National Fund for Workforce Solutions

UNIONS AS PARTNERS

Expanding the Role of Organized Labor in Workforce Development

By Stacey Wagner November 2010

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National Fund for Workforce Solutions

The National Fund for Workforce Solutions

www.nfwsolutions.org

The National Fund for Workforce Solutions is an award-winning initiative focused on helping low-wage workers obtain good careers, while at the same time ensuring that employers have the high-quality skills that will enable them to succeed in this highly competitive economy. Since 2008, the National Fund has raised $24 million to support 23 communities that have contributed an additional $104 million in locally raised resources from 216 different funding sources, including community foundations, United Ways, corporate foundations, workforce investment boards, chambers of commerce, and state agencies. Each of these communities has created local funding collaboratives that are collectively investing in more than 80 sectoral workforce partnerships.

The National Fund is led by nine national investors who work closely with funders in states, regions, and communities nationwide: Annie E. Casey Foundation; the California Endowment; Ford Foundation; John S. and James L. Knight Foundation; Microsoft; The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation; The Hitachi Foundation; The Prudential Foundation; and the Walmart Foundation.

JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

Jobs for the Future

www.jff.org

Jobs for the Future develops, implements, and promotes new education and workforce strategies that help communities, states, and the nation compete in a global economy. In 200 communities in 41 states, JFF improves the pathways leading from high school to college to family-sustaining careers. Jobs for the Future is the implementation partner for the National Fund for Workforce Solutions.

About the Author

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The need has never been greater to ensure that people are productively employed—not simply in any job but in a job with a future. This is the goal of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, which is dedicated to helping employees and employers succeed in a postrecession economy. Spearheaded by leading foundations across the United States, this public-philanthropic initiative is creating, applying, and evaluating new ways to rebuild our economy by better preparing our workers.

Central to the National Fund for Workforce Solutions is the idea of anchoring workforce development in local workforce partnerships that meet the needs of both employees and employers in industry sectors that are critical to local economies. These partnerships, which form the bedrock for systemic change at the community, regional, and state levels, can include employers, community colleges, Workforce Investment Boards, and community-based organizations—and unions. While organized labor has played a small role in the public workforce development system to date, union involvement can be integral to the reemployment of the American workforce.

Unions As Partners highlights several workforce partnerships in which organized labor has played a significant role. It demonstrates why such a role should be encouraged within, and beyond, traditionally unionized industries, and suggests how policymakers and practitioners can support an expansion of that role for unions.

Within the flexible workforce partnership model, each of the stakeholders in workforce development can engage in multiple roles or settle on one role that best represents its constituent's interests. The experience of several workforce partnerships in the National Fund for Workforce Solutions points to opportunities for unions to contribute to such efforts in three major ways: as leaders of collaborative efforts; as providers of customized training and apprenticeships; and as providers of industry information. Less commonly, unions also fund workforce partnership activities and convene workers, reaching out not only to their members but to nonunion workers as well.

The nonprofit Voice and Future Fund has its roots in a 2002 strike in Boston as well as in a union's desire to improve its members' access to skills development, knowing that the right skills are fundamental to upward economic mobility. Following the strike, Service Employees International Union Local 615 and several Boston-area building owners and building maintenance contractors created a partnership focused on improving the skills of building maintenance workers and modernizing the human resources policies of employers. That partnership, which evolved into the Voice and Future Fund, has worked closely with employers on improving human resources policies and career advancement opportunities. The project has gained the ongoing commitment of building owners and maintenance contractors to providing education and advancement opportunities.

In the Philadelphia area, the District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund provides opportunities for continuing education and career advancement in the health care field to members of District 1199C and also to nonunion workers and job seekers. The union, an affiliate of the National Union of Hospital and Healthcare Employees, AFSCME, created the Training Fund through a collective bargaining agreement in the early 1970s. Originally, it was designed to assist the union's members in moving up and out of dead-end jobs and to help them keep pace with increasing technological demands. Today, the Training Fund is a workforce partnership that includes 50 major health care employers who hire graduates of programs the Training Fund supports or operates. Half of the students in the programs supported and offered by the Training Fund are union members, and half are community residents, dislocated workers, and welfare recipients. The training focuses on skills that prepare individuals in southeastern Pennsylvania and

southern New Jersey for career pathways in nursing, allied health, health information, and behavioral health.

Through Building Futures, a workforce partnership in Providence, Rhode Island, unions provide information about skills, training, and access to apprenticeships. The unions partner with nonprofit organizations to reinforce the partnerships' role in workforce development, and they are supported in this work by National Fund regional collaboratives.

