



# Career Ladders

A Guidebook for Workforce  
Intermediaries

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Prepared for Workforce Innovation Networks—WINs*

**PART OF A SERIES ON ENGAGING  
EMPLOYERS IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**



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## Workforce Innovation Networks—WINs

WINs, a collaboration of Jobs for the Future, the Center for Workforce Preparation of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Center for Workforce Success of the National Association of Manufacturers, addresses the workforce development needs of businesses and communities. Launched in 1997, WINs works with local employer organizations across the country that are on the cutting-edge of workforce development, testing the proposition that they can play a unique intermediary role in achieving a dual goal:

- ★ Improving the economic prospects of disadvantaged job-seekers and workers; and
- ★ Meeting the needs of their member firms for employees at the entry-level and above.

### The Role of Employers in Workforce Development

A basic principle of WINs is that efforts to help individuals succeed must provide education and training that meets employer needs for knowledge and high skills. Similarly, individuals—particularly those with low education and skill levels—will not succeed in gaining family-sustaining employment unless they gain the skills necessary to perform in today's complex work environment.

Yet the top challenge faced by the people and organizations whose mission is to serve either constituency—job seekers or employers—is the challenge of engaging effectively with employers. For example, WINs asked a group of workforce development professionals, “What is the primary workforce development challenge facing your community?” Half the respondents answered, “Employers are not connected to the system.” WINs then asked, “What is the biggest challenge you face in implementing the Workforce Investment Act?” Over 40 percent of respondents said, “Engaging employers.”

Jobs for the Future has prepared a series of resources on meeting the challenge of engaging employers in workforce development. These include:

- ★ *Career Ladders: A Guidebook for Workforce Intermediaries*
- ★ *Employer-Led Organizations and Career Ladders*
- ★ *From Stakeholders to Partners: Organizing Community Partnerships for Workforce Development*
- ★ *High-Leverage Governance Strategies for Workforce Development Systems*
- ★ *Hiring, Retaining, and Advancing Front-Line Workers: A Guide to Successful Human Resources Practices*
- ★ *Mentoring*
- ★ *Working Together on Worker Training*



## Career Ladders

### A Guidebook for Workforce Intermediaries

*Prepared for Workforce Innovation Networks—WINs*

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## INTRODUCTION

**E**mployers consistently rank recruiting and retaining skilled workers as two of their top human resources priorities. At the same time, low-wage, low-skilled individuals struggle to find avenues out of occupations that offer little opportunity for advancement and into those that improve their skills, pay a family-sustaining wage, and offer upward mobility.

Career ladders are a solution to this overlapping labor market problem: the need for better ways to recruit, retain, and advance workers. The term career ladders refers to a set of occupations that are linked together by common or complementary skills; these linkages provide workers with opportunities to advance, and they expand the recruitment opportunities for employers. Career ladders bring order to an often chaotic labor market with the strategic decision to satisfy both an employer's need for skilled labor and a worker's need to advance.

Employers' demand for skilled workers pulls low-income individuals up from low-wage jobs through the pathways created by the career ladder. As a result, career ladders are:

- For employers, an effective source of employees; and
- For workers, a vehicle to increase opportunities to advance to better jobs.

Career ladders group together employers whose skill requirements for a range of occupations can be met with skills that potential workers acquire in previous jobs and training. Career ladders can even operate within a single firm, linking occupations based on similarities in skill requirements across different job levels. In either case, career ladders focus on the jobs that employers have the most trouble filling as they seek to stay competitive: jobs with high turnover, those in which the demand for new

workers is great, and those that are rapidly growing in demand. The career ladder provides a road map for efficient, effective hiring by identifying the skills those jobs require, arranging the jobs in steps up which workers advance, and sourcing workers to employers based on the skills they have learned, at least in part, in their previous jobs.

Career ladders help solve recruitment problems, reduce turnover, and increase productivity. By integrating "dead-end" occupations into a sequence that leads to high-wage occupations, employers at the lower rungs of career ladders benefit from higher retention rates for participating workers. Because workers gain the skills employers need, employers can capitalize on skills acquired at lower-skill levels of employment or through training that targets their requirements.

