Workforce Strategies Initiative

update

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Building Effective Employer Relations

This publication reports on the key lessons learned with regard to choosing employer partners, structuring relationships with employers, and providing services that are valued by businesses.

Today, there are two key groups of customers that employment and training programs must serve: participants and businesses. Nonprofit groups and community colleges have developed expertise in creating and delivering training opportunities that are valued by participants, but for many, engaging and serving employers has been a much more elusive pursuit.

For one group, the *sectoral workforce development* providers, the task of engaging employers is linked explicitly to organizational structure and mission. In addition to providing targeted opportunities for training and education, sectoral employment development programs are unique in that they seek to create change within a particular industry sector so as to sustain and increase the demand for skilled employees. They are, by definition, programs that engage deeply with employers.

Because so many workforce development programs, both newly created and veterans, struggle with meeting employers' needs, we set out to learn from the experiences of 10 sectoral programs and some of their leading employer partners. This publication reports on the key lessons learned by these programs with regard to choosing employer partners, structuring relationships with employers, and providing services that are valued by businesses. Although these are the experiences of sectoral projects, we hope that their experiences will provide insights useful to the larger field of workforce development.

This report is based on interviews conducted during November and December of 2003 with a working group of 10 mature sectoral programs and one employer representative per program.[1] This group operates in the health care and manufacturing sectors. (See Chart I.)

Sectoral employment development programs target a particular industry – and a set of occupations within it – in order to place disadvantaged people in high quality jobs. These programs become knowledgeable participants in the targeted industry in which they work. They strive to influence industry practice on behalf of low-skilled or otherwise disadvantaged workers by pioneering labor-based innovations that benefit industry and workers. Sectoral employment projects utilize a range of strategies to achieve these ends, including: operating education and training programs; running for-profit businesses; forging institutional links with educational institutions, employers, unions and industry associations; advocating for policy changes; and providing consulting or other services to firms within the industry.

[1] The employer that had agreed to participate in this project in collaboration with the Artisan Baking Center was unavailable during the time that interviews were conducted.

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

CHART I. WORK GROUP PARTICIPANTS

HEALTH CARE

Program	Est.	Profile
Boston Health Care and Research Training Institute (The Training Institute)	1999	A collaboration between the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation (JPNDC) and the Fenway Community Development Corporation located in two of Boston's most diverse neighborhoods. The Institute has undertaken a series of workforce development programs to train both new and incumbent workers in three health care and research career pathways: patient care, technician/technologist, and administrative/managerial positions at 11 partnering employers.
Children's Hospital Boston relationship initiated: 1999		The primary pediatric teaching hospital for Harvard Medical School offering a complete range of health care services for patients from birth through age 21. CHB's mission is to provide the highest quality health care and enhance the health and well-being of the children and families in its local community. More than 300 hospital workers have been trained by the Training Institute.
Boston Private Industry Council (BPIC)	1979	A nonprofit workforce intermediary with a mission to strengthen Boston's communities and workforce by connecting youth and adults with education and employment opportunities that prepare them to meet the skill demands of employers in a changing economy. BPIC offers financial support to individuals pursuing associate's degrees in radiologic technology and also has worked in collaboration with Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation to design a pre-radiologic technologist modular course.
Partners HealthCare System relationship initiated: 1992		An integrated health care network of hospitals and medical professions in Boston. Partners HealthCare has worked with the BPIC on strategies to develop training programs for health care workers. These include: school to career programs which provide career exploration and worksite learning, and skills training programs for incumbent and dislocated workers.
JVS	1973	Founded in San Francisco to aid recent college graduates who were having trouble finding employment, JVS has expanded to address the barriers faced by low-income individuals who are attempting to become self-sufficient. In collaboration with the University of California at San Francisco Medical Center, JVS designed a pre-employment program to train clinic assistants and unit coordinators (administrative positions) for work at the hospital. JVS provides employment and training services to more than 3,500 individuals each year.
UCSF Medical Center relationship initiated: 1997		An academic medical center offering pioneering treatments not widely available elsewhere. UCSF Medical Center provides specialty health care services in such areas as cancer, heart disease, infertility, neurological disorders, organ transplantation and orthopedics, as well as special services for women and children. More than 900 doctors and 600 employees work at the medical center.
Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute (PHI)	1993	A national nonprofit health care employment development and policy organization. PHI pursues the dual mission of creating decent jobs for low-income individuals within the long-term care system while providing high-quality long-term care services. PHI works to shape the health care industry, facilitating the creation of worker-owned health care enterprises and employer-based training and career-upgrading programs, and promoting fundamental changes to public health care policy.
Home Care Associates (HCA) relationship initiated: 1993		A worker-owned home health care agency created in 1993 to provide high-quality home care services and high-quality jobs in the Philadelphia Metropolitan area. With ongoing support and assistance from PHI, which trains more than 80 new employees and 70 incumbent employees for HCA each year, HCA operates an employer-based training program which serves low-income individuals.
Tucson Medical Center U	1998	Established by Tucson Medical Center HealthCare to meet critical shortages in nursing and radiology technologists. TMC U prepares and assists TMCHC's employees to complete various health care-related educational programs offered by Pima Community College.

