

# Organizing and Supporting the Employer Role in Workforce Development

*A Guide for Employer Organizations on How and Why to Become Workforce Development Intermediaries*



January 2008



## Taking Care of Business:

### *A Series of How To Manuals on Creating and Sustaining Employer-based Workforce Development Intermediaries*

As WINs worked with selected employer-based intermediaries, the partner organizations captured exemplary practices, lessons learned, and “how to” approaches of those that successfully fulfilled this role. Presented here and in related publications are these experiences in the form of four manuals. Each explains in detail how to replicate a successful intermediary strategy and tailor it to your needs. These manuals are designed for workforce professionals and employer intermediaries that wish to use the public workforce system to address the dual demands of employers and job seekers. The WINs partners present these manuals as tools to help solve our nation’s most pressing workforce challenges.

The manuals cover four topics:

*Creating Community Advancement Intermediaries:* Implementing a model that enables employers to move entry-level, low-skilled workers up career ladders, at the same time creating vacancies for new workers entering the job market.

*Partnering with One-Stop Career Centers:* Advice for businesses on collaborating with One-Stop Career Centers in strong public-private partnerships to train both incumbent workers and new entrants to the labor force.

*Providing Business Services:* Positioning employer intermediaries to provide business services through the local workforce system—and using this new position as a tool to grow both association membership and the number of employers who use and benefit from that system.

*Building Employer-Responsive Workforce Systems at the State Level:* State-level employer intermediaries organize and facilitate task forces of key stakeholders to make state workforce systems more effective and responsive to employer needs and to better align state economic and workforce development policies and programs.

In addition, WINs has prepared a guide, *Organizing and Supporting the Employer Role in Workforce Development*, that has two purposes. One is to help employer organizations to understand why it is important to better organize and support the employer side of the employment equation and to engage employers more effectively in workforce development. The second is to show the leaders of employer and employer-serving organizations why and how they should become “workforce development intermediaries.”

These manuals and *The Guide* may be especially useful to organizations involved in the U.S. Department of Labor’s WIRED Initiative. The WIRED Initiative focuses on labor market areas that comprise multiple jurisdictions within states or across state borders. It supports innovative approaches to education and workforce and economic development that prepare workers to succeed in a globalizing economy. Through the WIRED initiative, governors have a unique opportunity to design and implement strategic approaches to regional economic development and job growth. These manuals provide critical lessons from WINs’ on-the-ground experience.

These manuals and the guide will help you understand what to do and how to create and sustain employer-based workforce development intermediaries. The state and local Workforce Investment Boards and employer intermediaries described in these manuals did it, and so can you!

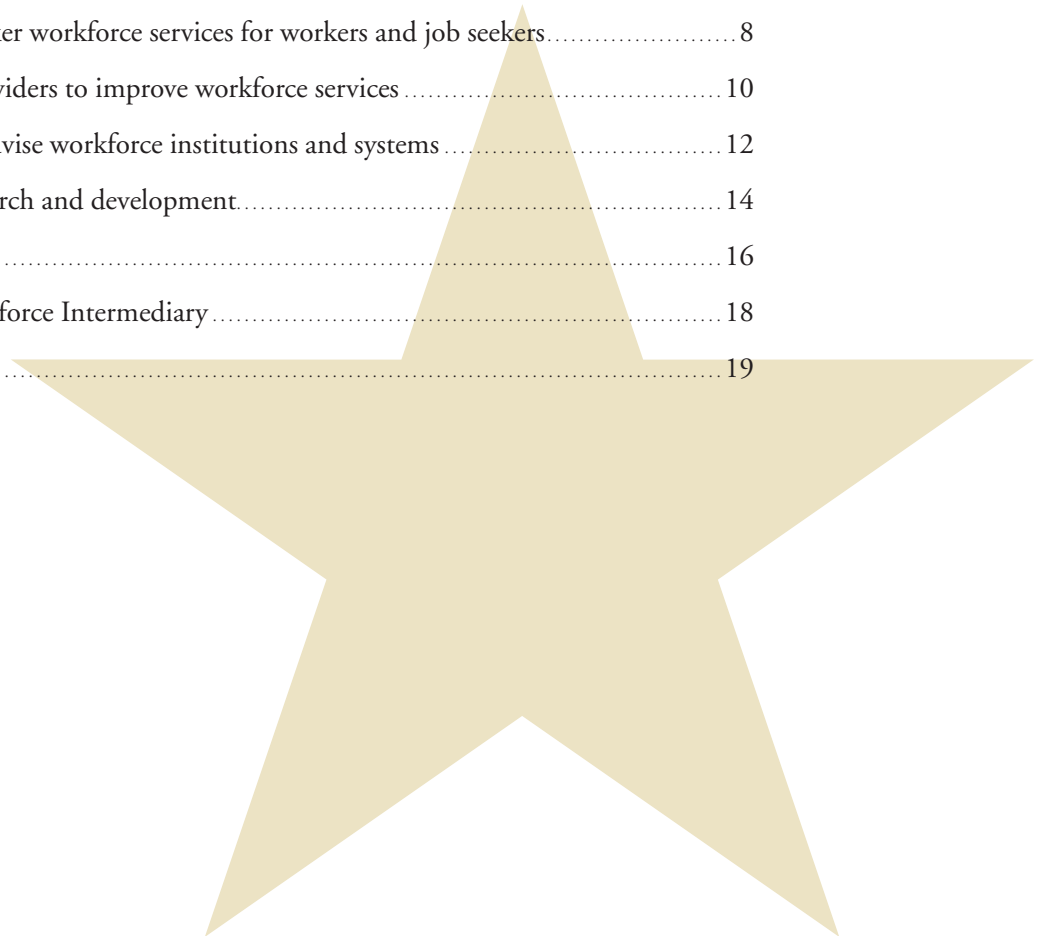
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## Workforce Innovation Networks—WINs

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## **Acknowledgments**

This publication is one in a series written collaboratively by the WINs partners. Special thanks go to Basil Whiting, Russell Hamm, Rosemary Lahasky, Jeanette Nigro, Bob Watrus, and Amy Robins for their extensive contributions during the programmatic work and in writing these publications based on those experiences.

The WINs partners would also like to express our appreciation for the funding support and professional collegiality of The Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, and of The Ford Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, and The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation during the ten years of work by WINs on developing and promoting the model of employer associations as workforce development intermediaries.



# Organizing and Supporting the Employer Role in Workforce Development

## Introduction

### Who Should Read This Guide?

This guide is directed mainly at the leadership of employer organizations that are membership bodies comprising large and small businesses and, in many cases, nonprofit and governmental employers as well.

If you are reading this guide, you likely lead one of the nation's 2,500 local or state chambers of commerce affiliated with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce or one of the 300-plus local, state, and national trade and other employer associations affiliated with the National Association of Manufacturers.

This guide is also designed to serve leaders of organizations that are not membership bodies but that are led by and serve employers. And, too, the guide is intended to be useful to leaders of any of the many other organizations that employers have formed to meet their various economic, technological, workforce, and other needs. In addition, you could be an employer, a public policymaker, a scholar concerned with workforce issues, or a workforce development professional in one of the many agencies comprising the workforce system—the public sector's Workforce Investment Boards and their One-Stop Career Centers, community colleges, other training providers, community-based and faith-based organizations, and so on. Finally, you might be a civic or labor leader or citizen concerned with retaining jobs in your community and helping workers obtain and retain jobs that offer—or lead to—family-supporting incomes.

### Purposes

For all these audiences, this guide has two purposes. One is to help you understand why it is important to better organize and support the employer side of the employment equation and to engage employers more effectively in workforce development. The second is to show the leaders of employer and employer-serving organizations why and how they should become “workforce development intermediaries.”

### What Is a Workforce Development Intermediary?

The bulk of this guide is devoted to discussing what workforce development intermediaries are, why they are important, what role they play, what they have accomplished—and how employer organizations can become one.

The term “intermediary” can be confusing, so let's define it at the outset. One dictionary defines it as being “in the middle, in-between” and “acting as a go-between.” Employer organizations acting as workforce intermediaries stand “between” employers and workers, on the one hand, and the elements of the workforce development system, on the other hand—educators, trainers, recruitment and placement organizations, and so on. And they act as a “go-between,” *linking* the two sides—conveying information from one to the other or brokering services from the workforce system to employers and workers. More on this later.

### Who Are the Authors and What Is Their Experience With Intermediaries?

This guide was prepared by three national organizations that are partners in the Workforce Innovations Networks—WINs:

- The Center for Workforce Success, the nonprofit arm of the National Association of Manufacturers;
- The Institute for a Competitive Workforce, a nonprofit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce; and
- Jobs for the Future, a national nonprofit research, consulting, and advocacy organization that works to increase educational and economic opportunities.

For a decade, the WINs partners have worked to conceive, develop, and expand the role of employer workforce development intermediaries. They have done this with the funding support of the Employment and Training Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor and several philanthropic foundations, especially the Ford, Annie E. Casey, and Charles Stewart Mott foundations.