Career ladders are not naturally occurring phenomena, however. They require conscious construction and competent management. Therefore, a *workforce intermediary* sits at the center of many successful career ladders, directing the flow of labor demand and supply among participating firms and workers. These intermediaries, despite varying institutional origins, programmatic priorities, and long-term ambitions, share several important characteristics. In particular, they improve local and regional labor markets by pursuing two broad sets of functions:

- *Organizing and planning:* Workforce intermediaries mobilize the stakeholders in the labor market—including employers, individual workers, government



officials, and education, training, and other service providers—to benefit employers and low-income workers.

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

## ■ Using this Guide

*Career Ladders: A Guidebook for Workforce Intermediaries* provides information on planning, developing, operating, and expanding the role of these invaluable organizations in career ladders. The guide is intended for use by program developers on the staff of workforce intermediaries leading or organizing career ladders.

The guidebook is designed for organizations that are new to career ladders as well as for those that have begun developing and implementing their own initiatives. For organizations just beginning to consider developing career ladders, the guide is a comprehensive introduction, as well as a stage-by-stage approach for program development and implementation. For organizations familiar with career ladders or other workforce development programs, this guide serves as a resource on in-depth information and strategies.

The guide is divided into three sections, plus a compendium of resources for program development and implementation.

Section I, *The Fundamentals of Career Ladders*, defines key terms, details the value and characteristics of career ladders, and outlines the alternatives for leadership in their development.

Section II, *Stages of Program Development and Implementation*, explains the three stages in the process of developing and implementing career ladders: Self-Assessment and Planning, Partnership Building and Program Development, and Program Operation, Improvement, and Expansion.

Section III, *Examples of Career Ladders*, profiles successful programs from around the country, with brief case studies of each type.

Available on line or on a CD-ROM are *Career Ladder Resources*, with additional information on each of the content areas covered by the guide. These resources also highlight key areas for further research for the three development and implementation stages.

Section I grounds program developers in the basics of

the career ladder model. How readers approach the remaining sections depends upon current organizational capacity for developing, and experience with, career ladders and similar initiatives. For example, organizations with efforts under development may find the content in the *Assessment and Planning* stage familiar and less immediately relevant than the information contained in the other stages. Wherever you begin, the guide provides access to research, process-related information, and program development resources, as well as helpful tips, tools, and guidelines.

This guidebook is the result of an analysis of national best practices on career ladders, summarizing lessons learned from innovative work across the country. Of particular importance were the experiences of San Francisco Works, the Greater Cleveland Growth Association, and Workforce Connections—three test sites for the draft of this guidebook as part of Workforce Innovation Networks (WINs). Also included in the research were interviews with practitioners and reports on the varied and growing number of models that seek to accomplish the fundamental objectives of career ladders: building on skills and linking them to occupations in high demand.

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## SECTION I

### THE FUNDAMENTALS OF CAREER LADDERS

**Career ladders offer multiple avenues for advancement into family-sustaining, skilled occupations.**

*Career ladders benefit employers:* they provide a pipeline to workers who have knowledge and skills that are in high demand. Participating employers offering high wages and skilled positions gain access to workers currently in occupations requiring lower levels of skill and paying lower wages. Employers with lower-skilled, lower-paying job openings become more attractive to potential employees because career ladders improve access to higher-paying jobs.

*Career ladders benefit workers:* they offer multiple avenues for advancement into family-sustaining, skilled occupations. By identifying the skill-based links between seemingly dissimilar occupations, career ladders link workers to a variety of advancement opportunities. They also help to clarify how skills developed even in entry-level occupations can become a foundation for careers.

Employers and workers both benefit because the providers of support services and education and training—who are frequently partners in the career ladder—assist in overcoming barriers to retention and advancement.

Career ladders leverage the core competencies of all of these partners to more efficiently address regional workforce development needs.

#### Characteristics of Leading Career Ladders

The most successful career ladders:

- Identify avenues of advancement for workers within local labor markets by matching the skills acquired at one level of employment or education and training with the skills required by higher levels of employment;
- Help participating employers identify potential candidates for employment;
- Clarify the skill needs of employers to exert an employer-driven influence on the training efforts of workforce development systems; and
- Address the needs of workers for pre- and post-employment training by utilizing a range of educational options, from on-the-job training to contracted training from local providers.