Building Futures, a labor-management partnership promoting the benefits of using union contractors and their skilled union workers, runs a workforce-readiness assessment program that screens candidates for jobs in the construction industry. It then helps candidates who do well on the assessment to secure apprenticeships in a building trade. Building Futures represents the interests of both contractors and building trades unions in Rhode Island.

In Milwaukee, construction and skilled trades unions and union employers work with the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership/BIG STEP. WRTP/BIG STEP partners with many Milwaukee-area community-based organizations and counts among its partnerships the Construction Labor Management Council, which promotes union construction, advocates for a diversified and qualified workplace, and promotes apprenticeships in the construction trades. The council and WRTP/BIG STEP together identify potential apprentices, train them, and promote apprenticeships as a pathway to a good job with family-supporting wages.

Unions can be instrumental in the identification of worker training needs. With their direct access to workers, they can provide workforce partnerships with information on the skills and competencies needed to keep workers and businesses competitive. This is one goal of Denver's newly formed SkillBuild Colorado and, in particular, of one of its members, the Constructors and Designers Alliance.

Regardless of how long America's economic recovery takes, one thing is certain: people always need good jobs that pay family-supporting wages and offer opportunities for career advancement and upward economic mobility, and employers always need workers with up-to-date skills. Workforce partnerships already play a welcome role in many communities, and will continue to do so. As a mechanism for economic stimulus, they should be encouraged and supported, as should organized labor-management collaborations.

Unions As Partners concludes with suggestions that can support the growth and success of these partnerships—for the greater success of all of the stakeholders: individuals, families, employers, union members, and communities and regions.

- *Redefine Old Paradigms*. When unions and employers share goals, support the means of alignment, such as the sharing of best practices, more substantial dialogues about mutual outcomes and ways to achieve them, and the inclusion of visionary leaders who can move shared agendas forward.
- *Rethink Labor Markets*. Rather than acting through one employer at a time, union and industry sectors should look across their industries at the larger issues of skill sets, economic mobility, and career advancement ladders.
- *Expand Access to Academic Credentials*. A hallmark of many workplace-sponsored or focused training programs is the drive to ensure that participants receive academic credentials. It is no longer enough for individuals to receive training—as good as it may be—if they do not also receive academic credit or some credential that has meaning in the labor market.
- *Develop Career Pathways*. The opportunity to learn skills and increase earnings through visible and accessible career ladders can help ensure that individuals have multiple pathways to career and economic success over their working lives, and that organizations and regional industry sectors have burgeoning talent pipelines.

INTRODUCTION

One American worker in three lacks the skills needed to succeed in today's economy. Even with unemployment hovering around 10 percent, skill shortages in critical sectors present major obstacles for businesses on the path to recovery. The need has never been greater to ensure that people are productively employed—not simply in any job but in a job with a future. This is the goal of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, which is dedicated to helping employees and employers succeed in a postrecession economy. Spearheaded by leading foundations across the United States, this public-philanthropic initiative is creating, applying, and evaluating new ways to rebuild our economy by better preparing our workers.

Central to the National Fund for Workforce Solutions is the idea of anchoring workforce development in local workforce partnerships that meet the needs of both employees and employers in industry sectors that are critical to local economies. These partnerships, which form the bedrock for systemic change at the community, regional, and state levels, can include employers, community colleges, Workforce Investment Boards, and community-based organizations—and unions.

While organized labor has played a small role in the public workforce development system to date, union involvement can be integral to the reemployment of the American workforce. President Obama has signed executive orders encouraging a critical place for organized labor in the economic recovery, and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which introduced $3.9 billion into the public workforce development system, provides significant funding for workforce partnerships, especially those with union involvement. In December 2009, 135 leaders from every sector of the economy—including labor—gathered at the White House for a jobs summit to discuss how to put America back to work.

Unions As Partners highlights several workforce partnerships in which organized labor plays a significant role. It demonstrates why such a role should be encouraged within, and beyond, traditionally unionized industries, and suggests how policymakers and practitioners can support an expansion of that role.

WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIPS AND THE ROLE OF UNIONS

For workers and their families, the difference between union and nonunion wages can mean the difference between poverty and moving into the middle class, which is a primary goal of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. In 2004, for example, median weekly earnings for union construction workers were $893 compared with $588 for nonunion workers; in service occupations, union workers earned $655 per week compared with $389 for nonunion workers.[1] In 2008, 85 percent of union workers in private industry had access to retirement benefits versus 59 percent for nonunion workers; 88 percent of union workers had access to medical care benefits versus 69 percent of nonunion workers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2008).

Such data provide a basis for union participation in workforce partnerships, an increasingly successful mechanism for extending the reach and success of efforts that seek to bring more Americans into good jobs that pay family-supporting wages and offer opportunities for career advancement. Workforce partnerships organize key stakeholders and local resources within regional industry sectors or occupational clusters to help workers gain the skills they need and to give employers access to the skilled labor they require. At their core, effective workforce partnerships are results-driven, entrepreneurial, and worthy of trust from both employers and workers.