Tucson Medical Center HealthCare relationship initiated: 1998		A nonprofit community hospital serving southern Arizona and northern Mexico. It provides a full range of pediatric and adult acute care services and has a workforce of approximately 3,000. As of Spring 2003, 370 TMCHC employees were involved with the TMC U training program.
MANUFACTURING		
Program	Est.	Profile
Artisan Baking Center (ABC)	2001	A sector initiative of the Consortium for Worker Education (CWE) that provides skills training and business services to the baking industry in New York City. It trains both incumbent workers and prospective workers in baking and culinary skills, as well as GED prep classes and ESL courses. As an industry intermediary, ABC is able to work with many different agencies, programs and educators, accessing services for many small- to medium-sized employers at once.
Center for Workplace Learning	1993	An arm of the University of Southern Maine's College of Education and Human Development located in Gorham, Maine. The Center provides customized education and skills training in the workplace by concentrating on five areas: education for refugee and immigrant populations; education for industries and sectors, specifically the precision manufacturing sector and health care industry; customized education for organizations and businesses; college-credit classes delivered at the workplace; and research and best practices in workplace education.
Barber Foods, Inc. relationship initiated: 1993		A family-owned and operated manufacturer of processed poultry products employing 750 individuals. Over 44 percent of Barber Foods' employees come from more than 52 countries and speak 56 different languages. For 10 years, Barber Foods has worked with the Center for Workplace Learning to provide incumbent worker education programs including basic education and college and pre-college classes.
Jane Addams Resource Corporation (JARC)	1985	A nonprofit, community-based organization that serves the Chicago area with a strategic mix of industrial retention, training and educational initiatives focused on the metalworking industries. Through a variety of programs, JARC provides workforce development services to companies in a three-county area around the city of Chicago.
S&C Electric Company relationship initiated: 1995		A mid-sized manufacturing and services company founded in 1911 that specializes in electric power switching and protection. S&C's fuses, switches and metal-enclosed gear are used around the world. S&C customers include both electric utilities and large power consumers. Since 1997, JARC has trained more than 300 incumbent workers for S&C.
New Century Careers (NCC)	1998	A nonprofit organization that contributes to the growth of the manufacturing sector in Southwestern Pennsylvania by developing a capable workforce that meets the needs of a network of more than 160 partner manufacturing companies. Specifically, NCC provides entry-level and advanced training in machining and welding, developing skills in individuals that lead to good quality family wages and careers.
Superbolt, Inc relationship initiated: 1998		A manufacturer of specialty bolts and related bolting products. Its main plant in the U.S. has 65 employees, shipping 60,000 - 80,000 individual products per year. Superbolt has been involved with NCC since 1998 and has hired 15 NCC graduates. Also, 24 incumbent workers have been trained by NCC.
Teamworks, Inc.	1996	A nonprofit organization based in rural Minnesota, created to help low-skilled low-income individuals achieve economic self-sufficiency. Teamworks has grown from a local training center to a regional/statewide organization that trains rural workers in metals manufacturing.
TEAM Industries-Cambridge relationship initiated: 1997		A drive-train product designer involved in design engineering, research and development, testing, manufacturing and assembly. Since 1997, TEAM Industries has hired 400 new employees from Teamworks, Inc. and 250 TEAM Industries' incumbent workers have received training through Teamworks.

Choosing an Employer Partner

A program participant's success in the workforce is as much a factor of the characteristics of the workplace where (s)he becomes employed as it is a reflection of the quality of the employment training program. Recognizing this to be true, many successful programs have created alliances with employers that have a work environment that matches the goals of the program, such that the benefits of their training program can be realized both by the trainees and employers. Our sectoral work group provides examples of these types of program/employer partnerships. These relationships were each born out of unique and dynamic circumstances – some were created by intent, while others blossomed through fortuitously organic processes. Regardless of their origin, the experiences of this working group point to the following as steps toward choosing strong employer partners, and can provide pointers for identifying businesses with which programs are more likely to develop strong win-win relationships.

- Match their needs with your strengths.
- Seek an employer with a vision.
- Identify champions.
- Appraise the organizational culture.
- Look for employment practices that match your goals.
- Select companies with competitive advantages.
- Consider the appropriate number of employer partners.
- Find an employer who will dedicate resources.

Although programs may find it difficult to identify employers that embody all of these traits, an employer that demonstrates a willingness to learn and to change over time may eventually develop into a more ideal partner. In selecting employer partners, the programs in this group value a company's willingness to change, whatever its current culture and set of practices may be, as critical to future success. They may choose to start slowly with limited employer engagement, matching their own levels of investment to an employer's willingness and ability to participate as an active partner. **JVS** has developed an "Employer Engagement Model" around the concept of gradually deepening the level and scope of the program-employer partnership over time. Gradual development of these relationships may help to diminish the dangers of asking an employer to take a perceived risk.

A good fit: Their needs match your strengths

"We had a shortage of employees and they had people who needed jobs – a perfect match." – Arlene Beauchemin, Children's Hospital Boston

In order to develop an effective partnership, the employer must have a need that could be met by the program. To engage employers, programs have to present their services in terms of addressing those business needs.

To do this, programs must first understand what employers value, and be ready to articulate their own strength in terms of what will matter to employers. For example, a program may be accustomed to publicizing its strong community relations to funders, local government and other constituencies. However, if an employer does not rate good community relations as a critical factor, touting a program's successes in that area to potential business partners may prove useless. It is more effective to market the program in terms that respond to key employer needs and values.

In this study, most of the employers were facing a shortage of skilled workers at the time the relationships were forged. They needed assistance in recruiting and training workers, as well as help acquiring funding to support such activities. The programs they chose to work with offer real solutions to these business problems.

As time has passed and economic conditions have changed, the needs of many of these employers have shifted. Several of those that struggled to meet hiring needs in the past are no longer hiring at the same pace, but have more urgent issues regarding the skills of their incumbent workforce. These agile programs have been able to add

Measuring to find a good fit

- Be clear about your program's vision, goals and unique strengths.
- Understand employers' values and needs. What do they care about?
- Look for synergies. Where do the program's goals overlap with the employer's needs?
- Know your competition. What other for-profit and nonprofit groups offer similar services? What has been this employer's history with them? How does your program compare in terms of what matters to the employer?
- Prepare to articulate your potential value in clear and concise language that makes sense to your target audience. Some, but not all, of your program's strengths may matter to the employer.
- Don't be overly attached to old approaches. Be willing to modify program strategies to the needs of employers.
- Revisit. Constantly reevaluate the employer's needs and the program's strengths.
- Respond. Prepare to respond to changes with agility and speed.

other services to meet the evolving needs of their partners.

To find a good fit, programs must also consider their own strengths and mission. The occupation, industry and location of the selected employer must match with the program's targeted participants, as well as its capacity to deliver quality training services.

"In order to be financially viable, we need to staff our beds. We need a workforce that will be with us for a long time. It is absolutely critical to our economic viability that we find ways to bring young people into health care careers." – Emily Jenkins, TMC HealthCare

Employers with a vision

Several of the employers in the working group had a vision for a growth strategy based on workforce development before they came in contact with the sector program. For these employers, a high-quality workforce is part of their business strategy. Their vision of their companies' future became a driving force for the development of the relationship with the program.

For example, before coming in contact with the **Jane Addams Resource Center (JARC)**, the **S&C Electric Co.** had its own internal training function and was working with the local community college to upgrade the skills of its incumbent workers. The company, under the management of a full-time staff person dedicated to workforce development, had set benchmarks and performance goals for training. Unsatisfied with the outcomes of the early training projects, S&C sought an external provider that could better serve its very particular needs. Recognizing the opportunity that this large and well respected company posed for local workers, JARC reached out to S&C, offering to provide exactly what the company was looking for. As a result, one of JARC's most important employer partners became connected to the program.