Beyond these common elements, career ladders vary in important ways, including:

- The occupations and number of occupational tiers they include;
- How individuals get to the “first rung”;
- The extent to which employers modify human resource practices;
- The range of workforce development services offered; and
- The organization responsible for operating the career ladder.

#### What Workforce Intermediaries Bring to Career Ladders

Central to all the models described in this guide is an organizing entity that can, at a minimum, oversee the initiative. The same organization may also manage day-to-day operations, including the placement and advancement of workers and the use of information regarding skill requirements throughout a career ladder.

Workforce intermediaries often play a pivotal role in creating, implementing, and leading career ladders by pursuing a “dual-customer” approach: they serve businesses looking for qualified workers, and they serve job-seekers and workers looking to advance their careers.

Workforce intermediaries facilitate the success of career ladders by performing two sets of vital functions:

- *Organizing and planning:* Workforce intermediaries mobilize the stakeholders in the labor market—including employers, individual workers, government officials, and education, training, and other service providers—to benefit employers and low-income workers.
- *Providing or brokering services:* Workforce intermediaries ensure that low-income job seekers, and the employers who hire them, have access to job-matching, training, support, and other services.

Through these functions, workforce intermediaries reduce turnover and increase economic mobility for workers by assuring continued support and opportunities to upgrade skills. With innovative approaches and solutions to workforce problems, they improve outcomes for firms and their workers by catalyzing improvements in public systems and business employment practices.

#### Who Operates Workforce Intermediaries

Employer organizations, labor-management partnerships, community colleges, One-Stop Career Centers, community-based organizations, and for-profit firms all can function as intermediaries that operate career ladders. The descriptions below highlight:

- The advantages that each type of organization brings to a career ladder initiative; and
- The benefits to the intermediary from operating a career ladder initiative.

## **EMPLOYER ORGANIZATIONS**

Employer organizations, such as Chambers of Commerce or industry associations, provide their member firms with a range of services. Increasingly, they are extending the range to workforce development assistance—including taking on the role of workforce intermediaries.

Whether by offering workforce development services directly, brokering them with third parties, or aggregating the demand for services in order to lobby for their provision, employer organizations are highly valued by their members. Indeed, some already have developed career ladders to fit the needs of their members and the resources available locally. As their experience proves, an employer organization can serve as a linchpin in a career ladder by convening employers, defining and articulating their skill needs, and meeting their workforce needs through brokering the services of community-based providers of training and support services.

The scope of activities taken on by a particular employer organization varies. Depending upon each organization's capacity, it ranges from serving in a coordinating role to providing services, to managing the career ladder.

In developing a career ladder, an employer organization leverages its core competencies in workforce development:

- Because an employer organization is viewed as a trusted resource by its employer members, undertakes activities connected to their businesses, and ultimately depends upon them to stay in business, member companies are more likely to respond to requests for proprietary information. Career ladders require employers to identify their common workforce training needs; employer organizations are likely to have the legitimacy, relationships, and working systems to assist them in doing so. They use this information to match the skill requirements of firms with the skills acquired by workers in other member firms or education and training programs.
- Because the members of an employer organization trust it as a source of information and services, it is an excellent channel to market a career ladder model, bring members together as customers, and support their participation in the career ladder.
- Because an employer organization may already broker some workforce development services, and even provide them, it is likely to have the capacity to do so for career ladders. Alternatively, it is likely to be able to judge whether another organization has the expertise,

management, efficiency, and commitment to quality and results that are required to broker and provide workforce development services.

- Because an employer organization represents its members, it can make workforce development services and the overall workforce development system more responsive to employers.

Employer organizations benefit from career ladders in a variety of ways:

- Successful career ladders can improve member satisfaction and even increase revenue from members.
- Career ladders can help employer organizations leverage resources of value to members, such as public-sector funds for workforce development.
- Career ladders can create forums for forming relationships among employers and workforce development service providers.
- Career ladder programs can generate public relations benefits for the intermediaries that operate them.
- Career ladders have the potential to attract new members to the organization because it improves the local business environment over the long term, serving to entice new employers to locate in an area or to assist local employers as they grow.

