



RESTORE THE PROMISE OF WORK

Reducing Inequality by Raising the Floor
and Building Ladders

By Maureen Conway
and Steven L. Dawson



Cover Illustration by Valdek Dymtrowski

For all inquiries, please contact:

The Aspen Institute
One Dupont Circle, NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 736-5800
Fax: (202) 467-0790

Copyright © 2016 by The Aspen Institute

The Aspen Institute
One Dupont Circle, NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036

Published in the United States of America in 2016 by The Aspen Institute

All rights reserved

RESTORE THE PROMISE OF WORK

Reducing Inequality by Raising the Floor and Building Ladders

By Maureen Conway and Steven L. Dawson

INTRODUCTION

In America, we believe that work is the pathway out of poverty. Today, however, it is all too possible to work hard and remain poor. What's worse, the dynamics of low-wage jobs create a cycle of economic instability that is hard to escape. Indeed, recent research and reporting has underlined that America's "ladders of opportunity" are too often illusory. This brief argues that redesigning work is an essential component of any effort to expand economic opportunity and address ever-widening inequality—particularly if inequality is defined in terms that are social and political as well as economic.

Restore the Promise of Work is a companion to *Raise the Floor and Build Ladders*, published by the Aspen Institute and PHI in April 2014.¹ That paper, directed specifically to the workforce development community, argues for a more balanced workforce development strategy—not only to help low-wage workers climb a career ladder out of poor-quality jobs but, just as important, also to develop strategies that will make bad jobs better.

The reaction to *Raise the Floor and Build Ladders* has been remarkable, with a wide variety of workforce leaders and advocates for low-income workers responding positively to its ideas. Reflecting on the nature of work, and not just the deficits of would-be workers, seemed to name a challenge that workforce service providers face daily. Since then, we have devoted significant time to conversing with a range of workforce organizations and considering how some of the paper's ideas could be put into practice.

We have found that this effort must extend well beyond the workforce development community. In this brief, we aim to include all those who are engaged in pragmatic efforts to strengthen low-income families and promote a more inclusive economy. This broader community includes not only policy advocates and workforce development practitioners but also "high-road" employers and leaders in the realms of organized labor, community economic development, community development finance, community organizing, and social and cooperative enterprise. We believe all of these organizations need to advocate not just for but *with* working people—amplifying workers' voices in private decisions about the design of work and in public decisions about employment and economic policy.

¹ <http://www.aspenwsi.org/resource/raise-the-floor-and-build-ladders-workforce-strategies-supporting-mobility-and-stability-april-2016/>

If aligned together, this broader community can forge a *powerful agenda to promote quality work* that will:

- **In policy**, reaffirm societal values about the purpose and dignity of work and ensure that laws and regulations upholding basic standards for work reflect those values; and
- **In practice**, engage with employers to redesign the structure of low-wage employment, providing long-term value for the worker, the business and the community.

We recognize this broad and diverse community has many decades of experience and hard-won successes. A coordinated effort focused on the conditions of work will be critical to expanding and sustaining success. A key element for this coordination will be a unified “*job quality*” *public narrative* that offers a clear story line about work. To date, too much of the public narrative has been about the need for education in order for individuals to qualify for a “good” job and too little about the need to value—in every sense of the word—the essential work that workers who currently have “bad” jobs perform. Their work is essential in service, caregiving and many other occupations that make up a large and growing proportion of employment. We need a firm goal of *redesigning poor-quality jobs*.

This goal cannot be secondary to the goal of improving workforce skills; nor can it be achieved after raising the skill levels of working people. Instead, we must recognize that workforce skills and job quality are deeply interconnected, and that quality jobs not only reward job performance but also further develop workforce skills and capabilities. Therefore, strategies must focus equally on ensuring that workers are prepared to perform a job *and* encouraging the development of jobs that will support worker success.

The benefits of quality jobs not only accrue at the level of the individual worker or firm but also at the community level. Communities with a lower proportion of poor-quality jobs will, in turn, have more work accomplished by people with dignity and sustainable livelihoods—people who are, in their turn, more empowered agents in their private, family lives and in public affairs. Work that engages and rewards working people both reduces economic inequality and engenders greater political and social equality, a critical component to building strong communities.

