

Lifelong learning accounts are individual asset accounts



held by workers over the course of their working life (Osterman et al. 2001). They are financed by employee and employer contributions, with the potential for public subsidy, and they allow the account holder to draw down resources to pay for eligible education and skill development services. Most LLA models are designed to be universally available to all workers, funded by both employees and employers, with any public subsidies highly leveraged by private contributions through such mechanisms as tax deductibility. Some models propose to steer tax subsidies to lower-income workers by allowing employees who are eligible for the federal Earned Income Tax Credit to finance their accounts exclusively through employer contributions.

Lifelong learning accounts are:

- Portable: They travel with the employee, regardless of income, employer, or job category.
- An efficient way for employers to promote training and skill development: For example, employers can arrange customized training and organize their employees to use their LLAs for such training in return for certification and advancement opportunities.
- Able to leverage other public workforce training and education resources: WIA Individual Training Account vouchers could be linked, for example, as could incumbent worker training funds funded by many states from UI diversion funds.

The Council on Adult and Experiential Learning is piloting an LLA model in several states and has helped to draft federal legislation to create a national LLA demonstration project. CAEL's experience with LLAs has led it to several key design principles: make LLA's universally available to all workers; leverage private dollars by requiring employer contributions; make the account tax-deductible; and develop an accompanying career transcript to record an individual's skills progression and education for portability (Leiken 2002).

LLAs require substantial marketing and promotion to ensure a high rate of take-up. Workforce intermediaries

can organize training providers to offer "bulk" discounts if employers agree to training financed through employee LLAs. Intermediaries can provide critical career counseling services to workers, enabling them to make good choices about how to use their LLA assets for career advancement. State workforce intermediary investment funds could consider supporting the provision of career management services to overcome the information challenges facing workers not accustomed to deciding about education purchases. Alternatively, or in addition, LLAs might be structured to treat career management as an allowable tax-exempt expense for some limited proportion of an individual's account.

Unemployment Insurance has always been viewed as the primary vehicle for providing temporary income to workers who lose their jobs due to cyclical or temporary layoffs. Recent debates about UI have centered on the declining coverage of workers and the need for changes that can help low-wage workers stay attached to the labor market in times of economic hardship. These changes, which would expand eligibility and make benefits portable, are necessary but not sufficient. Given workers' needs for continuous skill upgrading in order to earn family-supporting wages, it may be time to broaden the purpose of UI from an income-support system to one that would help eligible individuals adjust to and succeed in today's economy by supporting investments in training and skills upgrading.

Federal policy might tackle this issue in various ways. Currently, the federal government uses the \$15 billion in the Employment Security Administrative Account to offset the deficit. At a minimum, a portion of these funds reserved for administration of workforce programs and UI benefits could be returned to states through a Reed Act distribution (a law that authorizes periodic redistributions of these funds back to the states) to encourage states to fund workforce services that promote the advancement of low-income, eligible workers. In addition, incentives could encourage states to use these dollars to support labor market services to employers and planning and program development services, in addition to advancement services provided by workforce intermediaries.

Another option is for the federal government to consider adopting the policy and financing model of a few states (e.g., California, New Jersey, Indiana, Texas) that invest significantly in a wide range of employer-focused, incumbent-worker-training programs through a UI tax diversion. These states primarily assess a per-employee tax on employers covered by the UI system and simultaneously reduce the unemployment tax burden by the

Over the long run, far-reaching changes in unemployment insurance law may be needed if the nation is to have a sustainable system that enhances the skills of our workforce and meets the needs of businesses in our knowledge-based economy.

same amount, therefore avoiding a tax increase on employers.

Federal policy, through an amendment to the Federal Unemployment Tax Account, could support a similar funding mechanism to leverage and increase state spending by providing matching funds to states that support training and advancement through UI diversions. Federal policies guiding the use of these funds should encourage investments in advancement and retention activities that build the skills and knowledge of low-skilled individuals, support employers at the workplace, and support the services and operations of workforce intermediaries.

Over the long run, far-reaching changes in UI law may be needed if the nation is to have a sustainable system that enhances the skills of our workforce and meets the needs of businesses in our knowledge-based economy. A permanent percentage of UI funds (for example, one tenth of one percent) could be returned to each state for the sole purpose of upgrading the skills of the workforce. Because the UI system is funded through an employer tax, employers will want to be assured that these dollars are used to meet the skill requirements of business. Most states have an oversight board for their incumbent-worker, UI-funded programs that includes business representatives and other stakeholders, and this should be a required feature.

Further, as a nation, we should consider broadening the responsibility for skill upgrading and advancement beyond the employer. Support for skills upgrading could include not only an employer assessment but also a small but meaningful contribution by the employee. For example, New Jersey requires an annual employee contribution of \$4.83; the employer contribution is \$19.83.

Finally, the federal government should provide a match for those individuals who are most in need of basic skills upgrading. In this way, support of lifelong learning would be a tripartite responsibility of employers, employees, and government.

Student financial aid for higher education, particularly at the federal level, is perhaps the most significant of the potential public sources of advancement financing. Total federal adult workforce training in 2001 consisted of \$950 million for adult employment and training and \$1.6 billion for dislocated workers under the Workforce Investment Act, combined with \$561 million in adult basic education funding. By comparison, federal student financial assistance through the Higher Education Act, including grants and loans, totaled nearly \$50 billion last year (Bosworth and Choitz 2002).