Similarly, a collaboration of radiology departments within the Partners HealthCare System had created a Task Force on Recruitment and Retention to deal with worker shortages and had approached management about setting up a scholarship program. When the **Boston PIC** came in to help secure a grant, the group from Partners already had a program plan written up. The BPIC helped to develop strategies for implementing this plan and provided access to training and financial resources. Although Partners was convinced that they wanted to address the recruitment and retention issues, they needed the BPIC to make it happen.

While most workforce development programs will not find employers with a fully funded training program just waiting for a partner to help them implement it, the more important point is to seek an employer partner that values a quality workforce as part of its business strategy, and is ready to make some level of commitment to that goal. By seeking such employers, workforce development providers can identify opportunities for long-term commitment to the implementation of training and education projects.

The importance of champions

Visionary employers can become models for other local businesses that are convinced of the value of workforce development by the testimony of a fellow employer. Such employers are champions within their industry sector. Oftentimes, they are willing to speak about their successes with workforce development programs in public forums or to the media, and can provide a credible assertion that partnering with the program is good business. Such leaders tend to be active on workforce boards, in trade associations or other industry groups. Oftentimes, they are employed by companies and institutions that want to be known as leaders for worker education or strive to be "employers of choice."

The **Tucson Medical Center** identifies itself as an employer that is very active in local education and workforce development policy. Through these activities, it seeks to act as a local champion for workforce development initiatives. Senior executives of TMC sit on a wide range of state and local workforce development committees. TMC's Senior Vice President for Public Policy is the former chair of the Advisory Committee to the Arizona Department of Economic Security. It was through this connection that the Department of Economic Security asked TMC to start a Welfare to Work program that could serve as an industry model and as motivation for other employers. Now, **TMC U** is pursuing the possibility of bringing its training model to other hospitals in Arizona.

Likewise, **New Century Careers (NCC)** finds that having a nationally known business leader as Chairman of the Board gives credibility to its program. The professional career of NCC's chairman has included being President of Westinghouse Electric Corporation's highly regarded Energy and Advanced Technology Group, Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Commerce, and former Dean of Duquesne University's A. J. Palumbo School of Business. His testimony has been invaluable in providing credence to NCC's success in an industry that has become highly competitive. NCC staff believes that this opens the door for the development of relationships with a wide range of employers.

Similarly, programs frequently rely on a strong and consistent internal *champion* within their business partners. In many cases, the leadership and support of this individual has proven critical to the success of the partnership. According to Matt Coumbe from **Teamworks,** efforts to develop a sense of ownership of the project "will not succeed if you don't have an idea champion within that partner that looks at the process and the development in roughly the same manner as the program." Sometimes the champion is a CEO or member of senior management who, through a position of authority, is able to set values and goals for the organization. In other cases, the champion may be an individual within the organization whose job it is to recruit and develop staff. This person is an advocate who effectively communicates up lines of authority to senior management and is able to maintain buy-in at multiple levels. Whatever their position, champions are able to advocate for the program vertically within the organization as well as horizontally from one department to another.

Appraise the organizational culture

"At TMC HealthCare, we have a broad sense of community service. It's a very cooperative, collaborative environment. Otherwise, this would not have worked." – Emily Jenkins, Tucson Medical Center HealthCare

It is critical that, when initiating a partnership with an employer, the program appraise and seek to understand the organizational culture and values of that workplace. Sometimes this culture is embedded in the very mission of the employer, although understanding it is far more complex than simply reading the mission statement. In seeking partners, programs in this study group look for employers that are open to change and value a skilled workforce. Minnesota-based **Teamworks** goes so far as to conduct an extensive organizational effectiveness and organizational culture survey just to understand a company before they commit to a partnership. Said Teamworks' Matt Coumbe: *"We look for a workforce that cares about quality, that takes pride in their work, that plans on working there for quite a few years, that has confidence in the company's ability to change. We look for management that care for what they do, are confident in their own abilities, and know that they have to be flexible and agile in order to change."* Depending on their values, objectives and context, each program may look for different characteristics and manifestations of organizational culture.

Superbolt, Inc., one of more than 160 employer partners to the Pittsburgh-based sectoral project, **New Century Careers,** describes itself as a "common sense" company that is owned and run by engineers. They are willing to make investments that are expected to pay off for the company in the future, whether that means buying an expensive machine or investing in employee skills development. *"It's our philosophy that we will gladly help an employee better educate himself…we have tuition reimbursement, and we'll change his hours to help him go to school. We want to help our employees better themselves because we feel that, in turn, it betters us as a company as a whole."* – Bill Myers, Plant Manager, Superbolt

Many of the health care employers in this working group spoke of their employer's explicit mission to serve surrounding communities. Other examples of organizational cultures that favor workforce development lie with institutions, such as teaching hospitals, where there is a particular emphasis on learning. **UCSF Medical Center,** for example, has an academic mission. *"We're trying to be the best place to work, the best provider of patient care, and the best place to do research and education. That's really our mission,"* said Jennifer Hermann of UCSF Medical Center. When the employer's culture and mission closely mirror the goals of the program, there is a logical reason for engaging in a partnership and long-term buy-in and successful outcomes are more likely to occur.

Other sectoral programs, in attempting to create strategic change within an industry, choose to work with employers where the work culture conditions may not be as ideal for setting up workforce development programs. Their strategy is to work with businesses to improve the work environment and build the foundations for cultural change within the company. This may involve introducing concepts and practices of quality assurance, continuous improvement and teamwork; training management and supervisory staff; or addressing issues of diversity and economic justice.

Because it is very difficult to impact cultural change within large employers, programs with this goal may consider unit-level impacts.

"…when initiating a partnership with an employer, the program [must] appraise and seek to understand the organizational culture and values of that workplace."

Cultural change may occur when employers see outcomes. For example, within particular units, **UCSF Medical Center's** attitude toward hiring welfare recipients changed as a result of the program. Although initially skeptical, these units learned through the program's successes that "welfare-to-work participants are often very dedicated to their work and can become successful," said Jennifer Hermann.

Whether or not programs see cultural change as a part of their mission, it is important that they pay close attention to the organizational culture of their employer partners and accordingly develop expectations, goals and strategies that are pertinent to that workplace.

Look for employment practices that match program goals

Today, many successful employers compete on a basis of quality and innovation, and provide opportunities and rewards to their workforce. Programs that seek out and engage with such employers provide their participants with greater opportunities for advancement and long-term self-sufficiency. When seeking new employer partners, it is essential to consider whether their employment practices fit with the program's ultimate goals. In some industries and regions, programs struggle to identify employers that operate with the types of labor practices that result in quality jobs. Thus, it may be an objective of a program/employer partnership to use a range of services to create competitive business conditions that enhance, sustain and improve employment practices.