Within the workforce partnership model, each of the stakeholders in workforce development can engage in multiple roles or settle on one role that best represents its constituents' interests. Certainly, some roles are specific—employers will continue to be employers and community colleges will remain education providers. However, too few workforce partnerships make connections with one key stakeholder: organized labor, which can bring resources for both advancing workers and strengthening business competitiveness.

The experience of several workforce partnerships in the National Fund for Workforce Solutions points to opportunities for unions to contribute to such efforts in three major ways: as leaders of collaborative efforts; as providers of customized training and apprenticeships; and as providers of industry information. Less commonly, unions also fund workforce partnership activities and convene workers, reaching out not only to their members but to nonunion workers as well.

Collaboration Leaders: The Voice and Future Fund

Unions have connections with both employers and employees, positioning them to identify opportunities for training, convene the stakeholders in workforce advancement, reach out to businesses, and act as champions of workforce partnerships. Unions have experience collaborating with diverse partners, based on their capacity to galvanize and organize workers, understand their skill needs, and represent their interests to employers and employer organizations. Also, they offer an institutionalized structure useful for workforce partnerships: some unions now have nonprofit affiliates for holding, managing, and leveraging training funds.

The Voice and Future Fund in Boston, a workforce partnership in the National Fund for Workforce Solutions network, illustrates the partnership role of unions, as does Pennsylvania's Keystone Development Partnership (*see box on next page*).

The nonprofit Voice and Future Fund has its roots in a contentious 2002 strike, as well as in a union's desire to improve its members' access to skills development, knowing that the right skills are fundamental to upward economic mobility. Following the strike, Service Employees International Union Local 615 and several Boston-area building owners and building maintenance contractors created a partnership focused

on improving the skills of building maintenance workers and modernizing the human resources policies of employers. This innovative partnership, which has instituted sustainable career pathways in the building services industry, provides the union with a vehicle for improving worker access to training, changing training standards, and influencing the labor market toward better outcomes for building service workers generally.

In 2004, SEIU Local 615 institutionalized this effort by creating the nonprofit Voice and Future Fund to support training that increases career mobility and opens up opportunities for building janitors to advance by changing the industry dynamic of skills, training, and wage compensation. Also in 2004, VFF received a grant from SkillWorks, now a regional collaborative in the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, to start a workforce partnership.[2] VFF instituted a career pathways model of education, training, and career coaching, bringing together local community-based organizations, a technical vocational high school, Boston Adult Education and Community Services, the Boston Private Industry Council, and several employers of building janitors, such as Harvard University, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, and the John Hancock Tower.

VFF staff work closely with employers on improving human resources policies and career advancement opportunities, and the project has gained the ongoing commitment of building owners and maintenance contractors to providing education and advancement opportunities. Building owners and maintenance contractors have taken on responsibility for "high road" employment policies and practices for their building services workers. The project has created not only upward mobility for building maintenance workers but also a shared vision for living-wage jobs among the city's employers, university leaders, contractors, and the union. The VFF training fund has changed Boston's building services industry, and the partners in it have learned that by working together they can change the dynamics of the local labor market, inducing workers to obtain training and employers to pay better wages for those trained workers (Scott 2007).

Providers of Customized Training: District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund

Workforce partnerships often include or link to many training providers whose expertise they can call upon: community and technical colleges, proprietary and trade schools, and adult education agencies and organizations. In addition, unions can provide strategically targeted and customized training to both businesses and individuals, based on analyzing skill gaps and then offering analyses, apprenticeships, and mentorships that use union members or retired workers as curriculum advisors and teachers. Training can take place at union learning centers or on the job, and unions can also link traditional training institutions to both employers and employees, describing the skill needs of specific unionized occupations to those institutions and supplying training curricula.

One advantage to having unions provide training is their access to on-the-ground skills and experience among their members. Union members "get" the working environment because they are workers as well as training providers. Moreover, they understand how the skills they are teaching are used in the workplace.

STATEWIDE COLLABORATION: PENNSYLVANIA'S KEYSTONE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP

Joint decision making and problem solving is the foundation of the nonprofit Keystone Development Partnership. Through its affiliation with the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO and access to a statewide network of union representatives, KDP acts as a third-party consultant in the establishment of joint labor-management partnerships. It then helps these partnerships identify and respond to training needs. Union partners include the Amalgamated Transit Union, Transport Workers Union, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Utility Workers of America, United Auto Workers, United Steel Workers Union, Teamsters, International Association of Machinists, and UNITE HERE. Other partners include the Employment Skills Center, a community-based organization that provides Adult Basic Education, employability skills training, and technical training; and the Keystone Research Center, a policy development and research institute, which provides technical assistance to the partnership.