Despite the rising number of adults finding their way towards further education, access to financial aid for low-income working adults is difficult to secure. While 28 percent of working adults enrolled in higher education in 1999 less than half time were among the working poor, only 7.7 percent of all working parents received *any* federal, state, or institutional aid.

According to Brian Bosworth and Victoria Choitz (2002), limited access to financial resources remains perhaps the largest obstacle to, and federal higher educational funding may be the largest untapped source of, potential advancement financing. Strategies to make Pell Grants, Hope and Lifelong Learning Tax Credits, and other student loans and grants easier for working adults to access and use could be a powerful lever for lifelong learning and educational advancement, which are now all but closed off to many low-skill working adults.

Bosworth and Choitz recommend four policy changes that could expand federal financial support for the advancement of low-income workers in higher education:

- Amend the Hope and Lifetime Learning Tax credits to improve opportunities for working adults to pursue skill development. Modifications would include allowing students enrolled less than half-time to participate and expanding the tax credit from 20 to 50 percent of qualified educational expenses.
- Make less-than-half time students eligible for some government guaranteed loans.
- Modify eligibility barriers for less-than-half-time working adult students with dependents within the Pell Grant program.
- Revisit financial-aid-eligibility barriers to shorter term and more flexible educational programs.

Expanding access to student financial aid will not in and of itself ensure that higher education is accessible to low-income, working adults. Programs that fit the needs, time constraints, and academic deficiencies facing many working adults are not readily available in postsecondary institutions. Proposals to widen eligibility for student aid also run into significant political resistance from higher education advocates who see opening up opportunities for poor, working adults as a “zero sum game” that diverts resources from needy students already competing for limited funds. Despite these obstacles, expanded access to higher education financing for low-wage working adults, combined with supports to ensure success in postsecondary programs, has to be part of any long-term strategy for advancement and lifelong learning.



Making a Difference

There is no dominant workforce intermediary model in the United States today. This is a period of great experimentation and trial and error in the design and organization of these organizations and the services they provide to their dual customers: employers and job- and skill-seekers. For this reason, a “one size fits all” approach to financing workforce intermediaries is impractical. Moreover, standardized expectations and design specifications, while administratively attractive, would undermine the flexibility, rapid response, and mission-driven character of the best intermediaries. As the blue-ribbon MIT Working in America Project concluded: “[The] federal government should foster experimentation, evaluate and disseminate the results, support the development of sustainable funding strategies and review the emergent institutional structure to ensure the coherence of the system as a whole” (Osterman et al. 2001).

Of course, adequate financing for workforce intermediaries and the range of services necessary for advancing low-income adults to family self-sufficiency will not, *by itself*, propel working adults out of poverty. Many hurdles outside the control of even the best workforce intermediaries and financing systems stand between poor adults and the skills and careers they need to support their families. Yet even as they face the challenges of sustaining and expanding their services to employers and job seekers, workforce intermediaries and their strategies for advancing workers to family-sustaining careers could make a real difference to communities, low-wage workers, and their employers. They are a potentially powerful mechanism for helping working Americans attain the skills and supports they need to thrive and contribute to their communities.

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Organizations Referenced

AFSCME District 1199C
Training and Upgrading Fund
Breslin Learning Center
100 S. Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA 19110
215.568.2220
www.1199ctraining.org

Boston Private Industry Council
2 Oliver Street
Boston, MA 02109
617.423.3755
www.bostonpic.org

California Association of Health Facilities
2201 K Street
Sacramento, CA 95816
916.441.6400
www.cahf.org

Capital Area Training Foundation
P.O. Box 15069
Austin, TX 78761-5069
512.323.6773
www.catf-austin.org

Central Piedmont Community College
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Charlotte, NC 28235-5009
704.330.2722
www.cpcc.cc.nc.us

Greater Cleveland Growth Association
50 Public Square, Suite 200
Cleveland, OH 44113-2291
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www.clevelandgrowth.com

Project QUEST
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San Antonio, TX 78207-4446
210.270.4690
www.questsa.com

The Reinvestment Fund
718 Arch Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106
215.574.5800
www.trfund.com

San Francisco Works
235 Montgomery Street
San Francisco, CA 94104-3103
415.217.5193
www.sfworks.org

Shoreline Community College
16101 Greenwood Avenue North
Shoreline, WA 98133-5696
206.546.4101
www.shore.ctc.edu/shoreline

WIRE-Net
6516 Detroit Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44102-3057
216.631.7330
www.wire-net.org

Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership
532 E. Capital Drive Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53212
414.906.4204
www.wrtf.org

Notes

¹ An ongoing research project on workforce intermediaries in Silicon Valley and Milwaukee is looking systematically at some of these institutional variations and how they affect efforts to improve placement and advancement for low-income workers (Benner et al. 2001).

² For more information on career ladders, see Mills and Prince (2003).

³ Through Workforce Innovation Networks—WINs—JFF is helping SFWorks increase its reach, scale, and operational sophistication by researching additional industries for expansion, identifying and securing expansion financing, and helping to refine its business model.

JOBS FOR THE FUTURE seeks to accelerate the educational and economic advancement of youths and adults struggling in today's economy. Jobs for the Future partners with leaders in education, business, government, and communities around the nation in order 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.



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