This brief underscores that an effective job-quality agenda requires initiatives in both policy and practice and in equal measure. That is, new job-quality minimum standards must be mandated in law and regulation and then consistently enforced. It is essential that laws reflect societal values around work and guide economic competition in ways that protect those values. At the same time, practical support for improving job quality is also needed. Adherence to policy is more likely when the “how” and “why” of compliance are clear, yet policy alone cannot address the myriad details and decisions that can improve job quality. A sole emphasis on public policy—particularly one that emphasizes minimum hourly income—risks undervaluing what a quality job actually means in the daily life of a low-income worker and overlooking valuable opportunities for improving job quality.

Therefore, we place equal emphasis on the very practical, day-to-day, job-quality elements that can help make bad jobs better. These include stable and predictable hours, adherence to health and safety standards, good supervision, sufficient training for job demands, well-designed workflow, cross-training, internal career ladders, access to external public benefits, participative decision-making, and shared ownership. And even this long list is far from exhaustive but rather illustrative of the countless job redesign interventions to be explored when beginning the journey of improving job quality.

We undertake this call for a job-quality agenda in full recognition that the very nature of work is rapidly changing in America—from the growth in “fissured workplaces” that demand “just-in-time” work schedules, to “1099 gig” independent contracting. Some of these changes likely result from advances in science and technology, but more and more social scientists are concluding that much of the deterioration in job quality and growth in economic inequality are not merely unfortunate side effects of technological progress but rather the consequence of a variety of public and private choices—changing tax laws, employment regulations, business norms and more.

Precisely because the nature of work is changing so profoundly, we need low-income advocates, human service providers, community and economic development leaders, and education and workforce leaders to focus on driving a *pragmatic* vision of quality work into the core of economic opportunity efforts, thereby restoring the promise of work in America.

CONTEXT

Non-livable-wage employment challenges a wide variety of efforts to alleviate poverty and promote economic advancement. Most Americans rely on earnings from work to make a living, whether they are employed or self-employed. A great many adults are trapped in low-wage jobs with few opportunities to get ahead, and this has been true for decades. The fact that so many jobs provide an inadequate living has been a major factor in the limited success of social programs that help connect people to work: A population cannot make its way out of poverty through work when so many of its members are working and yet remain poor. Given that the recovery period from the Great Recession, which is well into its sixth year, has brought little growth in good job prospects for workers who need them, the question becomes: Is the bad jobs problem getting worse?

“Bad jobs” come with a substantial cost. Living in poverty or on its edge has many stresses, creating what Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir refer to as a “bandwidth tax.”² This further constrains low-income workers’ already limited capacity to invest in education or skill building that could improve their own job prospects, and it diminishes their ability to care for and invest in their children. Further, we know that poor children are much more likely to have poor education outcomes and, in turn, poor economic outcomes. Thus, the condition of working poverty limits the productive capacity of the current workforce, and it diminishes the prospects for the future workforce as well.

This “cycle of poverty” challenge has reached crisis levels in America, where more than half of public school children are eligible for free and reduced price meals.³ Too often, these children are not poor because their parents do not work or do not want to work. Rather, too many jobs in our economy are insufficient to lift a family out of poverty, and too few jobs offer workers a measure of economic security to protect them and their families from sliding into poverty.

² Mullainathan, Sendhil, and Eldar Shafir. *Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means So Much*. Time Books, Henry Holt & Company LLC. 2013.