Since 2001, KDP has created statewide partnerships in several industries, with strong commitments from employers and unions to these efforts. The first was the Transit Career Ladder Partnership, a statewide effort to train public-transit workers. KDP replicated this in the utilities industry, focusing on creating preemployment training and career ladders, from entry-level smart-grid workers to line technicians. This partnership was funded by a grant from the Pennsylvania Fund for Workforce Solutions, a state affiliate of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. Other partnerships have followed in manufacturing and in the hotel, trucking, and warehouse industries.

In the Philadelphia area, the District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund provides opportunities for continuing education and career advancement in the health care field to members of District 1199C and also to nonunion workers and job seekers. The union, an affiliate of the National Union of Hospital and Healthcare Employees, AFSCME, created the Training Fund through a collective bargaining agreement in the early 1970s. Originally, it was designed to help union members move up and out of dead-end jobs and keep pace with increasing technological demands. Today, the Training Fund is a workforce partnership that includes 50 major health care employers who hire graduates of programs the Training Fund supports or offers.

The Training Fund partners with employers to provide customized, competency-based education programs at workplaces or at District 1199C's learning center. Half of the students in these programs are union members and half are community residents, dislocated workers, and welfare recipients. The training focuses on portable skills that prepare individuals in southeastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey for career pathways in nursing, allied health, health information, and behavioral health.

Because most health care and human services employers do not invest the time or other resources needed to develop full-service educational programs, this workforce partnership serves two customers: employers and employees. The model succeeds because District 1199C staff think of their work with employers as relationship building. They start by looking at businesses holistically and ensuring that all employees (union and nonunion) have training opportunities that benefit the entire organization. Each small step is done well and adds value for the employer, and every new program builds on previous experiences. In this way, the partnership grows organically and a culture of learning and trust develops.

The District 1199C Training Fund now receives support from the Job Opportunity Investment Network, a National Fund for Workforce Solutions regional collaborative. JOIN goals include enhancing the advancement prospects of low-skilled adults and creating career pathways and advancement opportunities. District 1199C's partnership model provides an effective method for helping JOIN identify the talent shortages in the region's hospitals, nursing homes, and independent-living facilities and for preparing entry-level workers for the middle-skill jobs of those organizations.

Providers of Apprenticeships: Building Futures and Skill Up Rhode Island

Unions have a long history of creating and offering apprenticeships, although participation declined for many years. Now apprenticeships are regaining popularity in the traditional industries of construction, manufacturing, and the skilled trades as employers and workers alike look for reliable skill-enhancement pathways that lead to portable credentials (U.S. Department of Labor 2008). At the same time, new apprenticeship programs are also being implemented in health care, service, and other "nontraditional" sectors.

In several workforce partnerships affiliated with the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, unions provide information about skills, training, and access to apprenticeships.

In Providence, Rhode Island, the workforce-readiness assessment program of Building Futures screens candidates for jobs in construction. Building Futures, which also helps candidates who do well on the assessment to secure apprenticeships in a building trade, is a labor-management partnership that promotes the benefits of using union contractors and their skilled union workers. It represents the interests of both contractors and building trades unions in Rhode Island.

Building Futures is a nonprofit partnership of Providence Plan/Build Rhode Island/YouthBuild and Skill Up Rhode Island, a regional collaborative of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. YouthBuild designs programs to connect residents of low-income urban communities with apprenticeship opportunities. Skill Up Rhode Island, led by the United Way of Rhode Island, invests in the development and enhancement of workforce partnerships to meet the needs of low-skilled adults and the employers who hire them. Through these ties, Building Futures helps the construction industry meet its needs for a skilled workforce in a coordinated, cost-efficient manner. Building Futures creates and manages talent pipelines from low-income communities to construction careers through apprenticeships, while Skill Up Rhode Island aligns multiple sources of funding for this partnership (and others) with the Rhode Island Department of Education, Governor's Workforce Board Industry Partnerships, the Rhode Island Department of Workforce Development, and Making Connections Providence.

In Milwaukee, construction and skilled-trades unions and union employers work with the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership/BIG STEP. WRTP/BIG STEP also partners with many Milwaukee-area community-based organizations, as well as with the Construction Labor Management Council, which promotes union construction, advocates for a diversified and qualified workplace, and promotes apprenticeship in the

construction trades. CLMC and WRTP/BIG STEP together identify candidates for apprenticeships, train them, and promote apprenticeships as a pathway to good jobs with family-supporting wages.