## **LABOR-MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIPS**

Labor-management partnerships have a well-established track record of training new workers and periodically upgrading their skills to keep up with changes in the labor market. As partnerships, they combine the training expertise and bargaining power of unions with employers' knowledge of production needs to create programs that range from GED courses to training specifically targeted to high-demand occupations.

Labor-management partnerships can leverage government grants and contracts for workforce development, although they typically fund education and training programs through agreements reached in the collective bargaining process. This distinguishes labor-management partnerships from publicly financed training programs by providing funding that is both much higher per capita and less restrictive.

Career ladders operated by labor-management partnerships are frequently found in industries, such as manufacturing, with relatively high skill requirements for entry-level jobs, placing a premium on a steady supply of skilled workers. Labor and management develop agreements around curriculum, hiring, and worker training.



In most cases, operational decisions are made jointly by union representatives and management. These career ladders generally focus on improving the skills of an incumbent workforce, although they frequently “backfill” the entry-level positions that open up as part of career ladder activities.

Labor-management partnerships are responsible for some of the largest and most enduring career-ladders efforts, including a growing number of successful initiatives in the health care, textile, manufacturing, hospitality, construction and agriculture industries. The advantages these partnerships bring to the development and operation of career ladders include:

- The ability to operate at a large scale, addressing several rungs on the ladder; and
- The relatively high per capita expenditure on training negotiated through the bargaining process.

Career-ladder efforts serve to strengthen the labor-management partnerships that operate them, based on the benefits they provide to one or both of their two constituencies:

- By improving workplace relations, career ladders strengthen the relationship between labor and management.
- Labor and management come to agreement on common strategic goals and the process for implementing them.
- Career ladders strengthen the relationship between unions and their members.
- Career ladders combine private funding negotiated through the bargaining process with public funding to advance workers.
- Union members gain pay increases and promotions, enhancing the union's reputation and increasing its membership.
- Participating firms increase productivity and increase the flexibility and agility of employees to function well in a wider variety of jobs; and
- Career ladders expand the role of organized labor as a partner in solving a firm's problems.

### **COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

The mission of many community colleges has come to include skills training as an important service for local employers and workers, alongside more traditional academic courses. Employers frequently look to community colleges as valuable training sources for technical skills.

This shift to include workforce development as part of their mission has paved the way for a growing number of community colleges to link together a set of occupational courses that together form a career ladder. Further, most community colleges already address the remedial education needs of their students—the same remedial education that employers state that many entry-level workers need. After students receive the requisite remedial education, they can then enroll in more advanced levels of training. By building on existing resources and programs, community college career ladders can maximize the outcomes for both employers and workers, as well as the schools themselves.

Some community colleges (and other colleges as well) have taken the lead in developing and operating successful career ladders. These career ladders typically market training to employers and involve them in decision making. This leadership arrangement generally brings to the career ladder resources that are available to higher education institutions, such as a reliable financing structure, the ability to offer college credits, and a college-based “feel.”

The dual-client nature of career ladders determines their objectives. In most cases, community colleges benefit from training contracts that meet the needs of employer clients. At the same time, a public “social mission” leads colleges to broaden access to training (and labor market opportunity) to include low-skill, low-wage workers.

Community colleges bring several advantages to developing career ladders:

- Community colleges are open to all and located in nearly every community.
- Community colleges offer a range of postsecondary education alternatives that can meet the diverse needs of low-wage workers—for example, through flexible schedules, modular curricula, financial aid, and ties to preparatory or “bridge programs” that minimize the risk of stranding some workers in remedial education.
- Community colleges can span the gap between workforce training and academic pursuits by providing credentials for skills courses. By doing so, they create advancement opportunities that could include paths to higher education as well as immediately in the workforce.
- Funding for community colleges is relatively stable compared to the funding sources for most career ladders and, when used to leverage scarce workforce devel-

opment funds, greatly increases the effectiveness of career ladder initiatives.

- Data suggests that employers turn to community colleges most often to meet their skill training needs.