Over the years, the WINs partners have worked intensively with a dozen and a half employer organizations and informed and assisted many others to work to varying degrees as employer workforce intermediaries. This guide synthesizes the lessons of that experience.

## Why You Should Be a Workforce Intermediary

Time was when employers could meet most of their needs for good workers by hanging a “Now Hiring” sign outside their doors or advertising available jobs in the newspaper. Employers who needed workers with specialized skills could either hire them off the street or “grow them” in-house, sometimes through apprenticeship programs.

### The World Has Changed

Three fundamental changes pose profound workforce challenges to the American economy:

- *Globalization of the economy* has shifted competitive advantage in advanced economies like that of the United States toward such factors as time-to-market, quality, customer service, and productivity. These factors push American employers to use advanced technology, materials, and processes.
- *The inexorable progress of technology* impacts both the workplace and business strategy, mainly by raising the skill requirements for workers at all levels. This places a premium on education and skills in worker competition for well-paying jobs.
- *The aging of the U.S. workforce and retirement of the baby boom generation* are taking a vast pool of accumulated skills and experience out of the labor force.

One result has been unusually tight labor markets beginning in the late 1990s, both for skilled and unskilled workers. Labor market studies project millions of job vacancies for technician-level workers, those with some amount of postsecondary education but not necessarily a Bachelor’s degree (two-year Associate’s degrees or shorter-term, often certified skills courses, some offering recognized credentials). At the same time, the shortage of qualified entry-level workers has forced employers to hire non-traditional populations and attempt to make them productive—for example, immigrants with little or no English language skills, ex-offenders, and disadvantaged workers with limited education and skills. Rising skill requirements even at entry levels have intensified pressure for the further development of this frontline workforce. Such tight labor markets are projected to continue indefinitely.

In such circumstances, employers could look to the national public workforce system—Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) and One-Stop Career Centers—for help, but few do. Surveys conducted by WINs indicate that over 90 percent of employers

have little to do with the federally funded system, largely because they feel that it is unresponsive to their needs. Worse, this is especially true of employers with jobs and career ladders offering family-supporting wages and benefits. Nor do employers have substantial involvement with the formal educational system, apart from scattered business/K-12 partnerships and limited customized training by community colleges. At the same time, employers voice a growing need for aid in coping with the unfamiliar challenges presented by non-traditional worker populations, their best new sources of entry-level labor.

The employer side of the workforce development equation clearly needs to be better organized and supported and play a more active role in workforce development. This is less an issue for large employers, who tend to have the professional human resources and training staff to address these new workforce challenges; but even they need advice and assistance.

Most employers, however, are small- and medium-sized businesses—the same firms that account for the bulk of U.S. jobs and job creation. They generally have limited or even no professional human resources or training staffs. Further, such employers have traditionally done little training of their workforce, except perhaps for some managers and some technicians. And if they are in sectors hard pressed by global competition, they often lack the funding for training. Moreover, such employers have seldom worked together to aggregate their training demands and seek customized services from education and training providers.

Most of these factors need to change. Employers need to engage more actively and effectively in workforce development, become more knowledgeable and demanding consumers of workforce services, and collaborate more in doing both. And, they need help in doing this.

### How These Factors Affect Your Members

As leader of an employer organization, you are aware of most of the above factors *intellectually*, but you are probably most acutely sensitive to what your members are saying. Probably your member employers (and non-members as well) are saying things like the following:

*I have been advertising and recruiting for weeks and months, and I simply can't find enough qualified workers, even entry-level workers. Some of the candidates I get can't really read, can't take direction, don't really know how to work.*

*To be competitive with foreigners, I have invested heavily in high-tech equipment and materials, but my employees lack the skills to get the most out of it.*

*I have a lot of lateness, absenteeism, and turnover, and some of it comes from off-job problems at home. Some of these folks really need a social worker.*

*I have a lot of immigrant workers, speaking a dozen or more different languages with hardly any English capability. They are willing to work hard, but you can't communicate with them. This results in low productivity, high scrap, and other errors.*

*I know I should be training, but I don't have any training staff and only one part-time HR person. I don't know how to find the right educators or trainers out in the community; I don't have time to spend looking; and I don't have the funds to pay for much training if I do find someone. I need some help.*

*I did bring a trainer in once, but he used an off-the-shelf course that wasn't what we really needed; it didn't really work for the new equipment we have. It was a waste of time and money.*

*I went to the local One-Stop Center once, and they sent me tons of workers whom they hadn't screened. Never again.*

Sound familiar?

## Why Call on Employer Organizations

Employer and employer-led organizations—chambers of commerce, affiliates of the National Association of Manufacturers, and others—are the natural peer infrastructure of the employer world. They are located throughout the nation. They speak “the employer language” and they understand employer problems. Some already provide employers with a range of workforce and other services. Most play active roles in their communities and know community resources; and they already have brokering and relationship-building skills. Most of all, they are trusted by employers, who are their members, and they can gain access to their leaders.

Employer and employer-based organizations are thus the primary candidates to better organize the employer side of the employment equation and, as stated above, help employers engage more actively and effectively in workforce development, become more knowledgeable and demanding consumers of workforce services, and collaborate more in doing both.

**What can you—as an employer organization leader—do to help make this happen?**

## How to Think about the Intermediary Role

As an employer organization leader, you must think in a pragmatic, problem-solving way about challenges. The challenge here is to determine what you could do to help your members more on workforce issues. How could you target your efforts? What kinds of things could you do?

Start by thinking about the categories of players in workforce development with whom you might work: not just employers but also workers and job seekers; education, training, and other service providers; and workforce institutions and systems. And consider taking on new roles, such as conducting research and development and engaging in partnerships.

### Employers

The obvious place to start would be employers. They are distressed by workforce problems. They are your members; they pay dues and fees; they are by definition your top priority. Still, don't confine your efforts to your members; helping out some non-members would broaden your reach and maybe sell them on joining your association or chamber.

Either way, what could you do with employers?

You could take a look at their human resources functions. Some employers have no full-time professional HR personnel and very limited personnel procedures. You could advise them on how to upgrade what they are doing in HR to a more proactive, professional level.

You could help them better understand their skill needs and translate those into accurate job descriptions for recruiting. You know that inaccurately stated skill requirements can mean a mismatch between a new employee and a job.

You could link employers to education, training, and other providers.

You could organize smaller employers into *ad hoc* or longer-term consortia, aggregating their training and other HR needs and linking them to education, training, or other providers in cost-effective ways.

You could advocate for employer workforce needs with the various elements of the workforce system—WIBs and One-Stop Centers, community and technical colleges, public and private skills training providers—and to public policymakers and the community at large.



## Workers and Job Seekers

The next obvious candidates for you to reach out to are workers, whether job seekers or already employed. The major need here is education and training—both “foundational skills” (including interpersonal skills, basic language and numeracy, problem-solving, teamwork) and “hard skills” or technical skills specific to an industry or occupation (skills to do the tasks required on the job in relation to equipment, materials, processes). English as a Second Language (ESL) would be a priority with some employers and workers. Supervisors also need training in modern leadership techniques. And there also appears to be a need to help people access child care, transportation, social and other community services, and, in some cases, the Earned Income Tax Credit and other public benefits.

Some employer organizations have in-house education and training capacities, so you could perhaps provide some or many of these services yourself. The others you could broker from a range of providers you are aware of—or are well positioned to find—in the community.

## Education, Training, and Other Service Providers

The perceptions of your members about the public workforce system, while based in unhappy experiences, are also somewhat out of date. The Employment and Training Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor now places a priority on making WIBs and One-Stop Centers more responsive to employers. Its “dual customer” approach serves both employers and workers. You could make an important contribution by informing receptive WIBs and One-Stop Centers about employer needs, and by informing employers about the various improved services provided by the public workforce system.

Your member employers also complain that too many trainers and community colleges try to sell standard courses and don’t customize to what employers seek: training that is relevant to their needs. You could work with providers to offer courses tuned to actual employer job standards and worker skill needs. You could provide existing curricula on various subjects that are relevant, and you could sit with providers and help them design or redesign their curricula, certify their programs, and credential graduates, where appropriate. Or you could organize employers and providers into consortia to generate new course offerings. Similarly, you could work with providers of child care, transportation, and social or other services to attune them more closely to employer and worker needs.

## Workforce Institutions and Systems

Designing particular courses or making them relevant is one thing; helping ensure that the institutions and systems in the workforce development arena are serving employers and workers in the most comprehensive, effective, responsive ways is another—a matter of participating in the governance of such institutions and systems. You could sit on—or nominate employers to sit on—local or state WIBs or the governing boards of training organizations or community colleges.

Beyond boards, much of the work of deciding what institutions and systems do to serve employers and workers is done by advisory committees, curriculum committees, working groups, task forces, and so on. You could ensure that employers are well represented on such groups—and even help them play effective roles by briefing them as to what such roles require.

## Research and Development

Beyond these four major categories of workforce players whom you could work with, there are many unknowns in the workforce development arena. For one thing, there is often an absence of data upon which to make decisions or prioritize actions (e.g., what are an employer’s or an industrial sector’s job standards and major skill needs in the reasonably foreseeable future? What local training capacity is there, for example, for advanced laser applications or CAD/CAM?).