"When seeking new employer partners, it is essential to consider whether their employment practices fit with the program's ultimate goals."

The Artisan Baking Center (**ABC**) has recently convened a task force to develop guiding principles for the selection of employer partners with satisfactory labor standards. This task force is exploring the use of contracts between the program and its employer partners that would require adherence to such standards. For ABC, desirable employer partners are those that pay fair living wages; provide workers with access to benefits; have clear rules and criteria for advancement; and maintain a safe working environment. Through the use of such contracts, ABC hopes to identify employers where the chances for success are high, while simultaneously helping to sustain and improve good labor practices within the sector.

In industries where no compatible employers can be found, some programs have gone so far as to create their own social purpose for-profit businesses. In the home health care industry, the **Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute** (**PHI**) works to create and support "yardstick corporations" that are competitive, offer excellent health care, and provide quality employment for home health aides, one of the lower paid positions within the health care industry. Divergent from most employers of home health aides throughout the country, PHI's Pennsylvania partner, **Home Care Associates** (**HCA**), provides aides with full benefits, stable work hours, profit-sharing and a vote at the company's shareholders' meeting. Through its partnerships with employers such as HCA, PHI is working to change the structure of the home health care industry so that long-term care consumers can benefit from the improved services that come through high-road competitive strategies.

Employer has competitive advantage

Some sectoral programs focus on assisting disadvantaged people to access job opportunities within high growth industries, while others aim to preserve good jobs within beleaguered industries threatened by global market pressures. **New Century Careers,** for instance, integrates incumbent worker training into a package of services aimed at positively impacting an industry in turmoil. To a large extent, each program's mission will determine the type of business with which it will choose to partner.

Regardless of the sector, however, most programs seek to partner with employers that possess or have the potential to develop a competitive advantage in the marketplace, and design their activities to support the development of that competitive edge. Even within shrinking industries, successful business models can lead to a competitive position for innovative employers. Inversely, businesses that do not have any competitive advantage are destined to eventual failure, and programs that make large investments in attempting to rescue them may find their precious resources poorly spent. Commonly, however, it is difficult for programs to assess the competitive position of a potential partner, because programs often lack access to detailed or accurate information about the company and/or its specific market niche. Some indicators of strength include an expanding workforce, investments in facilities and/or equipment, healthy and growing sales, unique knowledge and skills, and the implementation of continuous improvement practices.

Frequently, sectoral programs conduct or otherwise obtain ongoing industry analyses to better understand the factors that contribute to competitiveness within a target sector. This enables them to better assess the strengths of particular businesses with which they work. For example, during its early developmental stages, the **Artisan Baking Center** conducted and published a study entitled *Baked In New York* that analyzed competitive opportunities for local bakeries. The study both informed the sector about potential growth areas and provided ABC with the information necessary to develop strategies and select partners. Nevertheless, the estimation of a company's competitiveness will never be fail-safe; companies that appear to be strong today can find themselves faltering tomorrow for reasons that even the most well-paid industry analysts cannot predict.

Consider appropriate number of employer partners

Generally, programs work with either a small number of large businesses or multiple small- and medium-sized employers. The structure of a target industry will usually dictate the size of the employers with which a sectoral program partners. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile for programs to consider the benefits and challenges of each approach as they make decisions regarding the allocation of resources.

Although the programs in this group work with employers of many sizes, most of the employer partners in this study were large, stable or growing businesses. Because of their size and financial strength, they have been able to provide pathways to advancement for program participants; act as industry champions to leverage additional support for the programs; contribute resources; and offer a long-term vision for collaboration. Although there are many benefits to working with large employers, the time and resources required can limit a program's ability to sustain multiple employer relations. Such lack of diversity can be risky; changes in leadership or financial instability within the company can threaten a program's performance and very survival. Furthermore, large employers tend to have many layers of management. Getting and sustaining the buy-in of key decisionmakers at multiple levels within an employer can be time-consuming and costly.

In contrast, a program such as the **Artisan Baking Center,** which works with small- and medium-sized employers in New York City, operates under very different market conditions. Because of the nature of the baking industry, **ABC** must work with a variety of employers over time, quickly shifting focus from one company to another in response to employer needs and job placement opportunities. Top management of smaller firms may be more accessible and the challenges of internal communication less complex. However, the task of developing career ladders can be particularly challenging when advancement may demand that an employee shift to another employer. In the case of ABC, no single business partner plays the "champion" role that large companies play for many other programs. Instead, ABC has found an industry leader within organized labor (the Baker, Confectionery, Tobacco, and Grain Millers Union) that plays an important role as advocate, advisor and relationship builder.

The decision to build strong, stable relationships with a few large employers or balance many relationships with a dynamic cadre of smaller employers is a question of strategic direction for each program. This decision will depend upon industry structure, choices about risk management, and the availability and allocation of financial and managerial resources.

Willingness to dedicate resources: staff and money

Within this study group, a key indicator of effective and sustainable relationships is the level of resources the employer dedicates to the joint endeavor. An employer that is willing to pay does so because it attributes real value to the services provided because they meet a business need.

HOW EMPLOYERS INVEST

JARC	S&C Electric pays release time for incumbent worker training, has donated equipment valued at $100,000 to support the Tech Training Center, and makes direct financial contributions to subsidize training.
The Training Institute	Initial funding is provided through demonstration grants. After a return on investment is documented, employers are asked to sign contracts that commit them to pay a fee reflective of their financial savings through training in exchange for additional services. The full cost of training and related services is offset with additional public and private dollars.
BPIC	Starting in 2004, Partners HealthCare System has agreed to a "Pay as You Hire" plan. (This plan is explained on page 11.)
CWL	Employers pay CWL for the costs of training. These funds are leveraged by the Maine Governor's Training Initiative (GTI), which reimburses private sector firms for 50 percent of their training costs. For the metalworking industry, CWL asks employers to sponsor manufacturing training materials, text books and release time for employees that are trained at the workplace on company time.
ABC	ABC is working with the relevant labor union and local employers to create a joint labor-management fund that would support its programs.

"It comes to an issue of whether we are convinced that training is the right strategic thing to do from a business point of view. And, in fact, we are. Therefore, we budget for it and allocate funds for it every year." – Gene Cottini, S&C Electric Co.