Community colleges benefit from operating career ladders:

- Career ladders can increase student enrollment in programs tied to jobs that are in high demand.
- Career ladders improve student success in postsecondary education by linking remedial courses to credit-bearing courses.
- Community colleges gain a higher profile among the local business community as reliable training sources.
- Community colleges gain access to funding from public-sector workforce development agencies and employers.

#### **ONE-STOP CAREER CENTERS AND WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARDS**

The Workforce Investment Act, enacted in 1998, authorized the creation of a network of employment and training centers that would serve employers, job-seekers, and incumbent workers in their efforts to create a more skilled workforce and better employment. These One-Stop Career Centers house a range of public agencies that provide “customers” with access to services and resources, helping job seekers to enter the workforce, incumbent workers to upgrade their skills, and employers to recruit workers.

Located in nearly every community in the country, the One-Stops are a central and vital part of any workforce development system. Designed as intermediaries between their dual customers—job seekers and employers—One-Stops are well positioned to coordinate career ladders. In particular, Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs)—the policy, planning, and oversight boards for the One-Stops—are effective intermediaries in the development and operation of career ladders for a number of reasons:

- One-Stops are the delivery centers for federal and state employment and training services. They provide access to support services for qualified workers, and they provide employers with human resource-related assistance.
- The Workforce Investment Act requires WIBs to reach out to employers to determine their labor and skill needs. They are funded to collect labor market information and conduct skills analyses, all of which are essential to successful career ladders. By coupling infor-

mation derived from employers with government labor market information, they can create career ladders that closely match the needs of the local economy.

- WIBs provide access to funding for skills training for entry-level and higher-skilled occupations.

Adopting a career-ladder strategy benefits One-Stops and WIBs:

- Career ladders improve the efficiency of the public workforce development system overall.
- Career ladders increase the value of One-Stops as an employment and training resource to employers.
- Career ladders expand the number of employers who use and benefit from the public workforce development system.
- Career ladders improve the advancement outcomes of the population One-Stops serve.

#### **COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS**

Career ladders operated by community-based organizations often reflect a mission to serve low-income clients. Their objectives typically include placing individuals in jobs, providing pre- and post-employment support services (e.g., assistance with transportation needs or child care), providing pre- and post-employment training and education services, and strengthening the worker “voice” in the labor market. In keeping with their missions, CBO-led career ladders also tend to devote considerable resources to tracking their clients as they advance through the labor market.

CBOs that operate successful career ladders balance their mission with an ability to make the case for businesses to participate. They can present their initiatives to the business community in a manner that addresses employer needs for a skilled and reliable workforce, often conducting labor market and skills analyses for targeted industries, while remaining true to their social service mission.

Community-based organizations bring several advantages to the design and operation of career ladders:

- CBOs often understand the employment and skill needs of their communities.
- CBOs often maintain relationships with workers as they begin a job, gain skills and experience, and advance.
- CBOs have often earned the trust of local social service providers, educational institutions, and employers.

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CBOs also benefit from operating career ladders:

- Career ladders advance the social-service mission of CBOs to improve the conditions in their communities and increase the level of skill and income for clients.
- Career ladders increase the level of trust between themselves and the employers who can hire a CBO's clients.
- Career ladders strengthen employers with whom they work, thereby supporting community economic development.

### **PLACEMENT FIRMS**

Some for-profit vendors of staffing and other workforce development services operate career ladders for low-skilled workers. These organizations capitalize on their status as trusted sources of labor to fashion avenues for labor market advancement from the wide range of occupations they fill. In some cases, a placement firm may also train workers as they advance from occupation to occupation.

Placement firms bring several advantages to the creation and operation of career ladders:

- Their strong orientation to serving employers affords them a level of legitimacy in the business community.
- Their business model provides them with market-driven financing that lends itself to expansion.

Placement firms benefit from operating career ladders:

- Placement firms gain the ability to tap into the publicly funded market for the recruitment, training, and retention of low-wage workers.
- Career ladders increase the level of trust that public agencies give to placement firms as a resource for employment and training.

## **The Types of Career Ladder**

From the point of view of program design, perhaps the most important way in which career ladders vary is from those that focus on advancement within a single firm, to those that focus on advancement among multiple firms in a single industry, to those that cross industries in a single sector, to those that advance workers across multiple sectors of a local labor market.