And there may be new approaches to workforce development that merit demonstration or pilot projects. Like many employer organizations, you may have experience in conducting surveys, focus groups, or other kinds of research—and in mounting experimental projects of various kinds. So, you could engage in research and development on these matters yourself, or you could stimulate or arrange for others to do so.

## Partnerships

Finally, you cannot—and should not—do all of these things yourself. Aside from the demand such activities will make on your resources, others in your community are likely better positioned, with more resources, skills, and experience, to take the lead on or to contribute to some of these activities. Plan to do some things yourself, but on others, look for partners among education and training providers, government bodies, and other relevant workforce development stakeholders.



## Employer Workforce Intermediaries in Action

Taken together, the activities just outlined comprise a “role,” the role played by employer workforce development intermediaries that has evolved over the last decade through the efforts of WINs. Since 1997, the WINs partners have developed the idea of using the natural infrastructure of employer organizations as workforce development intermediaries.

Before committing yourself to playing this role, consider the experiences of employer organizations that have done so. What have been their experiences and accomplishments? WINs has synthesized the intermediary activities of some of the employer organizations with which it has worked into the following short case studies, organized in accordance with the role discussed above. The WINs partners are confident that you will find examples of what you can do in your community if you choose to play the intermediary role.

Organizations in case studies indicated as affiliates of the NAM were projects of the Center for Workforce Success of NAM’s Manufacturing Institute. Unless otherwise indicated, organizations indicated as chambers were projects of the Institute for a Competitive Workforce of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Generally, other employer-based organizations were projects of Jobs for the Future.

### **1. Organize, advise, advocate for, and provide/broker services to employers**

- *Help employers, especially small and medium-sized firms with limited human resources (HR) and training staff, to understand their skill requirements and upgrade their HR practices*
- *Provide or broker training and services to meet these needs*
- *Aggregate these needs, in part by organizing such employers into consortia with similar HR needs*
- *Advocate for employer workforce needs with the community, providers, public policymakers, and others*

## Organizing Employer Consortia for Training:

### ***The Manufacturing Association of South Central Pennsylvania***

*The Manufacturing Association of South Central Pennsylvania, an affiliate of the National Association of Manufacturers, organized employers to better meet their workforce needs, worked with providers to improve workforce services, and forged partnerships with community colleges and state workforce funding agencies.*

The Manufacturing Association of South Central Pennsylvania (MASCPA) was one of the most successful WINs projects in building partnerships and coalitions that supported both businesses and their employees. Created in 1906, MASCPA is a regional business organization that provides supportive services to its members. Located in York, Pennsylvania, MASCPA has more than 350 member companies, spread mainly throughout south central Pennsylvania, and, to a lesser degree, in Maryland, New York, West Virginia, and Florida.

MASCPA envisions itself as a workforce intermediary. Through WINs, it provided leadership and vision to improve the effectiveness of the workforce investment system to support employers. First, MASCPA focused on helping the WIB to recognize its need to serve business more effectively. This led to the reorganization of the WIB and the addition of new leadership to its board and staff. Then, joint projects began to emerge between the WIB and MASCPA. The most impressive has been the creation of broad-based coalitions of employers who are in specific sectors and have common training and other needs.

With the WIB, MASCPA led the creation of three independent training consortiums in the food, manufacturing, and plastics sectors in south central Pennsylvania. The state funds these large consortia, which are training underemployed workers for jobs in each of the sectors. MASCPA received more than *one million dollars in grants*, mainly from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to build the consortia and deliver training to companies. Each consortium is composed of employer representatives from the sector, WIB staff, educators, and other relevant stakeholders—for example, the Food Consortium emerged from a collaboration of three WIBs, two business associations, and Pennsylvania State University. MASCPA found that organizing such consortia is a highly effective way to leverage its role as an intermediary in serving its members and the regional economy.

In addition, MASCPA has forged partnerships with the community college system. Prior to WINs, MASCPA had no relationship with the Harrisburg Area Community College. Now, the two organizations are partners in several outreach and training programs, and the college has opened a new facility in York. Building on the lessons of this partnership, MASCPA then built a partnership with the Reading Area Community College to establish a “mechatronics” training program.

## **Forming a Health Care Industry Cluster to Address a Nursing Shortage:**

### ***Arlington Chamber of Commerce***

*This Texas chamber organized its area health care industry into a cluster that addressed a critical nursing shortage.*

As in many cities, the health care industry in Arlington, Texas, has critical unmet workforce needs. Through WINs, the Arlington chamber leveraged its membership to form the Health Care Industry Cluster, which brings together CEOs of health care providers, deans of health programs at nearby colleges, local school district officials, and the local WIB. The chamber used WINs funds to support a series of studies assessing the nursing shortage in the county and to increase the capacity of educational programs to train the future health care workforce.

The Health Care Industry Cluster agreed on a three-pronged approach to addressing the nursing shortage. First, it focused on increasing the number of nurses engaged in instruction. The research had revealed that instructional nursing staff were in high demand but short supply, mainly because of inadequate funds to pay Master’s-level nurses as instructors. The cluster engaged students from the University of Texas at Arlington Graduate Business School to develop a business plan highlighting the need and stressing the benefit to the private sector of funding additional instructors. The cluster involved over a dozen hospitals with the development of the plan.

The second area of focus was to establish articulation agreements among educational institutions to better enable the nursing educational system to meet nursing workforce needs. One innovative effort has focused on a pre-Registered Nurse track at the high school level. Officials agreed to develop a Licensed Vocational Nursing program that would allow Arlington’s high school juniors and seniors who were ready to pursue college-level curricula to earn “dual credit” for LVN courses they took in high

school, enabling them to sit for the LVN state exam at the end of their senior year without first going to college. Students who passed the exam could then transition into a Registered Nursing program at a local technical college.

The third aspect of the Health Care Industry Cluster’s strategy is a nurse-mentoring program focused on increasing the retention rate of nursing students. University of Texas graduate students in social work interviewed deans from nearby colleges and universities and conducted student focus groups to identify the issues associated with high dropout rates. From this, a proactive counseling program was created for students to discuss their issues and challenges and to intervene before a student drops out of a nursing program.

## **Contracting with a One-Stop Career Center to Provide Business Services:**

### ***Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce***

*The Brooklyn Chamber contracted with the public workforce system to provide or broker advisory and training services to the area’s employers.*

Prior to 2002, New York City had a single One-Stop Career Center. Located in Queens, it “served” all five boroughs. In 2004, a new mayoral administration expanded the workforce system by launching a One-Stop Center in each of the five boroughs (Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island) and, to make the public workforce system more employer responsive, moved its administration into the city’s Department of Small Business Services. That department soon sought an outside provider to manage business services in the Brooklyn One-Stop Center. The Brooklyn Chamber was a prime candidate for this role, and its position was further strengthened by its association with WINs. Chamber staff indicated that they could leverage the WINs grant and relationship to build their credibility in bidding for the business services contract.

The chamber won the \$1.2 million grant to run the Business Solutions Center in the “Brooklyn Workforce 1 Career Center.” Many of the chamber’s workforce development staff immediately relocated to the Business Solutions Center, whose small business product offerings included training services, small business loans, micro-loans, and counsel on tax credits, wage subsidies, and training grants.

In addition to the array of business services it now offered, the chamber also created the position of human resources specialist, designed to build awareness among the borough’s largely small businesses of the Career Center’s resources. The HR specialist

spends more than half her time in the field, working directly with businesses to identify the services they need most.

A key emphasis is helping businesses take advantage of the state and city's incumbent worker training funds—grants that support training for existing workers to develop specific skills needed by their employers. Until the Brooklyn chamber became involved, almost all of these grants went to businesses upstate and in Manhattan. Now, the chamber seeks to target such incumbent worker training funds on specific industry sectors projected to grow—businesses that often could not otherwise undertake such training—as well as on entry-level jobs whose incumbents could advance with increased skills. In 2005 alone, the chamber helped to secure more than \$85,000 in workforce development funding for local businesses.

## **Organizing Employers to Create an Advancement Model for Nurses:**

### ***Greater Cleveland Partnership***

*The Greater Cleveland Partnership has worked with health care providers and educator/training providers to assemble training and a career ladder that enables Certified Nursing Assistants to progress to Licensed Practical Nurses and eventually to Registered Nurses and other health-related technician occupations.*

The Greater Cleveland Partnership was created in 2004 by the consolidation of Cleveland Tomorrow, the Greater Cleveland Growth Association, the Greater Cleveland Roundtable, and their primary affiliates—COSE, the Northeast Ohio Technology Coalition, and the Commission on Economic Inclusion. Through this merger, the private sector can better allocate two of its most precious resources—dollars and committed leadership—toward creating a more vibrant economy in northeast Ohio. GCP also makes it possible for employers to “speak with one voice” on behalf of job- and wealth-creation priorities locally, in Columbus, and in Washington, DC. GCP is the largest private-sector economic development organization in Ohio and one of the nation's largest metropolitan chambers of commerce. It has approximately 16,000 members in its service region of northeast Ohio.