³ Southern Education Foundation, “A New Majority: Low Income Students Now a Majority in the Nation’s Public Schools,” January 2015. Accessed February 5, 2016, www.southerneducation.org/getattachment/4ac62e27-5260-47a5-9d02-14896ec3a531/A-New-Majority-2015-Update-Low-Income-Students-Now.aspx.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD JOB

By definition, a good job generates a steady income that contributes to the economic stability of the individual and family and thus helps secure greater economic opportunity. A good job also provides access to other benefits that help manage the risks and uncertainties of work and life: health insurance, disability insurance, family and medical leave, a safe working environment, grievance protections, retirement savings. A good job supports worker success through adequate training, supportive supervision and opportunities for advancement. A good job encourages worker engagement in the work, creating opportunities for workers to build competence, exercise judgment and a measure of control over their work, and connect with and contribute to the larger purpose of the organization. Specific opportunities to improve job quality vary by industry and occupation, but progress can be made, along a number of dimensions, to move from an economically unstable and socially unsustainable job to one with stability that supports worker success.

Importantly, a good job provides a range of less tangible benefits to the individual: independence, dignity, self-respect, emotional security, opportunities to learn and develop new skills—and, in the best of cases, opportunities to serve others. Good work is an important part of social inclusion, not just a means of earning money. This aspect of quality work is important to many business leaders, too, and indeed the best of employers walk into their businesses each day wanting to be proud of the people who work there and to see their employees succeed. It is a false and misleading oversimplification to assume that all employers must, or choose to, make workforce investment decisions based solely on short-term financial return.

For quite some time, the lack of stable, living-wage jobs has been a primary factor limiting the success of workforce development programs. These programs have documented that low-income people can indeed learn—they can learn new skills, new workplace cultures, new behaviors—and countless organizations have had success in improving the skills of low-income workers through a variety of education and training innovations. At the same time, these programs are often criticized for their small scale or for training people for jobs that do not exist. Yet creating jobs or encouraging employers to improve conditions of employment is typically beyond the scope of social programs, and the absence of good jobs has remained a primary limiting factor to the effectiveness of job-placement and retention strategies. Again, too few employment opportunities reward higher skills with a stable income sufficient to meet daily living needs, let alone provide for a career path forward.

In addition, effective social programs are expensive: For programs to be truly effective in helping low-income workers build new skills, those individuals must have time to learn—time when they are not working (and thus not earning money). Therefore, good job training and education programs for low-income workers invest not only in providing skill-building services but also in providing or coordinating sources of income or living supports that enable clients to dedicate time to learning.

Unfortunately, public subsidies for all kinds of services that make the lives of low-income workers easier have been shrinking in recent years. Federal, state and local governments have felt pressure to cut budgets rather than improve services. Support for transportation, child care, affordable housing, education and training and other services has diminished, leaving low-income workers managing more with less. Perhaps the sole exception has been the Affordable Care Act, which has made health insurance more affordable for many and has the potential to reduce the burden of medical debt, which remains the leading cause of household bankruptcy. However, many low-income workers still have not been able to benefit from the ACA.

Too often, public expenditures on health, education and human services are cast as wasteful spending or unaffordable luxuries rather than as investments in human potential. However, recent economic research is challenging that perspective. Organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and Standard and Poor's have found that inequality poses problems for economic growth, suggesting that progressive tax structures and some public spending can mitigate inequality and may be important for economic health.⁴

Public investments in addressing inequality and building human capacity can pay off for the economy as a whole, and it turns out that private-sector investments in workers can benefit not only workers but business as well. Zeynep Ton documents how even in price-sensitive retail businesses, investing in workers can be good business. Stanford Business School professor Jeffrey Pfeffer has long recommended "high commitment work practices" to improve business performance, and a variety of business organizations and consultancies have promoted job-quality strategies as a means of improving employee engagement, a known driver of business results.⁵ In addition, researchers writing for the *Cambridge Journal of Economics* find that, in countries where business practices frequently allow for flexible deployment of labor, such as contingent work and on-demand scheduling, those practices lead to damaged trust, loyalty and commitment among working people—and ultimately to reduced knowledge development, knowledge sharing, innovation and productivity.⁶

THE COST OF BAD JOBS

Poor-quality jobs generate significant costs—for the individual, the business and the regional economy. For individuals, episodic and unpredictable work hours not only fail to provide a steady, livable income, but they also generate scheduling uncertainties that can make it impossible to plan for child care or for additional schooling—even for a second job. Irregular incomes make it difficult to plan for and manage regular living expenses. Unsafe working conditions can debilitate a worker for weeks, for years, for life. Poor training and bad or absent supervision can limit opportunities for developing skills or professional networks and thus curb chances for career advancement.