WRTP/BIG STEP receives funding from the Milwaukee Area Workforce Funding Alliance, a regional collaborative of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. The alliance's goals are to strengthen and expand the regional workforce system, and its support of WRTP/BIG STEP/CLMC provides opportunities for unions and the construction industry to collaboratively find, train, and hire skilled workers. Further, WRTP/BIG STEP's outreach capacity allows for greater participation in training and apprenticeships by the community's disadvantaged populations.

Providers of Industry Information: SkillBuild Colorado and the Constructors and Designers Alliance

Unions can be an instrumental ally in identifying worker training needs. With their direct access to workers, they can provide workforce partnerships with information on the skills and competencies needed to keep workers and businesses competitive. This is one goal of SkillBuild Colorado, a recently formed collective of philanthropy, business, economic, and workforce development entities with funding authority in the foothills communities that comprise the Denver metropolitan area. SkillBuild plans to advance low-wage workers into higher-paying jobs and to provide employers with skilled workers in the construction and skilled trades and health care sectors.

SkillBuild involves unions mainly through the Constructors and Designers Alliance, which brings together 24 construction associations and also includes the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the pipe-fitters and steam-fitters unions, and other unions. Some of the employers in the CDA are unionized, and a CDA task force that includes union members advises SkillBuild, bringing both union and nonunion perspectives to their common challenges in workforce development.

While only 10 percent of Colorado construction firms are unionized, they play a valuable role in helping to gather data and communicate the industry's workforce needs. CDA works with unions to understand what the employers' skill needs are. CDA distributes that information throughout its membership—union and nonunion shops. Because all Coloradan construction firms can apply to the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship to provide certified apprenticeship programs, skill needs across all Colorado construction firms can be met in an aligned and coordinated fashion, whether firms are union or not.

UNIONS AS WORKER FUNDERS AND CONVENERS

Unions sometimes create nonprofit organizations that support training and that also raise funds for grants, scholarships, or other types of education funding for union (and even nonunion) workers. These funds can be combined with other training support provided by employers, by foundations, and through the public workforce system to help sustain workforce partnerships and reach a wide array of constituents.

In Boston, the Voice and Future Fund, initiated by Service Employees International Union Local 615, has created a sustainable industry education and training fund similar to counterparts in Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago. All of these labor-management partnerships have received grants that help fund workforce partnerships. Similarly, in Pennsylvania SEIU established the Multi-Employer Training & Education Fund. This fund is a statewide joint effort of SEIU Healthcare Pennsylvania and employers to upgrade the skills of health care workers and improve the quality of patient care. Originally focused on nursing-home workers, the fund is expanding to offer training and other advancement supports to hospital workers as well. Another example is the Southwest Carpenters Training Fund, which provides lifelong learning opportunities for members of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters.

When reaching out to workers, unions have access not only to their members but also to extensive communication mechanisms that can target nonunion members who wish to learn more about industry career ladders and training and development opportunities. For example, the Keystone Development Partnership reaches out to both union and nonunion workforces across Pennsylvania with messages about the importance and availability of training and career ladders. District 1199C does the same through its Training and Upgrading Fund.

MUTUAL BENEFITS

On many issues of common concern, employers and unions would appear to be potential and natural partners. Such basic needs as the building of talent pipelines (apprenticeships), credentialing (identifying common skills needed for jobs), and increasing business competitiveness by developing the skills of new and incumbent workers (workplace-based training) all highlight the value of labor-management partnerships. And today's economic environment essentially forces them to march to the drumbeat of competitiveness and challenges them to find solutions to the continued demand for skilled workers. More than 12 million adults without a high school credential are in the labor force, but about twice as many jobs will require a postsecondary credential or college degree over the next decade.[3] Employers and unions can work together to achieve a nation filled with skilled workers in family-supporting jobs.

Successful labor-management relationships, using the model of workforce partnerships, leverage the strengths each partner brings to the table.

All successful workforce partnerships build upon shared values, but there are unique elements to partnerships that include organized labor. Specifically, union partners strengthen the workers' voice in the training planning process. Often, decisions about workforce training are made at the top of an organization, with little involvement by employees beyond a test of their knowledge, a skills test, or a review of their job performance. The strong voice of labor in a labor-management workforce planning council or team ensures that workers have a say in their own development. For employers, this enhances employee buy-in to training, and the training can be more

TIPS FOR BUILDING LABOR-MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIPS

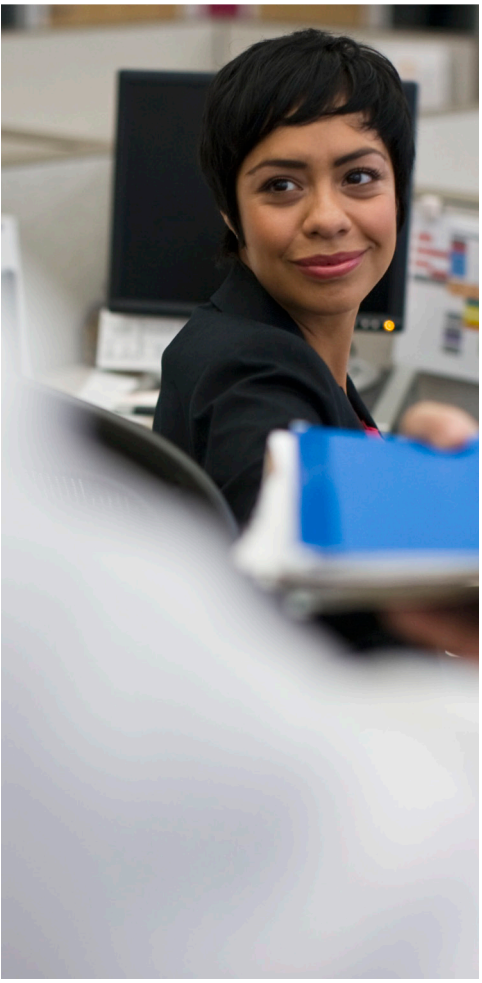
While each labor-management partnership is unique, their effectiveness is always enhanced when they reflect certain common elements and approaches, including an understanding of the different cultures of unions and businesses. The experience of successful labor-management partnerships for workforce development, particularly to create and implement joint training programs, suggests these guidelines for achieving that understanding:

- A partnership is a long-term relationship. Start small, create value, build on successes, and develop relationships at every level—from frontline workers to managers to the CEO.
- Build collaboration around common goals and work toward solutions that benefit everyone. Joint decision making develops trust and an understanding of partners' needs.
- Quality is more important than quantity. A partnership should not start with more employer partners than it can serve. If a collaboration serves a few employers well, others will want to join.
- Everyone leaves their "colors" at the door and embraces a diverse set of partners who can offer many perspectives. Recognize the passionate commitment of employers and the unions to shared goals, and acknowledge it when it comes time to compromise.
- A strong leader and agreed-upon group norms help keep collaborations from fractionalizing.

The AFL-CIO Working for America Institute, a union-sponsored nonprofit dedicated to creating good jobs and building strong communities, offers a checklist for starting joint training programs. It is available at: www.workingforamerica.org/toolkit/checklist1.asp.

directed and focused. For workers, skills can be recognized, acknowledged, and interwoven with employers' business strategies and goals. Thus, a continuum of skill development and wage progression can be instituted within the workplace, facilitated by workers' knowledge and encouraging the continuous acquisition of new knowledge, skills, and abilities.

No less important is how the voice of labor can enhance standards that benefit everyone within an industry, and how unions can catalyze investments in education and training. In Boston, for example, SEIU Local 615 and the Voice and Future Fund have sought to drive basic change in the functioning of the labor market for building services. Using VFF's power to focus attention on the problem and to advocate for solutions, SEIU Local 615 created opportunities for educational access, changed skill standards for the industry, and changed the Boston-area labor market for building services workers.



EXPANDING UNION INVOLVEMENT IN WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIPS

Regardless of how long economic recovery takes, two things are certain: Americans always need good jobs with family-supporting wages, with opportunities for career advancement and upward economic mobility; and employers always need workers with up-to-date skills. Workforce partnerships play a welcome role in many communities, and will continue to do so. As a mechanism for stimulating the economy, they should be encouraged and supported, as should organized labor-management collaborations.

A promising aspect of successful labor-management partnerships is the redefinition of the business-union relationship when training concerns are considered separately from collaborative bargaining. The Keystone Development Partnership recommends separating the "training issue" from the "grievances issue," so that partnerships can build an infrastructure based on shared goals—for example, a trained workforce. As each stakeholder in workforce development comes to better understand the others, they can trust that all sides are working toward the same ends. As trust and understanding grow, these collaborations can grow as well. And because nonunion workers often receive the same training that union workers do, benefits will also accrue to the nonorganized workforce and their employers, who will have, ultimately, a stronger pool of skilled workers upon which to call.

Conversely, as with District 1199C and the Training and Upgrading Fund, by integrating education and training into collective bargaining, unions may find opportunities to modernize industry needs for skilled workers while also securing higher wages and strong career pathways to meet those upgraded demands. This can result in an "ecosystem" of skilled workers, livable wages, education and training, economic and career mobility, and more competitive businesses within (and perhaps across) industry sectors.

There is no one way to achieve success in a labor-management workforce partnership. Thus, the most important advice may be that partnerships must seek to understand the needs of each partner; listen honestly and with good intentions; be flexible in conception, implementation and operation; and seek to learn, turning "lessons learned" into new strategies.