### **SINGLE-FIRM CAREER LADDERS**

As firms focus on what they do best and move to reduce short-term labor costs and risks, they often shed ancillary occupations that had provided entry-level employees with opportunities to gain skills and experience that made it possible to advance to higher levels. This change

in firm practice, weakening "internal career ladders," compounds the already difficult advancement process for workers who enter the labor market with few skills and little work history.

Still, some businesses have benefited by going against the trend and strengthening their internal career ladders, often as a result of close labor-management cooperation. These employers develop the skills of entry-level employees and prepare them to advance to higher-tiered jobs without moving to new firms.

To operate an internal career ladder, an employer targets a number of entry-level occupations, then creates opportunities for training that are tied to occupations requiring higher-order skills. These firms collaborate with training providers and staff to help ensure that vacancies can be filled through internal promotion. Key partners in this relatively simple career ladder include management, employees (and, where applicable, their representatives, such as labor unions), and providers of training and support services. Essential to success is a firm's commitment, either through a union-negotiated contract or human resources policy, to support the career ladder.

*For examples of single-firm career ladders, see Section III  
Cape Cod Hospital  
Partners HealthCare*

### **SINGLE-INDUSTRY CAREER LADDERS**

Many career ladders bring together a group of participating firms in a single industry, training workers to fill similar occupations in any of the firms, not just for jobs with the current employer. These career ladders connect a pool of workers to relatively higher-skilled occupations. The firms collaborate in the development of curricula that prepare workers for essentially similar occupations.

More sophisticated versions of a single-industry career ladder target not only entry-level workers but also incumbent workers and workers transitioning off of welfare and into employment. As in some single-firm career ladders, strong labor-management cooperation can facilitate career ladders operating across an industry. The agreements that emerge from cooperation signal the importance of these career ladders to both employers and workers.

Key participants in single-industry career ladders are employers, employee representatives, intermediary organizations, and training and support service providers.

Agreements among firms regarding hiring and training practices are typically very important, as are agreements of firms with other partners.

*For examples of single-industry career ladders, see Section III*

**Community Development Technology Center/  
Mortgage Financing Program**

**COWS: Jobs With a Future**

**Greater Cleveland Growth Association**

**San Francisco Works**

**WorkSource Partners, Inc.**

**Worksystems Inc./Oregon Health Sciences University**

#### **CAREER LADDERS BASED IN SECTORAL INITIATIVES**

Career ladders can be based in sectoral initiatives that target the creation or preservation of jobs in an industry sector, such as information technology or manufacturing. The partnership operating a sectoral career ladder develops skills training courses designed to prepare workers for employment in specific occupations or sets of occupations.

While some career ladders based in sectoral initiatives focus on meeting employer demand for skilled labor, others also emphasize changing that demand in significant ways. These career ladders identify new production techniques and encourage employer investment in more modern equipment. As part of their career ladder activities, these initiatives may provide technical assistance to firms, link firms to new markets, assist firms in establishing skills standards for an industry, and encourage firms to adopt model human resource practices.

Most sectoral initiative-based career ladders rely heavily on training programs that are customized for targeted occupations or industry sectors, and they usually provide pre-employment training in basic work skills. In addition, some initiatives create career ladders specifically to improve workers' mobility among several occupations within an industry sector. These initiatives can utilize skills certificates that are generally accepted by participating employers to facilitate worker advancement to higher levels of employment.

Participants in sectoral initiative-based career ladders are intermediaries, worker representatives, employers, and providers of training and support services.

Agreements are typically among employers, intermediaries, and training providers and deal with worker placement and customized training curricula.

*For examples of sectoral initiative-based career ladders, see Section III*

**AFSCME District 1199C Skills Training and Upgrade Fund**

**Good Faith Fund Industry Partners**

**New Century Careers Manufacturing 2000**

**The San Francisco Information Technology Consortium**

**The Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership**

#### **CROSS-INDUSTRY CAREER LADDERS**

Career ladders can cross various industries. Cross-industry models recognize that basic work-readiness skills (or "soft skills") are valued across industries and that the transfer of workers—even across sectors, such as from retail to health care—benefits participating employers and workers. As workers advance beyond the initial tiers in the career ladder, however, the skills required for further advancement in many occupations become more specialized to given industries, diminishing cross-industry mobility.