For employers, bad jobs can lead to high turnover and excessive staff search and replacement costs. Job performance suffers and can lead to expensive mistakes, lower quality goods or services, difficulties with customer retention, limited growth and other issues.

For communities, bad jobs create a strain on public resources when working people must turn to public-sector benefits for basic needs rather than contribute to the tax base. Bad jobs can also inhibit civic participation and create a sense of economic exclusion that engenders divisions and tension in a community.

In short, bad jobs are not simply an absence of good jobs. They negatively affect individuals and their families and communities, and they compound the ills of excessive inequality.

⁴ See, for example, Jonathan D. Ostry, Andrew Berg and Charalambos G. Tsangarides, "Redistribution, Inequality and Growth," IMF staff discussion note, April 2014. Accessed February 5, 2016, www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/sdn/2014/sdn1402.pdf and Beth Bovino, "How Increasing Income Inequality Is Dampening U.S. Economic Growth, and Possible Ways to Change the Tide" Standard and Poor's Credit Services, McGraw Hill Financial, August 5, 2014. Accessed February 5, 2016, www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/forum/Forum_2014/Income_Inequality.pdf

⁵ See, for example, Robert J. Vance, *Employee Engagement and Commitment: A Guide to Understanding, Measuring and Increasing Engagement in Your Organization*. SHRM Foundation, 2006. Accessed February 5, 2016, <http://shrm.org/about/foundation/research/Documents/1006EmployeeEngagementOnlineReport.pdf>.

⁶ Alfred Kleinknecht, Zenlin Kwee and Lilyana Budyanto, "Rigidities Through Flexibility: Flexible Labour and the Rise of Management Bureaucracies," *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, August 2015.

THE JOB QUALITY AGENDA-FIVE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

We believe that restoring the promise of work should be the central tenet in the fight against poverty and growing inequality. A powerful alignment that includes “high-road” employers and leaders within the fields of labor organizing, community organizing, community economic development, community development finance, minimum wage and other policy advocacy campaigns (e.g., living wage; paid leave; predictable scheduling), and social and cooperative enterprise will be needed to move an agenda that can truly address these defining challenges of our age. Leaders should join together to build a cohesive, pro-work strategy incorporating five essential elements:

- **Build a relevant job-quality narrative:** Articulate a unified public narrative that *insists on the necessity for decent, stable jobs*—simultaneously benefitting the worker, the employer and all residents within a region’s economy.

All too often, the narrative frame involves business imperatives—because of competition, businesses “cannot” pay living wages, build safe workplaces or dedicate resources to worker training, or that people with “low skills” (e.g. less than a bachelor’s degree) are somehow deserving of low wages. We need an alternative narrative about the value of work—all kinds of work—and the benefits to workers, businesses and society of building good jobs.

This story line will spur leaders within public entities and philanthropic and civic organizations to expect employers to build better jobs and expand opportunity. They will see that an employer who provides quality jobs is both a better businessperson and a better civic partner. This narrative will recognize working people not only as important economic contributors but also as essential self-advocates in building quality jobs and successful enterprises.

- **Support a policy agenda:** Public policy matters in setting a meaningful set of standards for work. Because bad jobs come with a cost—a social cost—there is a public interest in setting standards for work and ensuring those standards are well understood and enforced. Such policies—such as minimum wage levels, essential benefits, safe working conditions, worker self-advocacy protections—also provide a common playing field, encouraging businesses to compete to produce the kinds of benefits we have come to expect. In the long run, a business climate that encourages business to pursue a race to the bottom in labor costs and externalizes the expenses of wasteful human resource policies benefits no one.
- **Quid pro quo investments:** When offering public/philanthropic services to, or making investments in, specific businesses, *bargain* with employers. Negotiate improvements in job quality for low-income workers in exchange for public or philanthropic support.

For example, community development funds could make job-quality investments a higher priority in exchange for their loan investments. Public agencies could require similar improvements in exchange for their procurements of goods and services from those employers.