Many of the employers in this group make a significant financial investment in the project, indicating commitment, buy-in and perceived value. From the point of initial engagement, several of these programs required that employer partners support all or some of the costs of the services. **New Century Careers,** for example, has been successful in charging fees to employers that hire their new recruits. Paul Anselmo, director of NCC Services, explains that NCC's fees are comparable to what employers would otherwise pay to advertise job openings. If an employer is unwilling to pay, Anselmo takes this as an indication that the employer does not share NCC's core belief in the value of skilled employees. Because NCC has adopted a strong demand-supply theorem as part of its own culture and mission, it is comfortable and successful in charging fees for meeting businesses' critical needs. However, NCC does recognize each company's unique financial situation, and tries to work with those companies that are reluctant to pay by showing them ways to gain grant monies to supplement the cost of their workforce development efforts, or by providing tangible evidence of the value of NCC's program.

In other cases, employers began to make financial commitments only after initial grant monies were expended or upon gaining tangible evidence of the value of the program. In Boston, **The Training Institute** used initial seed money from grants to jump start a longer-term strategy to sustain the training through substantial employer investments. Their plan was to monetize the value of the training through estimates of returns on investments to employers based on retention figures. Since they were able to collect data that demonstrated the value of their grant-funded intervention to the bottom line of the hospitals, they are now able to sell workforce development services directly to the employers through contractual agreements. The cost of such services is based on the past dollar savings that were accrued to each employer, as shown by the improved retention rates.

It is essential for programs to think through and implement strategies that will lead to a degree of employer investment, even if this is not feasible at the outset of the relationship. Programs concur on the importance of establishing expectations that they will need the employer to invest in the partnership at some point down the line. In all cases, these employers agreed that private sector firms do not expect to receive quality services for free. They must, however, be convinced that their participation in the program is an ***investment*** that will lead to bottom-line outcomes, rather than a ***contribution*** for purposes of community service. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that employers ever will pay the full cost of the program.

For hospitals facing chronic shortages of skilled staff, these programs began to solve a fundamental business problem. Once this was recognized, the hospitals were willing to pay for the training services.

During the pilot phase of the partnership between the **Boston PIC** and **Partners HealthCare System,** Partners contributed matching funds in the form of more than 90 scholarships awarded to non-grant eligible recipients; supplied a full-time radiology sourcing specialist to work solely on the project; and provided a small amount of paid release time for incumbent workers who wished to participate. Partners also provided career awareness/educational sessions for career centers, schools and other community-based organizations. Funding was provided through Partners' Corporate Human Resources (Workforce Development) and Community Benefits funds. This "seed money" was designed to match a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor through the BPIC. In order to sustain the program after this initial two-year trial period, the various radiology departments at the seven affiliated Partners acute care medical centers that benefited from the program have agreed to a "Pay as You Hire" plan going forward. Starting in 2004, radiology departments will pay for each graduate by repaying the scholarship/loan plus an "overhead fee" to cover program operations, including the salary and benefits of the radiology sourcing specialist. The repaid scholarship pool will be used to fund future medical imaging scholars. **Partners HealthCare** is willing to make this contribution because they see that the program helps them "to meet their mission of helping, and to maximize revenues and provide timely patient care."

As an alternative to cash contributions, in-kind resources may provide another valuable source of support. During its fourth year of operation, federal funding for the Barber Learning Center was cut in half and it appeared that classes at **Barber Foods** would be suspended. To fill the budget gap, supervisors, managers and associates were asked to volunteer to teach the courses and keep the center open. It was a great success. Employees ranging from office managers to the CEO himself stepped in to teach. Not only did the classes continue as planned, but also the experience excited the entire company and deeply reinforced the commitment to workforce development. According to Peter Bickford of Barber Foods, *"It was a renaissance. Barber Foods learned how rewarding this is. It became not something we do for these people; it became something we do WITH these people."*

Some of the most engaged employer partners have dedicated workforce development staff that is assigned to partnership activities. Examples of this are:

> "It is essential for programs to think through and implement strategies that will lead to a degree of employer investment, even if this is not feasible at the outset of the relationship."

Children's Hospital Boston, S&C Electric, Partners HealthCare, Barber Foods, and **TMCHC/TMC U.** In all of these cases, the decision to dedicate a percentage of personnel time to the new collaboration was made during the program design period when the partnership was first initiated. For some employers, this meant assigning existing workforce development staff, while for others, it involved creating new positions.

When the employer dedicates resources, it tends to adopt a sense of project ownership. Nevertheless, it may take time and proven success before many employers will contribute financially to the program. For organizations that work with less profitable or struggling businesses and sectors, this can be particularly difficult. Yet, many programs are able to think creatively about leveraging what the employer may have in the way of resources.

Structuring the Relationship to Create Shared Ownership

Where an employer views itself as a true partner in the workforce development initiative, rather than a mere recipient of a program's output of trained workers, it is more likely to remain invested over time. The programs in our study group have deployed a variety of tactics for structuring their partnerships with employers to create this sense of shared ownership over time.

Most employer-program relationships go through a series of stages in their development before they arrive at true partnership. Typically, relationships start off as trial arrangements where both parties take a risk in investing resources in one another. Over time, as successes become apparent, they may evolve into "key partnerships," at which stage, ownership of the project is truly shared.

Programs may want to end up with key partnerships, but to get there they need to have a vision for how to move along this process, and benchmarks for assessing the level of the relationship at various points in time. Benchmarks could include the number of vendors that provide similar training or placement services to the employer, the frequency with which an employer contacts the program for services, etc. These indicators and the path to key partnership will reflect the particularities of the target industry, service mix and context. The tactics discussed below can be elements of a strategy for creating shared ownership over time. Moreover, participants in our work group are mindful that the structure of the partnerships must be revisited continually over time to adjust for changes in strategy, personnel, program content, etc.

- Institutionalize the partnership.
- Engage employers in program design and development.
- Create dynamic feedback loops.
- Involve trainees and workers in program management.
- Involve employer in staff selection.
- Embed program staff within the employer.

Program	Employer	Structural Link
Teamworks	**TEAM Industries**	TEAM Industries helped establish Teamworks and has two to three representatives on Teamworks' Board of Directors.
ABC	**various**	Both employer and labor representatives participate as members of the Board or Directors and the Advisory Board. Labor and management stakeholders have recently been convened to establish a Joint Labor-Management Training Committee.
PHI	**HCA**	PHI established HCA. Each has representatives on one another's Board of Directors. PHI is also a stockholder of HCA.
Boston PIC	**Partners HealthCare**	Partners is a member of the Work Force Development Committee of the Board. Both the board and the council of the BPIC have a majority representing the private sector and are chaired by private sector representatives.
New Century Careers	**Superbolt**	NCC's Board of Directors is chaired by a nationally known leader from manufacturing and includes several other employer representatives. Superbolt chairs a committee of the National Tooling & Machining Association that credentials NCC's trainees.
JVS	**UCSF Medical Center**	JVS has employer representatives on its Board of Directors and has established a health care Industry Advisory Committee.
TMC U	**TMC HealthCare**	TMC U is a part of the TMC Workforce Development Program, a department within TMC HealthCare.