Cross-industry career ladders often focus on advancing workers from the entry level in one industry to higher levels of employment in another. Referral sources must have strong relationships with the industry from which workers are recruited and the industry in which they obtain higher-skill jobs. As in other models, a workforce intermediary takes responsibility for placing workers in vacancies in participating firms, monitoring workers' advancement up the career ladder, and recruiting new workers and firms.

*For examples of cross-industry career ladders, see Section III*

**Cascade Engineering/Butterball Farms, Inc.**

**Education Data Systems, Inc.**

### **Design Principles: Characteristics for Career Ladder Leadership**

In collaboration with employer organizations and their partners, Jobs for the Future has conducted research and development on workforce intermediaries as part of its work with WINs. This has led to a number of findings about career ladders and their role in the labor market.

A career ladder produces a "win-win": for employers and for workers. Every career ladder model has at its core the same dual goal: a labor market in which job seekers can easily identify and gain the skills that employers need at various levels of employment and a workforce develop-

**A career ladder produces a "win-win": for employers and for workers.**



ment system that responds to the skill needs of employers.

Each model has at its center an organizing entity to manage the flow of information regarding employer skill needs and oversee the partnership's ability to meet those needs. As noted above, workforce intermediaries play a central role in organizing the activities of a career ladder.

These fundamentals, along with the following design principles, provide a foundation upon which to build intermediary-led career ladders and distinguish them from other workforce development initiatives. The principles make it possible for the intermediary and other partners to be effective and to measure progress in developing and implementing a career ladder.

**Design Principle: Build the career ladder on the strengths of the workforce intermediary, including its commitment to worker advancement through skill development, its deep knowledge of employers' workforce needs, and its capacity to build and maintain relationships with employers and others.**

*Career ladders require workforce intermediaries to develop and manage them.* Successful career ladders often draw upon a variety of resources to meet the needs of their dual customers. A workforce intermediary makes it possible to serve both customers. The intermediary manages the movement of workers through the labor market, and it meets the demand for labor as expressed by participating employers. In more elaborate career ladders, the workforce intermediary may organize employers and other partners around common goals and broker, or even provide, labor market services to support the functions of the career ladder.

*A workforce intermediary provides leadership and facilitates the relationships among participating employers.* The design of any career ladder requires strong leadership, a knowledge of employer skill specifications, and a knowledge of the demand for skilled labor. Whatever type of intermediary serves in the organizing role, it must be conscious of how the career ladder meets local employer demand.

*A career ladder defines advancement pathways among occupations in participating industries, helping to create a "labor supply chain."* A career ladder provides employers with a steady supply of skilled labor and workers with advancement opportunities by:

- Actively involving employers and others, such as unions, government agencies, community colleges, training providers, and providers of support services for low-skilled, low-wage earners;
- Identifying high-demand occupations, the skills required for those occupations, and the workers that can fill them; and
- Providing a local workforce development system with a model for continuous skills upgrading and a reliable supply of skilled workers.

**Design Principle: Organize multiple partners and manage their activities in meeting the needs of workers and employers.**

*A workforce intermediary arranges for employers to use the career ladder, and it organizes partners' participation.*

Workforce intermediaries play a critical organizing and planning function within a local labor market. They bring together employers, educational institutions, social service agencies, and other providers to design and implement programs and policies to improve labor market outcomes for workers. The workforce intermediary assists the career ladder partners to focus on each of their strengths, creating an efficient division of labor that effectively addresses regional workforce development needs. Intermediaries must frequently organize not just the partners but also the resources needed to turn a career ladder idea into a reality.

*A workforce intermediary can manage the career ladder, or it may select a credible organization to do so.* The workforce intermediary should determine its level of involvement based on an assessment of its own capacity for managing the career ladder. In some cases, it may be necessary or preferable to contract or partner with another organization to take responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the career ladder.

**Design Principle: Promote the role of employers as the central authority of required skills and training.**

*A demand-driven approach to advancing workers is essential to any career ladder model.* Regardless of its complexity or the type of intermediary that operates it, a successful career ladder is driven by the local labor market's skill needs, as expressed by employers.