Given the tightening labor market, opportunities to bargain may improve and should be seized. Public, nonprofit and philanthropic agencies that seek to build relationships with employers must remember why they want those relationships and negotiate to get the most out of them. Agencies that seek to improve job quality also must be careful to engage working people in the process. While concessions wrought by caring advocates are helpful—and admittedly hard enough to achieve—they may not be as durable as a system that allows working people to develop and promote their own ideas about job quality. Care is needed to expand, not undermine, worker agency and worker voice.

- **Build business expertise:** To assist businesses in making practical improvements in front-line jobs, expertise in job design and a practical set of what is possible are necessary.

Business expertise is a core weakness in the current ability of advocates and practitioners to effect change within the labor market. While it is important to urge employers to improve job quality, it is equally necessary to know, technically, *how* to help those businesses redesign and improve their frontline jobs.

Such job-quality technical expertise is often sector specific, and thus relatively few organizations and consultants have experience in implementing improvements that simultaneously benefit both the worker and the employer. An intensive effort is required to identify the sophisticated technical expertise required to help businesses undertake frontline job-quality redesign—and to develop that expertise if it is not available.

- **Exemplars:** Identify and lift up both high-road employers and low-income workforce initiatives that offer concrete examples of how good jobs can be beneficial to all.

Fortunately, a number of employers and workforce and community initiatives, many of quite significant size, have succeeded both as businesses and as models of improved job quality. We describe several of these in the appendix.

Such initiatives are invaluable. They provide dramatic reality to the public narrative, and they provide sources of technical expertise to assist others in implementing job-quality initiatives across the country.

Together, these five essential elements combine policy and practice into a mutually supportive, integrated strategy. They also combine sticks and carrots—the sticks of mandatory legislative and regulatory reforms aggressively enforced; the carrots of investments, expanded markets and specialized expertise—all wrapped within a cohesive public narrative that affirms the value of work and the responsibility to ensure that the values of work are protected and rewarded.

REQUEST FOR DIALOGUE AND SUPPORT

In calling for a unified job-quality strategy, we want to explicitly acknowledge two often-ignored realities about work in the United States.

The first is quite sobering: Given the structure of the U.S. labor market, millions of hard-working Americans—no matter how hard they work—are unlikely to ever secure a middle-class income. They will struggle not for career *mobility* but for sheer income *stability*.

If we mistakenly define success in our fight against inequality solely in terms of “all Americans must become middle class,” we will surely fail and our resulting strategies will help only a relative few climb a career ladder. While thus engaged, we will likely miss a broad range of opportunities to “raise the floor” for perhaps hundreds of thousands of low-income people across the United States.

The second reality is more encouraging: An individual does not necessarily have to secure a middle-class job in order to achieve greater equality and walk in the community with dignity, independence and self-respect. Even jobs that do not pay a middle-income wage can be shaped into decent, respectable work. A quality job can provide not only livable and predictable income; it can also generate a broad array of attributes that carry tangible importance to the everyday life of a worker: good benefits, better training, a skilled supervisor, access to public benefits, dignity and respect.

This is not to argue that we should stop trying to raise hourly wages for low-income workers or, more generally, accept the current structure of the labor market without question. Quite the contrary. We believe there is tremendous scope to restructure work such that workers are better compensated. Nevertheless, we do argue for broadening our definition of what equality means: Equality is more than purely economic, more than a higher hourly wage. Indeed, most Americans expect and accept some measure of economic inequality. But equality is social and political as well, and in the social and political realms we seek much greater equality.

When structured thoughtfully, a good job not only reduces economic inequality but can also help secure equality in the fuller sense of the term. Cannot a home care worker carry herself with dignity and self-respect while caring for an elder—even if she is not making a middle-class income? Cannot a landscaping worker expect to be treated as an equal in his community—even if he does not own a single-family, suburban home?

Therefore, we call upon all low-income advocates and workforce practitioners to craft an assertive job-quality strategy that does not confine us to a particular income definition. Rather, we must embrace the full meaning of what work can provide for low-income workers.