GCP has leveraged its role as an organization that employers trust to develop an employer-driven response to the acute need for health care workers in Cleveland. In consultation with Jobs for the Future, GCP has created a career ladder that targets relatively low-skilled Certified Nursing Assistants, many of whom are former TANF recipients, for training to become Licensed Practical Nurses. The career ladder offers workers in long-term care facilities the opportunity to advance to higher-skilled, higher-paying occupations in local hospitals and clinics. Eventu-

ally, the career ladder will include training for radiology and surgical technician positions, as well as training to become Registered Nurses. Once complete, this career ladder will be an advancement route from public assistance to high-paying, family-sustaining occupations in health care.

GCP has involved employers at every step. Employers provided input on the initial stages of program design, including the selection of target occupations and advancement approaches. Employers are members of the program's governance board, and they are intimately involved in key decisions about program direction and implementation. In addition, employers review program performance and recruit other employers to the program. GCP is making a significant impact on the workforce needs of the region by organizing sectors of its membership to meet their workforce needs.

## **Advocating Change in the Use of Public Workforce Funds:**

### ***San Francisco Works***

*San Francisco Works successfully advocated for an incumbent worker training program funded by the public workforce system.*

San Francisco Works serves as the nonprofit workforce development arm of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce. The two organizations have a synergistic relationship in their distinct approaches to ensuring that San Francisco's businesses and residents prosper. SFWorks partners with business and government to enhance the skills of, and resources available to, workers earning less than \$40,000 per year. By helping workers and business thrive, SFWorks aims to contribute to the diversity and vibrancy of the city. Through its participation in WINs, SFWorks collaborated with Jobs for the Future on several career advancement projects.

For example, SFWorks has advocated for changes in policy regarding the use of public workforce development funding. It is a member of the full Workforce Investment San Francisco Board and its Employer Services Committee. Through this role, it has advocated for the approval of a Customized Training Policy that provides funding for incumbent worker training from WIA formula funds and sets a 30-day timeline for approval of employer requests for such funding. It is a constant voice for using workforce development funds in ways that better meet employer needs while providing opportunity to San Francisco workers.

## 2. Provide or broker workforce services for workers and job seekers

- Directly provide education, training, or other workforce services—or broker them from other providers—for supervisors, incumbent workers, or individuals seeking employment

*Note: some employer organizations have their own training personnel.*

### The Money Wi\$e Coalition:

#### Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce

*In North Carolina, the Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce assembled a coalition of local agencies to provide a range of services to low-income working families, helping them access statutory benefits and better manage their finances.*

In 2003, the Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce launched the Money Wi\$e Durham Coalition to create new asset-building opportunities for working families. The coalition promotes the Earned Income Tax Credit, expands Volunteer Income Tax Assistance services, trains frontline staff to deliver the FDIC's *Money Smart* financial literacy curriculum, and incorporates financial management, EITC, VITA, and other financial and asset-building programs into its client services.

During the 2004 tax season, VITA volunteers assisted in filing 1,300 returns; this secured \$250,000 in Earned Income Tax Credits and \$643,000 in total refunds and saved low-income working families approximately \$195,150 in taxes. The chamber convened financial institutions to work with the coalition on strategies to target the “unbanked,” with the mayor and the board chair of the County Commission serving as honorary co-chairs. The mayor proclaimed September 27–October 1, 2004, as “Money Wi\$e Week” in conjunction with the U.S. Conference of Mayors’ Dollar Wi\$e Initiative.

The Durham Coalition received \$40,000 from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation to support a part-time coordinator and *Money Smart* training. Over 200 Durham citizens have received training from the FDIC's *Money Smart* financial literacy curriculum, and a “one-stop” Money Wi\$e Help Line was established to provide information to the public on EITC, VITA, homeownership, and financial education programs.

## Fostering Career Development in the Long-Term Care Industry:

### WorkSource Partners

*WorkSource Partners brought together employers, education/training providers, and other workforce resources to develop a career ladder in the long-term care industry centered on advancing Certified Nursing Assistants to Licensed Practical Nurses.*

WorkSource Partners, a Massachusetts-based, employer-based intermediary, has used its expertise as a career counseling and workforce development service provider to establish a model for employee development programs offered at long-term care facilities. Founded in 1995, WorkSource Partners helps organizations cultivate the talent of their employees and the communities they serve, creating a more loyal and productive entry-level workforce. WorkSource serves as an intermediary that helps employers find, keep, and develop employees by providing and coordinating training, career counseling, and hiring services. WorkSource focuses on long-term and acute health care settings that have the scale necessary to provide workforce services on site.

The WorkSource model, developed with Jobs for the Future, has three central characteristics:

- It is directly responsive to the workforce needs of the long-term care provider.
- It makes ongoing outreach and career counseling services available to all employees.
- It forges partnerships with education providers.

WorkSource brings together employers, employees, community colleges, the public workforce development system, and others to provide workforce development services through this model. One of the model's primary focuses is to help Certified Nursing Assistants become Licensed Practical Nurses.

Employees can access a sequence of educational steps, coupled with counseling and support services that help prepare them to enter and succeed in community college-sponsored programs. WorkSource staff conduct outreach sessions at the facilities to communicate the employer's commitment to career development and to solicit employee interest in participating in educational programs. A WorkSource career development specialist then conducts a one-on-one session to help each interested employee develop a career plan based on an assessment of his/her academic skill level, career interest, and life circumstances. Employees who enroll in career advancement courses receive ongoing academic and life coaching to help them juggle the conflicting demands of family, work, and school.



The model's impact can be seen at two locations in Massachusetts that have been in operation for several years: the five facilities in Western Massachusetts owned by Genesis HealthCare, one of the nation's largest providers of long-term care and rehabilitation therapy, and the eleven independent, nonprofit facilities in Worcester that comprise the Intercare Alliance. Between 2001 and 2005, these facilities achieved the following outcomes: provided career counseling and education services to 350 Genesis employees; enrolled 74 Genesis employees into pre-college classes to prepare for the LPN program; enrolled 69 Genesis and Alliance workers into evening LPN training programs; and graduated 60 evening LPN students. In addition, Genesis ended its use of agency nurses to fill LPN vacancies at its five Agawam facilities, for a savings of \$500,000 per year, and Agawam reduced its CNA turnover rate by 30 to 40 percent.

### **Centralized Training for the Construction Industry:** ***Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership***

*The Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership brought together employers from several industries (especially construction), unions, the public workforce system, and education/training providers for a comprehensive workforce development program offering a range of skills and certifications to entry-level and other workers.*

In January 2005, working with Jobs for the Future, the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership (WRTP), a nonprofit workforce intermediary led by labor and management, launched a comprehensive career development program in response to the needs of the skilled trades and industries. The Center of Excellence serves as a single point of contact for the workforce needs of the construction trades industry in the Milwaukee area, and it has the support of the governor and key partners, including the state Department of Workforce Development, the Department of Transportation, organized labor, industry, and training and support agencies. For the industry and for job seekers, the creation of 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 employment opportunities in the construction industry.

The Center of Excellence is a model for meeting the workforce needs of an industry. Services include assessment, job preparation, and job placement services for any community resident who meets minimum qualifications. It provides access to a range of programs, including: BIG STEP, which focuses on developing the academic skills needed to pass the entrance exam required to work in the building and construction trades; preparation to

earn a commercial driver's license and permit; a program leading to an entry-level construction skills certificate; an entry-level manufacturing skills program; environmental remediation training programs; machining, welding and other career advancement training programs in manufacturing; and programs leading to an M-TRANS Road Construction Certificate, a Sewer and Water Construction Certificate, and a Utility Construction Certificate.

The Center of Excellence is having a significant impact. Since its inception in January 2005, its nine programs have together achieved the following outcomes: enrolled 470 participants; graduated 334 participants; and placed 348 participants into jobs. The center offers training, tutoring, and placement services. Placements exceeded graduates due to 81 direct hires. Since 2001, BIG STEP's results include placing 200 low-income graduates in skilled trade apprenticeships. Over a third were people of color and 14 percent were female. At intake, most participants were earning \$7 to \$9 per hour. Depending on the trade, earnings at placement varied from about \$12 to \$15 per hour.

WRTP attributes the success of the center to the relationship it has brokered among employers, their affiliate unions, the public workforce system, and training and support providers. According to WRTP executive director Eric Parker, "We have nailed the relationship with industry." Each partner has distinct needs that are met by their participation in the center. BIG STEP exemplifies this: recruitment of community residents interested in construction careers is streamlined through the Department of Workforce Development and the Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board; program content and training curriculum is driven by industry input; and graduates of BIG STEP have immediate market value to the region's employers. The payoff is that employers have a base of skilled workers from which to hire, participants have improved job prospects, and unions can build their membership.