Here then, are suggested principles for supporting the growth of these partnerships for the greater success of all stakeholders—individuals, families, employers, union members, and communities and regions.

Redefine old paradigms. Unions and employers may not always be at odds in their objectives, and more often than not they share goals and a passionate devotion to their industries. It is time to support the means of alignment, such as the sharing of best practices, more substantial dialogue about mutual outcomes and ways to achieve them, and the inclusion of visionary leaders who can move shared agendas forward.

Rethink labor markets. Rather than acting through individual employers, unions should look across their industries at the larger issues of skill sets, economic mobility, and career advancement. This is not to say that some models of labor-management partnerships, such as the multiple union/one employer model or the multiple employer/one union model, are not satisfactory—they can be. However, they may not be sufficient if communities, regions, and states are to bring about broad, deep changes to state economies and labor markets. Additionally, within these labor markets, the reach of workforce partnerships should extend beyond the already employed to encompass new recruits and job seekers. Traditionally, unions have focused on incumbent workers; they may want to reach out to job seekers to help them connect to the labor market in meaningful ways through pre-apprenticeships or other types of training.

Expand access to academic credentials. A hallmark of many workplace-sponsored or -focused training programs is the drive to ensure that participants earn academic credentials. It is no longer enough for individuals to receive training—as good as it may be—if they do not also come away with academic credit or some credential that has meaning in the labor market. The National Labor College, which offers labor education to all union members, credentials coursework that can be used at any postsecondary education institution in any state for the purpose of providing academic credits. More labor-management workforce partnerships should take advantage of this credentialing opportunity to ensure that workers earn academic credit when they receive training.

Develop career pathways. The opportunity to learn skills and increase earnings through visible and accessible career ladders can help ensure that individuals have multiple pathways to career and economic success throughout their working lives, and that organizations and regional industry sectors have burgeoning talent pipelines. From the front line to the back office, unions and management must work together to understand how work gets done; what skills are needed; the role that workers can play not only in their jobs but in the success of the organization or industry; and how this can be supported and compensated as knowledge, skills, and abilities mature.

Unions can be contributing partners in organizational development and systemic improvement, but they must think of themselves as part of the larger organization, not just as members of unions. Management can help facilitate this mindset. Indeed, in a time of shrinking resources, new partners and new thinking should be encouraged and welcomed by all.

APPENDIX: SELECTED WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIPS WITH STRONG UNION INVOLVEMENT

ORGANIZING ENTITY	SECTOR FOCUS	FINANCING	PARTNERS IN COLLABORATION	PARTICIPANTS	CAREER ADVANCEMENT ACTIVITIES
BOSTON					
Voice and Future Fund (nonprofit), Building Services Career Path Project	Building services	Through SkillWorks: 17 local and national foundations; City of Boston; State of Massachusetts	Employers and building owners (e.g., One Source, Unicco, Acme Building Services, American Cleaning Company, AM-PM Cleaning Corporation, MBTA, State Street Towers) SEIU local 615 Operating Engineers local 877 Adult education providers (e.g., Boston Adult Education and Community Services, Madison Park Technical Vocational High School) Community-based organizations (e.g., Jewish Vocational Services, Asian American Civic Association)	Disadvantaged populations Immigrants Incumbent Workers	Occupational skills Career coaching Career pathway development in companies English as a Second Language GED and postsecondary preparation

ORGANIZING ENTITY	SECTOR FOCUS	FINANCING	PARTNERS IN COLLABORATION	PARTICIPANTS	CAREER ADVANCEMENT ACTIVITIES
DENVER					
SkillBuild Colorado	Construction Skilled Trades	Mile High United Way Metro Denver WIRED Rose Community Foundation State Department of Labor & Employment Denver Office of Economic Development—Workforce Development Colorado Workforce Development Council Colorado Constructors and Designers Alliance Pikes Peak and Jefferson County Workforce Centers Workforce Board of Metro Denver Denver Health	30+ industry and workforce organizations engaged (but involvement not formalized), including Community College of Denver, Emily Griffith Opportunity School, Regional Transportation District, Women's Foundation, and MiCasa	Disadvantaged populations Immigrants Women and other nontraditional workers in areas such as construction	Apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship programs Bridge programs On-the-job training