In so doing, we fully acknowledge that those whom we call upon—from high-road employers to labor organizers, from community investors to social enterprise developers—are already undertaking courageous and effective efforts to strengthen low-income communities. What we hope for is a further commitment—to engage in dialogue across the variety of advocates, organizers, service providers and concerned business leaders—to build a *unified* job quality agenda that can strengthen all efforts to achieve greater economic opportunity.

The fight for equality is economic, political and social, and it will be secured primarily in how we define employment in America.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Maureen Conway is vice president of policy programs at the Aspen Institute and executive director of the Economic Opportunities Program (EOP). She founded EOP's Workforce Strategies Initiative (AspenWSI) and has led workforce research at the Aspen Institute since 1999. Today she leads a team of researchers and consultants in a variety of initiatives to identify and advance strategies that help low-income Americans gain ground in the labor market. In addition, she leads efforts to promote cross-sector dialogue through initiatives such as the Working in America conversation series, which brings leaders from business, academia, education, philanthropy, journalism, labor, and more together to explore critical issues affecting low and moderate-income workers in the United States and ideas for improving and expanding economic opportunities for working people.

Steven L. Dawson has worked in the field of low-income community and cooperative enterprise development for 40 years. He has helped create and lead a range of for-profit and nonprofit social enterprises, and written extensively on low-wage workforce issues. He is the now-retired founder of PHI (Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute), and is currently a consultant on low-wage job-quality strategies.

APPENDIX

Examples of Job Quality Strategies

Raise the Floor and Build Ladders lists examples of *raise-the-floor* job-quality initiatives across the country. We include those here, along with others and some notable businesses that have succeeded—primarily on their own, through dint of trial and error—in creating exemplary business models that invest in and reward frontline staff.

BUSINESS LEADERS

Marlin Steel Wire Products:⁷ Marlin Steel specializes in custom wire baskets, mesh baskets, stainless-steel products, custom wire forming and precision sheet-metal fabrication. It ships its products throughout the United States and to 35 other countries. At its Baltimore facility, Marlin invests in technology and people through a self-styled *Skills Matrix* that identifies each employee’s proficiencies. Then, through cross-training, Marlin rewards each worker with wage bumps of as much as \$1.00 per hour (5 to 10 percent of the hourly pay rate) for each new skill mastered.

By emphasizing cross-training, Marlin has cultivated a highly efficient and productive group of 40 wire-bending workers who earn significantly higher wages than their industry counterparts.

Alvarado Street Bakery: Begun in 1977 in San Francisco as a worker-owned cooperative, Alvarado now delivers 30 types of healthy, organic whole grain breads throughout California, as well as to the rest of the United States and to Canada and Japan. It employs more than 120 workers. Alvarado has honed a highly sophisticated system of baking and delivery that enables the cooperative to pay production workers more than twice the average market-level of wages, plus \$18,000 in annual cooperative dividends.

Costco and **QuikTrip:** As popularized by Zeynep Ton in *The Good Jobs Strategy*, these two very large corporations—the first a general retailer and the second a convenience store chain—have developed employee-centered business models. Both firms far exceed their competitors not only in wages and benefits for their workers but also in nearly every measure of business success: profits, market share and sales per square foot of retail space.

These corporations developed their models independently, but they share common characteristics regarding their employees. Both invest in greater training, promote from within and pay higher-than-market compensation, and these practices are an integral part of their overall business model and strategy.

⁷ This summary is excerpted from a profile authored by the Hitachi Foundation. Hitachi has published a range of case studies in its “Pioneer Employers” series at: www.hitachifoundation.org/our-work/good-companies-at-work/pioneer-employers.

Zingerman's Community of Businesses: Zingerman's is a family of ten food-related businesses in the Ann Arbor, Michigan, area. Zingerman's began with the deli and chose not to replicate their stores through a franchise model, but rather to develop new, independent businesses, all rooted in the local community and working together as one organization. Each business is operated by one or more managing partners who share ownership, together employing more than 600 full-time and part-time staff. Zingerman's business model emphasizes deep training of its staff (including the University of Zingerman), "open book" financial management and excellent food.