## Setting Up “Boot Camps” to Prepare Entry-level Workers:

### California Association of Employers

*The Boot Camps operated by the California Association of Employers, an affiliate of the National Association of Manufacturers, provide or broker services to job seekers, in this case via a partnership with the Sacramento Workforce Investment Board.*

The California Association of Employers serves its 475 member companies by providing a range of solutions to the workforce challenges its members face. While the CAE primarily serves employers, its recent initiatives have provided training and placement to job seekers as well. To support prospective employees, CAE developed and offered a free, one-week “Manufacturing Boot Camp.” During the Boot Camp enrollees learned the basic skills necessary to obtain and retain employment in a manufacturing company. CAE teamed with the local workforce board—the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA)—to build the Boot Camp and to deliver the training.

CAE designed and operated the Manufacturing Boot Camps, which were held at the local SETA office with SETA assistance and support. Each Boot Camp was preceded by an orientation session in which the prospective employees learned about the program. Applicants were required to pass an application screening and a drug test prior to their enrollment in the Boot Camp, thus assuring employers that graduates met the standards that the employers set. Content included general soft skills (i.e., work ethic, timeliness, conflict management, positive attitudes, communication skills, and customer service, etc.) as well as basic manufacturing skills and hands-on manufacturing experience.

CAE, working with SETA, offered 9 boot camps and placed 115 boot camp graduates in jobs—a 78 percent placement rate. Further, these new placements are staying in the jobs; the project has an 80 percent retention rate. As the positive reputation of the Boot Camps spread, more businesses showed interest in the training and hiring of Boot Camp graduates. Some companies are now contracting directly with CAE to hold individual company Boot Camps, and other nearby WIBs have approached CAE about establishing Boot Camps in their areas.

## 3. Work with providers to improve workforce services

- Assist providers to better meet employer/worker needs and make their offerings more relevant
- Convey employer job skill standards and worker skill needs to education/training providers
- Work with providers to design/redesign their curricula, certify their programs, and credential their graduates
- Work similarly with providers of supportive services like child care, transportation, case management, social services, etc.
- Providers can include the public workforce system, educators, training organizations, community-based organizations, supportive services, etc.

## Helping Higher Education Tune Courses to Worker Needs:

### WorkSource Partners

*WorkSource Partners collaborated with community colleges and other education/training providers to develop courses designed for full-time, entry-level health care providers. The courses were offered at or close to work sites and related to clearly defined career ladders.*

WorkSource Partners, a Massachusetts-based, employer-based intermediary, worked closely with Jobs for the Future and several education institutions and long-term care providers to develop educational programming that responds to the workforce needs of long-term care employers and workers. One significant outcome is the willingness of the educational institutions to change their traditional instructional practices and offer courses at employer locations. The courses respond both to employee education and skills needs as assessed by WorkSource and to the employer’s need to address the shortage of qualified nursing staff.

For example, WorkSource and Genesis HealthCare, one of the nation’s largest providers of long-term care rehabilitation therapy, came together with Holyoke Community College and Springfield Technical Community College, both located in Western Massachusetts, to give employees access to a continuum of nursing education and training programs linked to clearly defined advancement rungs on an employer-supported career ladder. The courses, offered at or near work sites, include certifications for Adult Basic Education, Certified Nursing Assistant, and Geriatric Nurse Specialist certifications; college-preparatory and pre-nursing courses; and customized Licensed Practical Nurse and LPN-to-Registered Nurse programs.

While the current environment requires the long-term care industry to collaborate in new ways with educational institutions



to “grow their own” nursing staffs, several barriers impede such a strategy. Many Certified Nursing Assistants who are interested in pursuing nursing degrees are not academically qualified to enter nursing or college programs: they need both further academic preparation and help adjusting to an academic environment. Moreover, most CNAs need to keep working and caring for their own families. Very few LPN and RN programs are tailored to the needs of working adults, contributing to higher dropout rates. WorkSource has been instrumental in helping educational providers respond effectively to these challenges and meet the education and training needs of employees and employers in the long-term care industry.

## **Developing New Training for Manufacturing and Financial Services:**

### ***New Century Careers***

*New Century Careers developed successful training programs that provide entry-level workers with the skills needed by manufacturers and by the financial services/insurance industries.*

New Century Careers, an intermediary focused on meeting the workforce needs of employers in southwestern Pennsylvania, worked with Jobs for the Future to develop two workforce development programs in response to the regional needs assessment conducted by the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board and the Pennsylvania Economy League.

The needs assessment revealed that the region’s manufacturers faced a critical shortage of entry-level machinists and other manufacturing workers, while companies in the key financial services and insurance industries also faced a chronic shortage of qualified candidates and had great difficulty retaining employees. New Century Careers developed a training program for the manufacturing industry called Manufacturing 2000 (or M2K) to assist the industry, and it has subsequently worked with additional partners to develop the Customer Service Supply Chain initiative to meet the needs of the financial services and insurance industries.

M2K operates out of the Training Innovation Center, a 15,000-square-foot facility located in South Pittsburgh. The center serves a largely African-American community, which has helped M2K recruit a diverse training pool, a significant objective of the program. The employer-responsive program exposes program participants to the real world of the manufacturing industry. It is offered in the evening to accommodate the work schedules of students, who must enter with a GED or high school diploma. An advanced component, M2K+, offers experienced welders and machinists opportunities for skill enhancement.

The Customer Service Supply Chain program uses the basic features of the M2K program to prepare students for work in customer service, with a particular emphasis on call center skills. The program is designed to serve low-income job seekers with limited work experience and educational attainment. An eight-week training program includes job-readiness training, case management, hands-on customer services training in a call center environment, and placement assistance with area employers. The training is structured to accommodate working adults and allows them to continue working.

## **Fostering Productive Relationships Between Employers and One-Stop Centers:**

### ***The San Diego Employers Association***

*The San Diego Employers Association, an affiliate of the National Association of Manufacturers, works with a provider, in this case the public workforce system, to make its services more responsive to employer needs; it is also an example of researching and advocating employer needs.*

Each of the WINs employer intermediaries sought to work closely with its local Workforce Investment Boards, which comprise the major public workforce system serving employers and workers. While multiple goals were pursued in these relationships, the intermediaries deemed none more important than assisting the WIBs and their One-Stop Centers to improve and align their services more closely with business needs and to require the same approach from the various other local service providers that the WIB engaged. The San Diego Employers Association was particularly successful in bringing the WIB’s business services more in line with business needs. The SDEA serves approximately 1,500 companies and provides its members with professional consultation about human resources issues.

San Diego manufacturers were finding it difficult to attract and recruit employees with the specific higher-tech skills they needed, while workers were finding it difficult to obtain the additional training required. The main SDEA focus in WINs was thus to assist the WIB in meeting the challenge of connecting to businesses and aligning its service menu. Using a series of investigative strategies, including focus groups, surveys, and member company interviews, the SDEA proposed programs and activities that would apprise San Diego manufacturers and other San Diego-based businesses of the services provided by the One-Stop system; develop a working rapport between the One-Stop Centers and the business community of San Diego; and, most important, help provide direction for the training provided by the One-Stop system so that this training would be specifically tailored to meet the demands and needs of the manufacturing sector.

The SDEA communicated with at least 1,500 companies through its outreach, education, and information efforts, and, in a sense, it became a marketing agent for the WIB, using seminars, tours, and newsletter exposure for WIB materials and publications. To reach consensus on the needs of business, the SDEA created an “Economic Development Task Force” of SDEA members who met, elaborated on their workforce needs, and conveyed these needs to the WIB. The SDEA also conducted an annual member survey, reported to the WIB, regarding needs and perceptions.

### **Creating a Single Training Resource for Employers:**

#### ***Arlington Chamber of Commerce***

*In Texas, the Arlington Chamber of Commerce demonstrated how an intermediary can forge partnerships that can bring training providers together into a coherent, employer-responsive model.*

The Arlington (Texas) Chamber of Commerce wanted to elevate its role in developing the local workforce and expanding the area’s intellectual capital by leveraging the effectiveness of already funded programs. The key, the chamber decided, was to act as a broker of services by developing strategic partnerships with the public workforce system.

The chamber’s Education and Workforce Development Council thus established partnerships with the state’s public workforce system, Workforce Solutions, and the University of Texas at Arlington. Together, the partners spearheaded the development of a Center for Continuing Education and Workforce Development. The center is a collaborative partnership of 15 of the area’s major workforce service providers—including the Arlington Chamber of Commerce’s Workforce Development staff—that now operate as a single unit focused on meeting employer and employee needs. The center, housed on the University of Texas campus, functions as an integrated model comprising higher education, the publicly funded workforce system, and employers.

The chamber’s Education and Workforce Development Council employer members meet on a monthly basis to provide the center with feedback and information related to the needs of the employer community. This approach has a valuable by-product: by increasing awareness of workforce development issues and resources, council members become effective advocates of an “employer-driven” workforce development system for the employer community. The success of these efforts is attested by the fact that between September 2004 and September 2005 the center’s market share of area training offerings nearly doubled (from 6.96 percent to 13.5 percent).