Institutionalized linkages

One way of creating shared ownership is by linking employers to projects through formal structures. Several of the employer partners in our study group participate as active members of the Boards of Directors of their program partners. **JVS** recommends that employers be invited to participate as board members based on their commitment to the mission of the organization and their willingness to aggressively support the organization and its participants. It is not enough for the employers to be board members in name only. Active board members will be willing to provide technical assistance to the program staff.

Employer involvement in program development

To gain lasting buy-in, it is essential to engage employers in program development. From the outset, programs need to ensure that there is fundamental agreement on objectives and the methodology to reach them.

There are numerous examples of how employers have played a significant role in program design and development. A group of employers in the Pittsburgh area were instrumental in the creation of **New Century Careers; TEAM Industries** helped create **Teamworks; Barber Foods** played a role in developing the **Center for Workplace Learning;** manufacturers helped **ABC, JARC** and **NCC** respectively to select appropriate technology for their training centers; **Children's Hospital Boston** co-authored a strategy with **The Training Institute** and helped select the program staff; **TMC HealthCare** created **TMC U;** and **JVS** continuously engages employers in the development of curricula, screening requirements, internships and mentoring programs. Although such levels of participation can be demanding on already overworked business representatives, it is in their interest that programs meet their particular business needs. Oftentimes, programs are fearful of asking employers for assistance with programmatic development. However, just as an employer will meet with a public relations consultant to discuss ideas for a new advertising campaign or review plans for a new office lay-out with an outside architect, they will want to have a hand in ensuring that workforce development plans, structures and curricula are designed so as to optimize benefits to the company.

Programs need to take the initiative and ask for employers' input. When they do, they should be clear about what they want the employer to do, why and the time commitment involved.

Dynamic feedback loops

In order to ensure that program activities are adequately serving both employers and participants, it is critical to establish channels of communication that allow for a constant flow of relevant information. Seven of the 10 programs in this study group reported that someone in their organization speaks to someone in the employer's organization on a daily basis.

In Boston, **The Training Institute** has gone so far as to develop an intentional communications strategy to ensure that everyone within Children's Hospital Boston receives timely reports and announcements about what they need to know without overburdening them with unnecessary information. Although there are at least seven individuals at the program working with Children's at any given time, The Training Institute is careful to ensure that each person at Children's does not have to know more than two or three names at the program. This helps avoid confusion. To do this, The Training Institute has thought carefully about the distinct needs for information among various departments within the hospital. Human Resources may need a different set of information from departmental supervisors, for example. The project makes an effort to listen to the various needs and address them in a way that is consistent and complementary, not contradictory. But, this does not happen easily. The Training Institute admits that developing and maintaining a communications strategy is very time-consuming, yet well worth the challenge.

Program Design and Management: Involving the Whole Business from Frontline Worker to CEO

Barber Foods is a manufacturer of processed poultry products employing 752 people in Portland, Maine. This family-owned business employs associates from more than 52 countries, and more than 56 languages are spoken at the facility. Together, the **Center for Workplace Learning of the University of Southern Maine (CWL)** and Barber Foods manage an extensive firm-specific workforce development program, providing these incumbent workers with opportunities for basic education as well as college and pre-college courses for credit taught at the worksite. One of the hallmarks of CWL's program is its creation of a joint **Advisory Committee** that engages participation at all levels to determine training needs and manage the project. The committee consists of six representatives from Barber Foods, including a supervisor, a department head, a training facilitator and three production workers, as well as trainers and program management staff from CWL. Production workers rotate in and out of the committee so as to involve current students who can contribute information on the strengths and weaknesses of the program. Barber Foods is committed to involving the workers in the decisionmaking processes to ensure the quality of the program, and hopes that this will further develop future leadership within the company. CWL's experience with other employer-specific workforce development advisory committees has not always had this degree of success. What differentiates the advisory committee at Barber Foods is its power to make and implement decisions. The committee, which meets on a monthly basis, has been empowered to make decisions about program design and use of resources while managing an assigned operating budget. Whereas similar committees within other programs eventually wilt as their unimplemented ideas await consideration from upper management, the Barber Foods Advisory Committee takes action and, simultaneously, is able to engage in long-term strategic planning. This system of employee-based steering combined with top-level buy-in and support builds organizational strength that will provide continuity for the future.

JVS and **UCSF Medical Center** include an on-the-job training component at an early phase in each training cycle. This serves to keep lines of communication open by introducing the trainee to the department manager and recruiter, and permitting feedback to occur around the student's progress throughout the process.

Most programs in this group have relationships with the employer at multiple levels within the organization. This type of communication helps to identify and correct problems quickly, to create buy-in across the organizations, and to prepare for the eventual transition of key actors within the project or employer.

Program staff selection and deployment

Another method that has been used to structure programs to build a sense of shared ownership is joint selection of program staff. Because it is so important that program staff assigned to work with business possess the appropriate set of skills and personal traits to make for a good fit, several programs have enlisted employers to help choose program staff. Employers are sometimes asked to participate in interviews and selection committees for program personnel. When **JARC** needed to hire instructors and a new director of training, it asked the **S&C Electric Co.** and another employer to participate in the interview process each time. Not only did this ensure that the employers were comfortable and supportive of the individual, but also it demonstrated to the employers that JARC cares about serving the employers' needs. Furthermore, JARC gained from the employers' contribution of expertise and perspective in assessing the industry-related skills of the new staff.

Similarly, by strategically stationing staff close to employers, programs can fortify relationships. In our study group, some programs that are working with large employers have staff that is stationed at the employer's facilities. By physically embedding staff within the employer, relationships between program and employer become profoundly entwined, enabling on-the-spot decisionmaking, development of shared values, and instantaneous communication. **The Training Institute** utilizes coaches that are stationed within the hospital. **USM** staff has desks, telephones and e-mail addresses at **Barber Foods.** Barber Foods lightly refers to one USM staff as the "Principal of the Barber Learning Center."

What Employers Want

Partnerships with employers are about building business relationships. Throughout the interviews with the study group, employers told us what they most valued from their program partners, and programs reported on success factors in gaining and maintaining these partnerships. The following themes capture the program characteristics and strategies that this group viewed as critical to success.

- To be heard and understood.
- Expertise.
- Flexibility and responsiveness.
- Streamlined fund-raising and grant management.
- Demonstrable business benefits.
- Recognition and celebration of accomplishments.