WORKFORCE AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Farm workers: The Coalition of Immokalee Workers is a worker-based human rights organization in Florida that originated in 1993 as a farmworker community organizing effort. In 2011, CIW launched the Fair Food Program, achieving new minimum labor standards for thousands of low-income tomato fieldworkers. Through contractual agreements with some of the nation's largest agricultural purchasers (e.g., Subway, Whole Foods and Walmart)—secured through a highly successful advocacy campaign—the CIW has won binding commitments from these end purchasers to enforce minimum labor standards upon the farm corporations from which they purchase tomatoes.

Manufacturing workers: In Chicago, the *Instituto del Progreso Latino* operates ManufacturingWorks, a sector-oriented workforce service center. In providing services, MW has implemented a tier system for rating companies based on worker compensation, bonuses and working conditions. MW sends placements to "better" businesses and is more responsive to their requests for incumbent-worker training or other training and recruitment assistance.

At the same time, MW engages with lower-tier businesses to better understand barriers that may prevent them from improving job quality and to consider strategies for overcoming those barriers. These businesses benefit from other forms of business assistance, such as human resources consulting and workshops on lean manufacturing.

Manufacturing workers: The Genesis Movement is a new approach to manufacturing extension services provided by the Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center, an affiliate of the federally funded Manufacturing Extension Partnership. IMEC works with small and medium-sized manufacturing firms in the Chicago area to focus on a more holistic approach that they describe as "people, process, product" since it integrates human resource strategies with process- and product-improvement strategies. The premise of the Genesis Movement is that companies can offer more and better jobs when human capital is integral to their business plans. This approach is expected to improve working conditions, compensation and advancement opportunities for frontline workers while also improving business success. It will provide lessons for others considering this type of integrated workforce and economic development strategy.

Workers within a specific region: The Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership, based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, begins with a foundational commitment to labor-management solutions, and views worker success, business success and the economic development of the region all as key and inter-related goals of the organization. WRTP responds to the specific skill needs of high-quality employers, developing tailored solutions—work-

ing with a network of nonprofit service providers and industry training partners—to create entryways into high-quality employment for low-income Milwaukee residents.

WRTP works within multiple industry sectors, ranging from construction to health care, and its diverse funding base includes privately negotiated training funds, philanthropic resources and public training dollars. WRTP’s model combines the voice of organized labor with the needs of industry as it crafts a strategy to support the creation of high-quality jobs and a skilled workforce.

Construction workers: The Workers Defense Project, a nonprofit, membership-based organization in Austin, Texas, helps workers in construction and related occupations advocate for better wages and working conditions. WDP builds policy and legislative campaigns, works directly with contractors to educate them about workplace standards and safe working conditions, and provides advocacy training and skill building opportunities for workers. It also participates in the national Day Labor Organizing network through which local organizations across the country advocate for safe environments for day laborers and encourage the creation of career advancement opportunities. Over the last decade, WDP has supported legal actions that have helped workers recover nearly \$1 million in back wages.

Restaurant workers: Restaurant Opportunities Centers-United, a national nonprofit headquartered in New York City, provides training for entry-level staff, undertakes policy research on the restaurant labor market and leads campaigns against specific “low road” restaurant employers who break labor laws. ROC-United has organized an alternative trade association of “high road” employers who encourage career development within their restaurants and who together advocate for improved labor regulations within the industry. The organization currently has a dozen affiliates in cities across the United States engaging workers and business leaders to improve working conditions in the restaurant industry.

Health care workers: PHI, a national nonprofit headquartered in the South Bronx, has created its own high-road home care agencies in New York City and Philadelphia. Acting as model employers and training programs, these agencies employ over 2,500 workers. PHI also undertakes policy research on the direct-care labor market, consults to a wide range of high-road health care employers on training and employment best practices, trains supervisors of frontline staff, and leads policy campaigns resulting in increases in compensation and improvements in job quality.



ONE DUPONT CIRCLE, NW
SUITE 700
WASHINGTON, DC 20036