### **4. Help govern/advise workforce institutions and systems**

- *Serve on or nominate employer members to Workforce Investment Boards or the governing boards of other workforce development institutions, such as community colleges or training organizations, as well as advisory committees, curriculum committees, task forces, interagency working groups, etc.*

### **Helping One-Stop Centers Understand and Serve Employer Needs:**

#### ***The California Association of Employers***

*The California Association of Employers, an affiliate of the National Association of Manufacturers, helps govern and advise workforce systems; it also advocates for member firms and collaborates with workforce service providers to improve their offerings.*

A basic WINs tenet is to integrate the activities of the local employer association as a workforce intermediary with the efforts of local WIBs, to leverage the power of each. This was well developed by the California Association of Employers. CAE emerged during the 1930s when employers in the Sacramento, California, area pooled their resources to form the California Association of Employers as a cost-effective way to provide solutions for improving employee relations and expanding training opportunities. The CAE has grown to more than 475 member companies, becoming a statewide membership organization that assists private and public sector employers. One of CAE’s two primary goals in WINs was to build an effective relationship with the local Workforce Investment Board, the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA). The CAE invested time and effort with that WIB that resulted in benefits to both organizations.

Initially, to bridge the distance between local employers and the WIB, CAE sought to inform the local One-Stop Career Centers about employer needs. CAE began by providing it with employer job skill standards and worker skill needs. The CAE conducted focus groups on behalf of SETA to obtain employer input for the WIB. Further, it jointly developed a training curriculum with the employers and the workforce agency. As these tasks were accomplished, the WIB learned useful information about employer needs and made numerous employer contacts. Specific initiatives were jointly created to provide education and training to prospective manufacturing employees. An important step in the relationship was the appointment of the CAE executive vice president/chief executive officer to the SETA board. This provided her with the opportunity to learn how the WIB made decisions and commitments, and how best the CAE could work with SETA to better inform it of employer needs.

CAE's outreach introduced more than 130 businesses to SETA and SETA's services. In addition, the CAE received SETA grants to support CAE's workforce efforts, especially its "Boot Camp" for entry-level job applicants.

## **Statewide Workforce System Change:**

### ***South Carolina Chamber of Commerce***

*The South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, a state-level affiliate of both the National Association of Manufacturers and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, assembled a team of statewide workforce system stakeholders. The team members worked for two years to facilitate profound changes in the state's workforce system, making it both more effective and more employer responsive.*

In 2003, the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce (also a NAM affiliate) assembled a WINS-funded state team of approximately 20 high-profile representatives from the public and private sectors to create a more effective, employer-driven state workforce system.

The team commissioned a consultant to document federal and state workforce development funding streams. The study identified 34 separate federal funding streams, totaling \$1.1 billion annually coming into the state for workforce development, each with its own legislation, requirements, and restrictions. The chamber team then brought in workforce development experts from six other states to share success stories, innovative strategies, and how such approaches might be adapted and applied to South Carolina.

The state team came to a consensus on a five-year plan to establish a single coordinating body—with public and private sector representation—empowered to create a statewide strategy and annual goals for workforce development. The state's Department of Commerce would staff the body and ensure that all state cabinet agencies involved in workforce development established joint annual goals and shared research, data, and best practices.

In April 2005, Governor Mark Sanford issued an executive order reassigning Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding from its traditional lodging at the Employment Security Commission to the Department of Commerce. The governor tapped seven members of the chamber state team to be part of the 10-member transition team. In addition, the governor agreed with and is working to implement the state team's key recommendation to establish a senior-level public/private coordinating body to rationalize and coordinate the fragmented services and funding streams for workforce development—and that it be staffed by the Department of Commerce.

Topping off these accomplishments, the governor appointed a chamber associate vice president, who chaired the state team, to direct the new workforce development agency, which will administer WIA and staff the new coordinating body. Even as the WINS initiative comes to a close, the state team plans to continue supporting the full implementation of the outcomes of its work.

## **Integrating Workforce and Economic Development:**

### ***Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce***

*The Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce works to integrate local, regional, and state workforce and economic development policies and programs.*

The Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce's overall workforce strategy has been to improve the public workforce system and make it more responsive to employer needs. More specifically, the chamber has worked to orient training funding to leading employment sectors, provide employers with better job applicant matches, and increase communication between employers and the public workforce development system.

However, these efforts did not improve economic development in the region, which has been significantly affected by NAFTA-related plant closings in the garment industry, beginning in 1994 and continuing today. To reduce or reverse the community's recent job losses, increased economic development efforts were critical. Although the Regional Economic Development Corporation had raised \$3 million to promote the region to prospective employers, businesses still struggled to see the connection between economic and workforce development efforts.

Responding to this gap, the Greater El Paso Chamber implemented a workshop, "Aligning Economic and Workforce Development," in August 2004. Over 60 community leaders attended this program; 83 percent stated that this workshop improved their understanding of the relationship between the two fields. Most important, the Regional Economic Development Corporation of El Paso created a new board position for the Workforce Investment Board chairperson to ensure greater coordination between the major agencies in these two policy arenas.

## 5. Engage in research and development

- Research employer and worker or industry needs
- Research effective employer human resources practices
- Engage in pilot or demonstration projects on new and effective workforce management and development practices

### Better Understanding the Local Labor Market:

#### **Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce**

*The Brooklyn Chamber took the lead on addressing a critical labor market data shortage.*

With funding from WINs, the Brooklyn Chamber commissioned a labor market study to understand the borough's economic trends and conditions. Brooklyn's labor market is unique because, as large as it is—2.5 million people and 36,000 businesses—it exists within a much larger citywide economy comprising five boroughs and centered on Manhattan, which provides stiff competition to the “outer boroughs” for both jobs and talented workers. Further, most data collection and data basis for New York City do not provide labor market data disaggregated sufficiently to distinguish Brooklyn from other boroughs. Indeed, most data efforts consider the borough part of—or of lesser importance than—Manhattan. As Brooklyn leaders and labor market professionals point out, the two boroughs have markedly different demographics, access to services, real estate costs, etc., so the acquisition of targeted labor market information is essential if Brooklyn is to understand and address its specific workforce needs.

To address this issue, the chamber worked closely with the Federal Reserve Bank, the New York Department of Labor, and Pratt Institute faculty to locate and disaggregate up-to-date data on Brooklyn, in some cases producing original research.

The study identified the area's emerging industries, as well as those on the decline, along with current and projected skills and hiring needs. The study also aimed to uncover obstacles specific to small businesses, because nearly 90 percent of the community's 36,000 companies employ fewer than 20 people. This study comprises a critical resource as Brooklyn moves to upgrade its workforce development system.

### A Centralized Source of Information on the Construction Industry:

#### **Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership**

*The Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership's Center of Excellence gathers data on job projections and training needs in the construction industry.*

The Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership's Center of Excellence, which worked in WINs with Jobs for the Future, serves as a single point of contact for the workforce needs of the Milwaukee-area construction industry. It collects and organizes industry-related information, including training resources, employment projections for construction projects, and training requirements.

### The Retention and Advancement Demonstration Project:

#### **Connecticut Business and Industry Association, American Association of Employers, and SMC Business Councils**

*Three affiliates of the National Association of Manufacturers participated in the Retention and Advancement Demonstration: The Connecticut Business and Industry Association, the American Association of Employers in Detroit, and the SMC Business Councils in Pittsburgh. The project, conceived, operated, and evaluated as a demonstration project, is a prime example of how employer intermediaries can provide an array of services to small and medium-sized employers by helping entry-level workers become more productive.*

The premise of the Retention and Advancement Demonstration Project (RAD) was that the job performance, retention, and advancement of low-skilled, incumbent workers in entry-level and near-entry-level jobs could be greatly improved if employer organizations worked with employers to apply the best human resources practices. This would include the skills training and other supports such workers need to become productive and successful employees who could help their employers compete or even survive—and enable both employers and employees to prosper.

The participating associations received WINs funds over three years (2002–2004). They used these funds for staff time, training, and certain supports provided to companies and their workers.



The RAD associations recruited firms and regularly visited them to assess and upgrade their HR systems, identify education and training needs, and provide or broker various services into place. Despite a recession, they achieved impressive results:

- 17 firms engaged in the project's three sites, versus the goal of 15.
- 300 to over 700 employees were targeted for services, versus the goal of 225.
- A broad range of human resources policies and practices were upgraded.
- At least 65 soft- and hard-skill formal training events were brokered or provided for incumbent workers, supervisors, and managers. In addition, over 200 hours of on-the-job training were provided for workers targeted by RAD.
- Employers cited significant improvements in morale, teamwork, and problem solving to improve operations, deriving at least in part from RAD.
- At least 14 promotions and 28 raises/bonuses were attributed to RAD.
- 290 workers were referred to social agencies for help with personal problems.
- Employers cited improvements in productivity, quality, waste reduction, overall competitiveness, and, in some cases, even survival.
- Additional resources were leveraged by all sites from either foundations or federal or state workforce funds.
- Commitment was made by many participating employers to continue RAD's HR systemic changes and skills training after the project ended.
- Benefits to the RAD employer associations included developing/testing new services and adding new member firms attracted by the RAD activities.