Listen and understand the employer's culture and needs

"Whenever there is something that impacts us, The Training Institute always includes us. They don't decide it and then tell us what they did. They bring it right to us with ideas. They ask, 'how would you like to proceed?'" – Arlene Beauchemin, Children's Hospital Boston

Employers consistently indicate that they want to be heard. They have intimate knowledge of their own needs and want to work with partners that can respond accordingly. They ask programs to speak their language; to consider the particularities of their culture; to ask questions; and to develop curricula around the feedback that is provided, rather than arrive with cookie-cutter solutions.

In response, **JVS** recently established an Employer Services Department with staff that is dedicated to treating employers as customers. The Employer Services team constantly learns from employers about their needs and solicits feedback to ensure that these needs are met. The team then passes this information on to training and job development staff. Information is stored in a customer relationship management system.

Offer expertise

Employers want to work with programs that offer some particular expertise. Herein lies one of the great strengths of sectoral employment development programs. Because sector programs target an industry and become valued actors within that industry, they build internal capacities and institutional knowledge. Sector programs often employ industry experts that speak the language of business, conduct sectoral analyses to understand industry trends, and communicate regularly with a wide range of actors within the targeted sector.

"We know that we can count on JARC. If we come to them with a specific need and it's in an area that we think they have some expertise in, we can proceed with confidence and not look any further. We know that they have the right spirit and

the ability to use their own resources or to pull resources in from the outside as needed. That confidence level is very important to us." – Gene Cottini, S&C Electric Co.

Flexibility and responsiveness

"They [JVS] were flexible, adaptable and resourceful. I felt that we could always continue to come back together and look at opportunities to help bring in a good potential workforce." – Jennifer Hermann, UCSF Medical Center

Competitive employers are agile, able to adapt to changes in customer demand-and-supply chain events. Workforce development programs must be equally responsive, especially when cultivating relationships with employers. Utilizing business language, **JVS** describes this as "just in time" training.

Because they also have a mission to serve the industries they target, many sectoral programs are able to forecast and react to business changes. For instance, **Superbolt, Inc.** lauds **New Century Careers** for its constant efforts to research industry needs and refine its programs. The **Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute (PHI)** provides a similar service to its employer partner, **Home Care Associates (HCA).** On a regular basis, PHI sends out industry information in the form of issue briefs and newsletters. Initially, this support focused on workforce development concerns, but as the priority needs of HCA shifted, PHI responded by focusing its assistance on business development and financial viability. Helping the employer to identify new market niches, PHI assisted HCA through a period of fundamental change in its business model.

"Stay flexible. And, remember who is paying the bills. Just because academia takes a month off doesn't mean you can. …We work year-round, we go to school year-round." – Peter Bickford, Barber Foods

In order for programs to best serve their partners' needs, they must be extremely nimble and demonstrate an ability to reconfigure programs and curricula to meet evolving employer needs and respond to funding crises and opportunities. The employers in our work group repeatedly praised their program partners for their degree of flexibility. "You have to find a way to get them what they want, when and where they want it," says Paul Anselmo of New Century Careers. That includes holding meetings and classes where and when it is convenient to the employer, looking for creative means to fund projects, and being willing to make swift and sometimes radical changes to strategies. At any point, a new business model, transitions in senior management, introduction of new technologies, for example, will require adroitness, creativity and, perhaps, even the preparedness to walk away from ill-fitting strategies.

While many of these programs started because of a funding opportunity and/or a shortage of skilled labor, grants eventually end and labor market conditions change. Recent employment trends in the nation's economy have forced programs to reconfigure their strategies as the demand for new employees has dropped off. Adaptable programs have been able to follow evolving employer needs and, in the case of our study group, begin to offer increased incumbent worker or supervisory training where in demand. Programs with longevity are those that can respond to new opportunities and challenges as they arise.

Act as fiscal intermediary/ streamline processes

Employers do not want to be bogged down with the chores of grant writing and contract management. Usually, they do not have expertise in these areas, and thus, they find the paperwork involved to be daunting. They even may be dissuaded from collaborating on workforce development projects for fear of landing in a bureaucratic quagmire. Generally, employers are highly appreciative of the contributions that their program partners make in soliciting funds and dealing with all associated "red tape." Almost every employer in this work group cited their partner's role as fiscal intermediary as one of the aspects that they most highly value. Employers want programs to allow them to focus on providing work experience and placements. They want minimal paperwork and simple contracts.

Employers are grateful to programs that will write reports for them to review and sign. It is important, however, that programs communicate with employers so that they are informed of the reporting that occurs and the status of outside funding.

"Working with Teamworks, you don't have to fill out a lot of forms; you don't have to sign a lot of contracts. You sit across the table; you have a discussion; you get a proposal." – Mike Hipsher, TEAM Industries-Cambridge

"They've (PHI) helped us get different sources of money, helped with grant writing, and even loaned us money. They actually collect some of the data and then report on it for us. That's a tremendous help in terms of providing a service." – Karen Kulp, HCA

"The level of support from The Training Institute is excellent. One of the reasons that we use external support is because we don't have the staff to manage it ourselves. The fact that they provide such a comprehensive support network behind the actual deliverable has helped us immensely and endears them to us and makes us want to continue our efforts with them." – Arlene Beauchemin, Children's Hospital Boston

Demonstrate business benefits

Employers usually enter into partnerships as a leap of faith, because they believe that there will be some value gained. However, to solidify and grow the relationship once a workforce development plan is in place, they must see concrete indicators of success that go beyond community service and relate to business needs. Programs need to develop methods for monetizing the benefits of their services and to convey effectively that both sides are winning. Proof of a real benefit to the business can be essential in garnering firm support from upper management. In our study, some employers initially saw the program exclusively as a service to the surrounding community. However, when shown that the program had positive implications for the company's bottom line, their participation in the workforce development programs gained great momentum, leading in several cases to the expansion of the programs.

At **TMC HealthCare,** the workforce development programs were seen as a community service until a Return On Investment (ROI) study was conducted during the third year of operation to look at retention rates. It was discovered that the hospital had lower turn-over for welfare to work participants than it did for employees hired through traditional mechanisms. The surprisingly favorable results convinced management of the "major significance" of the program. As a result, the hospital came to expect the program to feed its present and future workforce needs and was willing to dedicate greater attention and resources to TMC U. As discussed previously, a similar experience at **The Training Institute** was part of a strategy to secure financial investments from the employers.

"Programs need to develop methods for monetizing the benefits of their services and to convey effectively that both sides are winning."