ORGANIZING ENTITY	SECTOR FOCUS	FINANCING	PARTNERS IN COLLABORATION	PARTICIPANTS	CAREER ADVANCEMENT ACTIVITIES
MILWAUKEE					
Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership (nonprofit)	Construction Manufacturing	Local and national philanthropies (e.g., Helen Bader, Annie E. Casey, Charles Stewart Mott, Greater Milwaukee, and Harley-Davidson foundations) Governor's Council on Workforce Development Wisconsin Department of Transportation Milwaukee Sewerage District Milwaukee Public Schools WIA Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) Employers	Unions (e.g., AFL-CIO, USW Local 9040, IA, Local 908, IAM Local 1845) Community-based organizations Employers Public Workforce System (WIBs) Manufacturing Extension Partnership	Incumbent workers Disadvantaged populations	Skill gap analyses Organizational audits for human resources policies and practices Training programs Work readiness skills

ORGANIZING ENTITY	SECTOR FOCUS	FINANCING	PARTNERS IN COLLABORATION	PARTICIPANTS	CAREER ADVANCEMENT ACTIVITIES
PENNSYLVANIA					
Keystone Development Partnership (nonprofit)	Cross-sector skilled trades	Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry Unions Employers Federal grants WIA	Union partners include the Amalgamated Transit Union, Transport Workers Union, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Utility Workers of America, United Auto Workers, United Steel Workers Union, Teamsters, International Association of Machinists, and UNITE HERE CareerLink (One-Stop Career Centers) Employers Educators and other training providers Nonunion associations	Incumbent workers New workers	Skill gap analyses Organizational audits to modernize human resources policies and practices Customized training programs Apprenticeships Mentoring

ORGANIZING ENTITY	SECTOR FOCUS	FINANCING	PARTNERS IN COLLABORATION	PARTICIPANTS	CAREER ADVANCEMENT ACTIVITIES
PHILADELPHIA					
1199C Training and Upgrading Fund (union training fund)	Health care	National Union of Hospital and Health-care Employees, AFL-CIO Employers Philanthropies (e.g., Robert Woods Johnson and Hitachi foundations)	Health care employers National Union of Hospital and Health-care Employees, AFL-CIO	Union and nonunion workers Disadvantaged populations Dislocated workers Welfare to Work recipients	GED and postsecondary preparation Occupational skills Practical nursing internships English as a Second Language Work-readiness skills Scholarships and educational grants

ORGANIZING ENTITY	SECTOR FOCUS	FINANCING	PARTNERS IN COLLABORATION	PARTICIPANTS	CAREER ADVANCEMENT ACTIVITIES
RHODE ISLAND					
Providence Plan/Skill Up Rhode Island (nonprofit)—Building Futures Construction Collaborative	Construction	United Way of Rhode Island Governors Workforce Board Employers Industry Skills Development Initiative Rhode Island Department of Education Philanthropy (e.g., Rhode Island Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation)	United Way of Rhode Island Building Trades Council Build Rhode Island City of Providence 17 unions and contractors Community-based organizations (e.g., Dorcas Place, Genesis Center, Family Life Center of Rhode Island)	Disadvantaged populations Immigrants	Work-readiness skills Neighborhood pipelines Apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship programs English as a Second Language GED and postsecondary preparation

ENDNOTES

[1] See: www.workinglife.org/wiki/index.php?page=Union+vs.+Nonunion%3A+Wages+(2004).

[2] SkillWorks is a multiyear initiative to improve workforce development in Boston and in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. SkillWorks brings together philanthropy, government, community organizations, and employers to address the twin goals of helping low-income individuals to attain family-supporting jobs and businesses to find skilled workers. Phase I (2003-2008) invested $15 million to help more than 3,000 workers receive skills training, with hundreds entering the workforce or receiving raises and promotions.

[3] See Dohm & Shniper (2007), table 5. The Bureau of Labor Statistics characterizes a college degree to include two-year, four-year, and graduate diplomas. The BLS describes a postsecondary credential as the outcome of a vocational program lasting from a few weeks to more than one year, leading to a certificate or other award but not a degree.

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NATIONAL INVESTORS

The national investors provide seed money—$23 million in commitments to date—to regions for building local approaches to job training and career development. The investors also support a comprehensive evaluation of initiative activities taking place across the country, technical assistance for local partnerships, and a dynamic "national learning community" that helps those partnerships share best practices and solve problems together.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Ford Foundation

The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation

The Hitachi Foundation

U.S. Department of Labor

John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Microsoft Corporation

The Prudential Foundation

The Walmart Foundation

NATIONAL PARTNERS

Two national partners provide direct support to the regional collaboratives and workforce partnerships:

JOBS FOR THE FUTURE develops and leads the National Fund peer-learning strategies, coordinates technical assistance to the regional collaboratives and local partnerships, oversees the national evaluation, and provides fiscal and grants management.

THE COUNCIL ON FOUNDATIONS provides technical assistance and support to the National Fund's regional funders, and uses its networks and leadership to engage the philanthropic community and public policymakers in efforts to develop a skilled workforce.

WWW.NFWSOLUTIONS.ORG

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