## **Researching Employer Needs and Brokering the Services Required:**

### ***The Employers' Association of Illinois***

*The Employers' Association of Illinois, an affiliate of the National Association of Manufacturers, conducts research and development that enables it to help firms better understand their workforce needs, provide or broker services to them, and link them effectively to the public workforce system.*

Several WINs sites developed specific interview protocols and assessments that were used to research employer needs and develop and target services to them. The Employers' Association, a business service organization located in Peoria, Illinois, developed and tested a uniquely successful approach.

The Employers' Association (EA) established two project goals: to assist the Central Illinois Workforce Network—the local Workforce Investment Board—to more effectively serve employers; and to help employers better understand human resources challenges and utilize the publicly funded workforce development system available to them. The EA chose to focus on small businesses, based on the premise that they were simultaneously the future of the local economy and the most challenged with human resources functions and workforce issues. After obtaining company cooperation, the EA conducted interviews to determine barriers the employers faced in making HR, worker training, and related decisions. Interviews were followed by the collecting of data from the employer using a creative assessment tool.

The outcomes served as a basis to develop a menu of HR support services that were offered by the WIB's staff. The EA, in cooperation with the WIB's Business Services Department, presented the findings of the assessment to the leadership of each company and made recommendations for HR and training initiatives. Outcomes included:

- A full business/WIB partnership was established with 37 small companies, with HR training and advice provided to each.
- Several companies hired their first HR directors to better respond to the challenges each faced.
- The "HR healthier" companies hired more than 180 new employees.

Of specific value to the EA was the design and testing of the HR assessment tool, which was validated and proven useful to employers. In addition, EA staff developed the skills needed to use the tool and provide follow-up services that generated revenue for the EA.

## Getting Started

Clearly, choosing to become an employer workforce development intermediary is not a decision to be taken lightly. It will be a significant addition to the mission of your organization, but one that will enable you to make a major contribution to the competitiveness of your members and the security and future of their workers, while enabling both to continue their important contributions to your local economy.

You will not want to proceed until your organization is firmly behind such a decision. The first step is to clarify the purpose. Decide why you want to take on the role of a workforce intermediary. To develop new services for your repertoire? To attract new members? To help your members—and your community—to survive and prosper? To save jobs and help locked-in workers advance? Some or all of these? Persuasively articulate your reasons to your staff, board, members, other agencies you now or soon will work with, and perhaps the general public.

It is particularly important that your board and senior leaders understand your purpose, clearly authorize your workforce development activities, and approve your budgets for this effort, including, if possible, the use of dues or other association income for at least some of the costs.

With the purpose clear and your board and senior leadership firmly behind this decision, you can forge ahead with certain preparatory steps:

### Get to Know Local Employer Needs

Your association's relationships with your members probably provide a pretty good idea of their workforce development challenges. While useful, though, this is often anecdotal; it may be wise to deepen and broaden that knowledge. Surveys, interviews, or focus groups can help you better assess needs.

Further, be aware that you are not in regular contact with a stratum of members, those who seldom come to association meetings or respond to written communications. One of the best ways to engage such isolated employers is a *personal outreach visit*—by you or your staff, acting as a kind of “circuit rider” who calls to arrange an appointment and then visits employers in their places of business.

Consider applying all of these approaches to reach out to employers who are not members. They may have different challenges and ideas to contribute.

Your advantage as an employer organization, in comparison, say, with commercial consultants, is that employers trust you to have their best interests at heart, speak their language, and understand

their circumstances and needs. Build on that trust. Working with such employers may make them more active members—or, if they are not dues-paying members, experience indicates that working with them may stimulate them to join up.

### Assess Your Capabilities

What are your present capacities to provide human resources advice and skills and other training, or to reach into the community to find and link external resources to employers? Where are the holes? What can you add or find? Which of your existing services can be provided in “mini” versions for free or at reduced costs as you expand them?

### Inventory Other Local and State Workforce Resources

What public Workforce Investment Boards and One-Stop Career Centers serve your area, and what is the range of their services? Are they striving to become more employer-responsive and thus open to partnering with you? What community colleges serve your area, and what programs do they offer that may help your members? What other sources of basic employability and skills training are available? Of adult basic education? Of English as a Second Language? Of Employee Assistance Programs and other social services?

These other relevant workforce organizations, agencies, and institutions may include city or county public agencies, community-based organizations, and faith-based organizations. In some instances, such services are offered from state-level agencies (for instance, some states offer grants to local employers or communities for incumbent worker training). Some relevant providers may be public, others private; some nonprofit, others for profit. Establishing personal and professional relationships with as many such resources as possible will help you best serve employers.

Your inventory should include local, regional, and state economic development agencies. Workforce development and economic development systems are too often separate, with distinct funding streams flowing to different organizations whose work rarely overlaps. The efforts of both systems would be more effective if they collaborated, and you might be positioned to bridge these silos.

### Staff the Intermediary Effort

The WINs experience suggests that at least one half-time or, preferably, full-time senior, experienced professional is needed for effective intermediary work. You may reassign a present staff person to this new or expanded effort, because he or she knows



your association and its services, or you may hire a new person who would be supervised by an experienced in-house person.

It is a good idea to start new or expanded intermediary services at the level of a half- to a full-time person for a year or two to “learn the ropes,” then expand both staffing and operations as your business judgment suggests.

## Line Up Funding

Intermediary work has costs: for personnel to staff the intermediary functions and for the services provided to employers.

Assess where financial support can come from and start lining it up. You will have to cobble together resources from a variety of sources. Consider and approach as many as possible of the potential funding sources listed below as you begin to budget intermediary functions:

- Your regular budget, generally comprised mainly of dues from your members and fees you charge for the existing array of services you provide.
- Your local Workforce Investment Boards and their One-Stop Career Centers, funded by the federal Workforce Investment Act. Make the case that the benefits you can provide to companies, workers, and communities have substantial public benefits meriting support by federal WIA funds for both your personnel and other costs and for incumbent and other worker training. Several WINs intermediaries now have contracts or other arrangements with WIBs or One-Stop Centers to provide some of the employer services described here, and some have raised millions of dollars in training grants from public and private sources for various workforce projects.
- Your local, regional, or state economic development agencies. Approach them for financial support using similar arguments.
- Other local and state agencies, including community colleges, which may have training subsidies or low-cost training courses that you can link to your members and other employers. Include social service agencies and the operators of Employee Assistance Programs—and adult basic education providers and providers of English as a Second Language.
- Local and state foundations. Make the case that the role you propose to play can help disadvantaged low-income workers, as well as keep employers and jobs in the community.

Some of these funding sources will know little about the employer community and associations like yours, so this is an opportunity to educate them. Most, however, are anxious to serve employers or to have employers involved in their work.

Some will wonder why employers can't pay for more workforce development services themselves, and you will have to educate them about employer cost pressures and the importance of organizing and aggregating the needs of small businesses. You should also argue that the services you propose provide benefits not just to employers (for which employers should pay what they can) but also to low-wage workers, their families, and their communities—and that these broader benefits justify a degree of support by public or philanthropic sources.

Be aware that obtaining funding often depends on close personal and professional relations with funders; those take time and effort to build. Some funders will want to see results for a year or so before deciding to fund you, so subsidies from other sources may be important.

Finally, as a general matter, ask the employers you seek to work with to contribute something to these projects, even early on. People tend to value what they pay for more than something free. You may be able to provide or arrange free or low-cost training, but the employer should make space or equipment available or let the workers train in whole or in part “on the clock.” Or the employers should pay something for HR audits and other HR advisory services your staff may provide at low cost. The employers will also need to expend time and effort to upgrade some of their HR functions.

Establish such expectations for some cost sharing early on. Later, after the training and other services have proved themselves in practice, most employers become willing to pay more.

It is important to recognize at the outset that many employers will be unable, or unwilling, to pay for the workforce services you are brokering or providing to them. The firms that most need the kind of assistance described here frequently do not understand their own needs or the value of the services you can provide. Or they simply do not have funds to pay for many or all of the costs of providing these services. Thus, you will need some degree of continuing external subsidy to support “loss leader” services that these employers may eventually pay for, in whole or in part. Such subsidy from various sources is justified by preserving the contributions such firms and employed workers make to local economies.

## Operating as a Workforce Intermediary

With preparatory steps completed, decide what kind of projects and programs to start with. You have many programmatic options, and the examples in this guide are not exhaustive, but they are realistic and can inspire and inform your own efforts.

It is wise to start by responding to strongly felt needs with activities that have early and visible outcomes. This builds support among member firms, funders, and your own board.

Employers will generally cite two pressing needs: they want job applicants who are pre-screened and employment-ready; and they need incumbent worker training. As noted above, many smaller employers have rudimentary HR systems that need much improvement, but employers may not sense this or be willing to devote resources of time and money to such improvements—at least at the outset. In any event, they rank such issues as secondary in comparison to skill needs. So, start with employers' strongly felt skill needs and work toward more subtle HR system improvements after you prove yourself by meeting such expressed needs.

As you proceed, carefully plan some activities, marshaling support for them among employers and potential partners; other activities may emerge suddenly as targets of opportunity. You will have successes and maybe some failures as you advance into riskier projects; that is to be expected. And, as with managing any program, maintain momentum, learn from what you are doing, spread the lessons from your experience, and measure and monitor progress.