In reality, it is very uncommon for programs to have the resources to conduct comprehensive ROI studies. Most participants in our study group have cited the difficulties in measuring ROI as one of their key concerns. It is a time-consuming and costly endeavor to implement sophisticated tracking systems or to analyze issues of causality.

Most outcomes are identified through less rigorous analyses of easy-to-track data or anecdotal evidence. Nonetheless, this type of information can be extremely valuable in garnering support. All of the programs in our study group have used this type of ad-hoc research. Some of the bottom-line benefits to employers that have been cited in our interviews include retention, recruitment (becomes employer of choice), advancement, diversity, efficiency increases, reduced scrap rates, etc. Early in the development of the partnership, it is important that programs, in collaboration with the employers, establish methods to track performance data on participants. Ideally, but

Signs of Success

The work group participants cited many indicators of success as key to solidifying their relationships and advancing the workforce development efforts. The following are some examples:

- TEAM Industries-Cambridge: Retention rates improved from 50 percent to 90 percent for participants. Scrap rates were greatly reduced and efficiencies improved.
- TMC HealthCare: By Year 3 of the program, retention rates for welfare to work participants exceeded those for regular hires. Cost savings were realized in recruitment and retention activities and in the avoidance of health care insurance premiums, because participants were entitled to stay on the state Medicaid program during the first 12 to 24 months of employment.
- Partners HealthCare: Over 30 percent of new entrants into radiology are people of color as opposed to 3 percent in radiology as a whole, far exceeding the Hospital's diversity goal. The program has also gone far to address an extreme staffing shortage.
- UCSF Medical Center: Seventy-five percent retention and advancement rate among participants.
- Barber Foods: Turnover rates for college participants are one-quarter that of the non-participants.
- S&C Electric Co.: Productivity and quality improved; defect rates dropped.
- Children's Hospital Boston: Among Training Institute participants, turnover is less than 10 percent as compared to 17 percent overall. The program had developed a method for monetizing this change. The employer also cites improved productivity and patient care demonstrated by increased self-confidence, problem solving and active participation.
- Superbolt: Retention rates and skills of employees hired through program comparatively better. Individuals hired through the program have a six-month head start on other new hires in terms of productivity on the job.
- HCA: Typically has a retention rate 20 percent to 30 percent higher than the home care industry average.

with much greater difficulty, many programs also desire to monitor key productivity indicators to assess changes over time and compare participants against non-participants. Setting benchmarks together can help to clarify goals for both partners and keep the collaboration on track as it develops.

Celebrate successes

Employers want to share the credit for successful outcomes. Several employers cited a special award presentation or event hosted by the program as a turning point that engendered broad support for the relationship. Public recognition of the program helped employers to establish themselves as "employers of choice" within their communities. This translated to a direct benefit in terms of recruitment and retention. Moreover, celebrations of successes, especially where they involved individual success stories, helped solidify existing relationships and obtain greater buy-in from within the institution or company.

At the annual meeting of the **Boston PIC,** the PIC Achiever Award was presented to a new employee of **Partners HealthCare.** With no parents to support him, this young adult came to Partners through the Pro-Tech Program for disadvantaged high school youth. With the support of the employer and the program, he is now graduating as a radiology technologist and will earn a starting salary of $45,000. The celebration of this success story had a vital impact on the radiology personnel that went beyond demonstration of statistical data. It created an emotional connection as staff felt personal pride in their participation in the training program.

The Aspen Institute's Workforce Strategies Initiative (WSI) launched the Documenting Demand Side Outcomes (DDSO) project in 2003 to begin to assess the value of sectoral training programs to employers within targeted sectors. Over a two-year period, DDSO is convening 10 sectoral workforce development programs in manufacturing and health care to develop and test a system of measures. Each program has selected an employer partner to participate in all phases of the project. This unique feature of the research project is designed to ensure that the methodology is practical and relevant to employers' needs. For more information on the DDSO project, visit www.aspenwsi.org/DDSO.htm.

It's a *Social* Science

"One of the major challenges of developing long-term relationships between workforce people and employers is that often these relationships are dependent on a specific staff person." – Karen Shack, Boston PIC

Personal relationships can play a vital role in the development of effective partnerships. Easy, honest, patient, creative, flexible, realistic, practical and engaging are some of the words that members of our study group used to describe a key counterpart with whom they developed a special affinity. Oftentimes, programs or employers attributed the depths of their partnership to unique relationships based on shared values, trust and intangible elements of personal compatibility. Although there is no science to replicate the human element of relationship building, it is important to pay close attention to leadership development and to interpersonal aptitudes. According to Paul Anselmo at New Century Careers, *"It's really key; you have to have the right people with the right attitudes and the right traits to be able to do this successfully, because it is not easy."*

Furthermore, programs must prepare for the eventuality of turnover by building in redundancies in the form of relationships with a broad array of individuals within both program and employer. For programs that work with small employers, this can be particularly challenging. Conducting work in committees and sustaining a practice of careful documentation will help to lay the groundwork for future sustainability.

Final Note

The partnerships described in this publication have developed over time. Although we have described here a set of characteristics for effective employer relationships, rarely will all of these elements be in place at the outset of a partnership. Developing new partnerships with employers requires patience and perseverance as relationships mature over time. Building trust is a process and no program can expect instantaneous success. Moreover, the course is not always smooth. Most of these programs have experienced difficulties and setbacks at times, putting activities on temporary hiatus, struggling through funding crises, dealing with thorny changes in management, and so forth.

Remember that programs must establish *business* relationships that address bottom-line needs, but do not forget that relationships are about individuals. Relationships need constant nurturing and support to maintain their momentum. Yet, the payoff may be great and can help lead your program to reach its ultimate goals for the people you serve.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Hidden Agendas: Stereotypes and Cultural Barriers to Corporate-Community Partnerships. Laufer Green Isaac: Los Angeles, Calif. February 2004. www.lgicommunications.com

By Design: Engaging Employers in Workforce Development Organizations. Carol Clymer. Public/Private Ventures: Working Ventures. December 2003. www.ppv.org

Working with Value: Industry-specific Approaches to Workforce Development. Ida S. Rademacher, ed. The Aspen Institute, Workforce Strategies Initiative. February 2002. http://www.aspenwsi.org

Private Interests, Shared Concerns: The Relationship Between Employers and the AECF Jobs Initiative. Abt Associates Inc. and the New School for Social Research for the Annie E. Casey Foundation. November 1999. http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/jobsinitiative

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For more information about the Documenting Demand Side Outcomes project, please visit: www.aspenwsi.org/news-currentproject002.asp

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