### Peer Learning and Support

Bring people together from your various workforce programs periodically to share what they are doing and learn from and support one another. But also find and seek peer support for yourself, from other employer organizations playing the workforce intermediary role. If you are affiliated with a national organization like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce or the National Association of Manufacturers, it can help convene such gatherings.

### Monitor and Assess Progress and Results from Each Program Element

Set benchmarks for progress in each program element that your intermediary efforts stimulate and support. Is there more training for job seekers or incumbent workers? Is it relevant, effective, having impact? Are employer consortia working well, expanding? Are small employers doing better at assessing their skill needs? Are they upgrading their HR systems? Are providers

of all kinds (including the public system) increasingly responsive to employer and worker needs? Are new or revised curricula appearing that reflect employer job standards and skill requirements? Are employers increasingly appointed as members of governing boards and other working committees and groups? Are they prepared for these roles and having an impact? Is there research that needs to be done? Program ideas that need to be tried out in practice?

### Monitor and Assess the Progress of Your Workforce Intermediary Program

Periodically survey or interview your customers and partners as to how you are doing. Where are there gaps? Is your funding for all of this stable? Growing? Do your own intermediary staff need training and further development? Are your outside partners contributing to the effort effectively? Are they pleased with your role? What should you do more of, less of, begin, or end? What improvements are needed? What challenges do your members, other employers, and your partners face in the future?

### Document the Lessons; Celebrate and Promote Your Successes

Don't forget to document your experiences and lessons and to celebrate and trumpet your successes. You can commission evaluations and case studies of what works—or doesn't work—to extract the lessons from both experiences. Consider recognition or other awards for employers or partner agencies making significant improvements or contributing in major ways to your successes. And, publicize your success stories—including your role in them—to your members and the community at large!

## WINs Resources

The following WINs resources are available on the Web sites of the WINs partners, along with many more resources on employer-responsive strategies for community advancement models, workforce intermediaries, building workforce pipelines, employer engagement, training strategies for non-traditional workers, and more.

- Center for Workforce Success at the National Association of Manufacturers: [www.nam.org/workforce](http://www.nam.org/workforce)
- Jobs for the Future: [www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org)
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Institute for a Competitive Workforce:  
[www.uschamber.com/icw](http://www.uschamber.com/icw)

*Career Ladders: A Guidebook for Workforce Intermediaries* (Jobs for the Future 2003): Information and extensive resources on the role of workforce intermediaries in planning, developing, operating, and expanding career ladders. It summarizes lessons learned from innovative work across the country.

*Employer-focused One-Stop Centers: Businesses Getting the Most for Their Investment* (U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Institute for a Competitive Workforce 2004): Hundreds of One-Stop Centers across the country are meeting and exceeding employers' workforce development needs. ICW has the names of the businesses and their stories to prove it. Search the Online Database at: [www.uschamber.com/icw/](http://www.uschamber.com/icw/).

*Filling America's Jobs Series* (Center for Workforce Success at the National Association of Manufacturers): A Series of How-To Guides. "Working with CEOs to Communicate the Importance of a Skilled Workforce in Sector Workforce Development"; "How Businesses Can Implement Sector Workforce Development Strategies for Jobs and Economic Growth"; "How Employer Associations Can Help Small Firms Be More Competitive by Improving the Productivity of Entry-level Workers"; "How to Increase Supervisory Impact on Retention"; "A Guide for Public Workforce Professionals"; "A Guide for Employers to Benefit from the Public Workforce System."

*Finders, Keepers: Business Taking Action to Secure Skilled Workers* (U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Institute for a Competitive Workforce 2006): A series of best practices that share the successes of five chambers of commerce (four local and one state) that were supported by the WINs initiative to develop innovative pilot programs in workforce development.

*Meeting the Workforce Needs of the Milwaukee Construction Industry: Case Study of the Center of Excellence* (Jobs for the Future 2006): Profile of the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership's Center of Excellence, which addresses the boom in construction and a skills shortage in advanced manufacturing and, at the same time, connects low-wage workers to advancement opportunities in these industries.

*The Role of the Workforce Intermediary CD-ROM* (Center for Workforce Success at the National Association of Manufacturers): This CD-ROM describes the importance of regional collaboration—driven by the business community—to train the worker pipeline.

*Surviving in a Dynamic Economy—How Chambers Can Help Navigate the Workforce Development System* (U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Institute for a Competitive Workforce 2004): How chambers are helping employers meet labor force needs in three geographically diverse communities that are facing challenges—a shrinking manufacturing base, the expansion of services in the health care industry, and demographic shifts in the workforce.

*The 2005 Skills Gap Report: A Survey of the American Manufacturing Workforce* (Center for Workforce Success at the National Association of Manufacturers 2006): The results of this survey provide a picture of the broadening gap in the availability of skilled workers and the employee performance requirements of 21<sup>st</sup> century manufacturing and what should be done to ensure a future U.S. manufacturing workforce.

*Workforce Intermediaries and Their Roles in Promoting Advancement* (Jobs for the Future 2004): The origins and 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.

### Locating a One-Stop Career Center: The America's Service Locator

[www.servicelocator.org](http://www.servicelocator.org)

For a variety of workforce needs, the most efficient first step for an employer is to contact a One-Stop Career Center. The One-Stop Centers provide assistance with recruitment and training. Prepare for a visit to the local One-Stop Center by determining as precisely as possible your employee needs. The America's Service Locator Web site lists One-Stop Centers by state, zip code, services, and more. One-Stop Centers can also be located by calling: 1.877.US2.JOBS or 1.877.889.5627 (TTY).

Also, learn more about the public workforce system by visiting [www.doleta.gov/business](http://www.doleta.gov/business) and [www.workforce3one.org](http://www.workforce3one.org).

# The Role of Employer Organizations as Workforce Development Intermediaries

## **1. Organize, advise, advocate for, and provide/broker services to employers**

- Help employers, especially small and medium-sized firms with limited human resources (HR) and training staff, to understand their skill requirements and upgrade their HR practices
- Provide or broker training and services to meet these needs
- Aggregate these needs, in part by organizing such employers into consortia with similar HR needs
- Advocate for employer workforce needs with the community, to providers, to public policymakers, and others.

## **2. Provide/broker workforce services for workers and job seekers**

- Directly provide education, training, or other workforce services—or broker them from other providers—for supervisors, for incumbent workers, or for individuals seeking employment

*Note: some employer organizations have their own training competencies.*

## **3. Work with providers to improve workforce services**

- Assist providers to better meet employer/worker needs and make their offerings more relevant
- Convey employer job skill standards and worker skill needs to education/training providers
- Work with providers to design/redesign their curricula, certify their programs, and credential their graduates
- Work similarly with providers of supportive services like child care, transportation, case management, social services, etc.

- Providers can include the public workforce system, educators, training organizations, community-based organizations, supportive services, etc.

## **4. Help govern/advise workforce institutions and systems**

- Serve on or nominate employer members to Workforce Investment Boards or the governing boards of other workforce development institutions, such as community colleges or training organizations, as well as advisory committees, curriculum committees, task forces, interagency working groups, etc.

## **5. Engage in research and development**

- \* Research employer and worker or industry needs
- Research effective employer human resources practices
- Engage in pilot or demonstration projects on new and effective workforce management and development practices

*In doing the above, the employer intermediary will generally also form or join in various partnerships with education and training providers, community-based organizations, and other relevant workforce development stakeholders.*

## Workforce Innovation Networks—WINs

WINs is a partnership of:

- The Center for Workforce Success, the nonprofit education and training arm of the National Association of Manufacturers' Manufacturing Institute;
- The Institute for a Competitive Workforce, a nonprofit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce; and
- Jobs for the Future, a Boston-based national nonprofit working on education and workforce development.

From 2003 to 2005, with the support of the Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, WINs honed the capacity of employer-based organizations to function as workforce development intermediaries that can play a new and important role on the employer side of the nation's workforce equation.

### **The Role of Employer-based Workforce Intermediaries**

Employer associations and other similar employer-based organizations are uniquely suited to being workforce development intermediaries: they understand and aggregate employer workforce needs, speak employer language, and enjoy employer trust. Since 1997, the WINs partnership has identified and refined the core elements of the role of effective, employer-based workforce intermediaries. Such organizations:

Convene, organize, and support employers on workforce development matters, including aggregating and conveying employer needs to the federal job training system and other providers of workforce services;

Directly provide education and training to workers and job seekers or broker such services to them by linking them to the public workforce system's One-Stop Career Centers and other education and training providers;

Work with education and training providers to upgrade their offerings and make them more relevant to evolving employer needs (e.g., incorporate skill requirements, including formal skill standards; help design curricula; and work to certify programs and credential graduates);

Help govern the various elements of local workforce development systems (including but not limited to federally funded Workforce Investment Boards and One-Stop Career Centers, community colleges, and voc-tech centers at the secondary and postsecondary levels), and make them more employer-oriented and effective in serving both employers and workers; and

Conduct research and development (e.g., research employer needs locally and experiment with new workforce development techniques and partnerships).