*Skills are developed to meet employer-defined specifications.* The primary advantage of a career ladder is its

emphasis on meeting specific skill standards, as defined by participating employers. This requires employers to identify their skill needs. However, it may also require intermediaries to compile skill needs in a manner that protects proprietary information. In such cases, an employer organization acting in the role of intermediary benefits from the trust it has earned from its members.

*The mission of a career ladder is to advance workers based on skill development while meeting employers' workforce needs.* Career ladders represent a "win-win" for workers and employers: both benefit from the articulation of advancement pathways and the skill development that are central to a career ladder model. However, meeting employer needs for a skilled workforce must be the driving factor in decisions about occupations to include in the career ladder, as well as about the training workers receive.

*Outcomes in terms of skill requirements are identified and certified.* General agreement among career ladder partners should be reached regarding the competencies required for career ladder occupations.

**Design Principle: Establish clear pathways—from low-level to high-level jobs—that help workers advance and help employers to find workers who meet their business needs.**

*The career ladder includes occupations with a range of skill levels.* To serve its dual customers, a career ladder must encompass a range of occupations and skill levels. Employers benefit from wider access to workers in industries and occupations not normally considered for recruitment. Links to higher-paying occupations in a range of industries benefit workers with avenues out of traditionally "dead-end" jobs.

*Strategies and systems are effective in promoting retention and advancement, making it possible for individuals who begin with few skills to improve their skills and move up.* From a worker's perspective, a career ladder improves the path into and up through a labor market. As such, it helps individuals build progressively upon the skills and competencies acquired at each level of employment. This requires the intermediary to be equally concerned with meeting the job retention needs of workers new to the career ladder and the advancement needs of incumbent workers.

*Transferable skills make it possible for workers to move across industries and economic sectors.* Certain skill sets are transferable because they are valued as "entry-level" requirements in many industries. Other skills are valued in a variety of higher-level occupations and in one or more industries. Moreover, career ladders can benefit both employers and workers by documenting workers' sets of transferable skills through certificates, academic degrees, and other credentials that are respected and valued in the labor market.

**Design Principle: Meet the needs of employers and workers for recruitment, screening, training/education, and support services.**

*Workforce intermediaries lead partners in integrating service delivery or in collaborating on delivering services.*

Agreements must be crafted regarding the support services and training needs that the career ladder will meet. This is the case whether the goal is a simple career ladder with few partners or a complex one involving partners from a variety of community-based organizations, public agencies, employers, community colleges, or unions.

*The career ladder is demand-driven and responsive to employer workforce development needs.* To achieve this degree of agreement between its output and employer needs, a career ladder should effectively meet employers' workforce needs, with specific attention to quality, cycle time, ease of use, and cost.

*The program provides support services appropriate to the population served.* Many job seekers who benefit from career ladders bring a variety of barriers to job retention and advancement. The support services offered through the career ladder initiative should meet the needs of a working population that may require significant assistance with transportation, child care, and "soft skills," to name a few.

*Career ladders can connect workers in non-traditional labor pools to industries with high-demand occupations.* To meet the needs of its dual customers—employers and workers—a career ladder must include occupations covering a range of skill levels, from entry-level to high-skill. By doing so, career ladders build upon the experience gained in low-skilled jobs to develop skills that are in demand for better-paying employment.

## SECTION II

### STAGES OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

There are three key stages for developing and implementing a career ladder.

*Stage 1: Capacity Assessment and Planning* focuses on the potential benefits to your organization from building a career ladder and the planning required to prepare an initial career ladder development plan.

*Stage 2: Partnership Building and Program Development* focuses on the tasks of involving others in developing the career ladder, forging agreement regarding a full-fledged program, and starting operations.

*Stage 3: Operation and Expansion* focuses on running a career ladder, sustaining operations, and potentially expanding them.

This section of the *Career Ladder Guide* will help program developers determine which stages to focus on and point to objectives you need to accomplish and activities

you can undertake to do so. The questions and answers in this section will give you a road map for building a career ladder. The guide refers you to extensive resources provided on the accompanying CD-ROM.

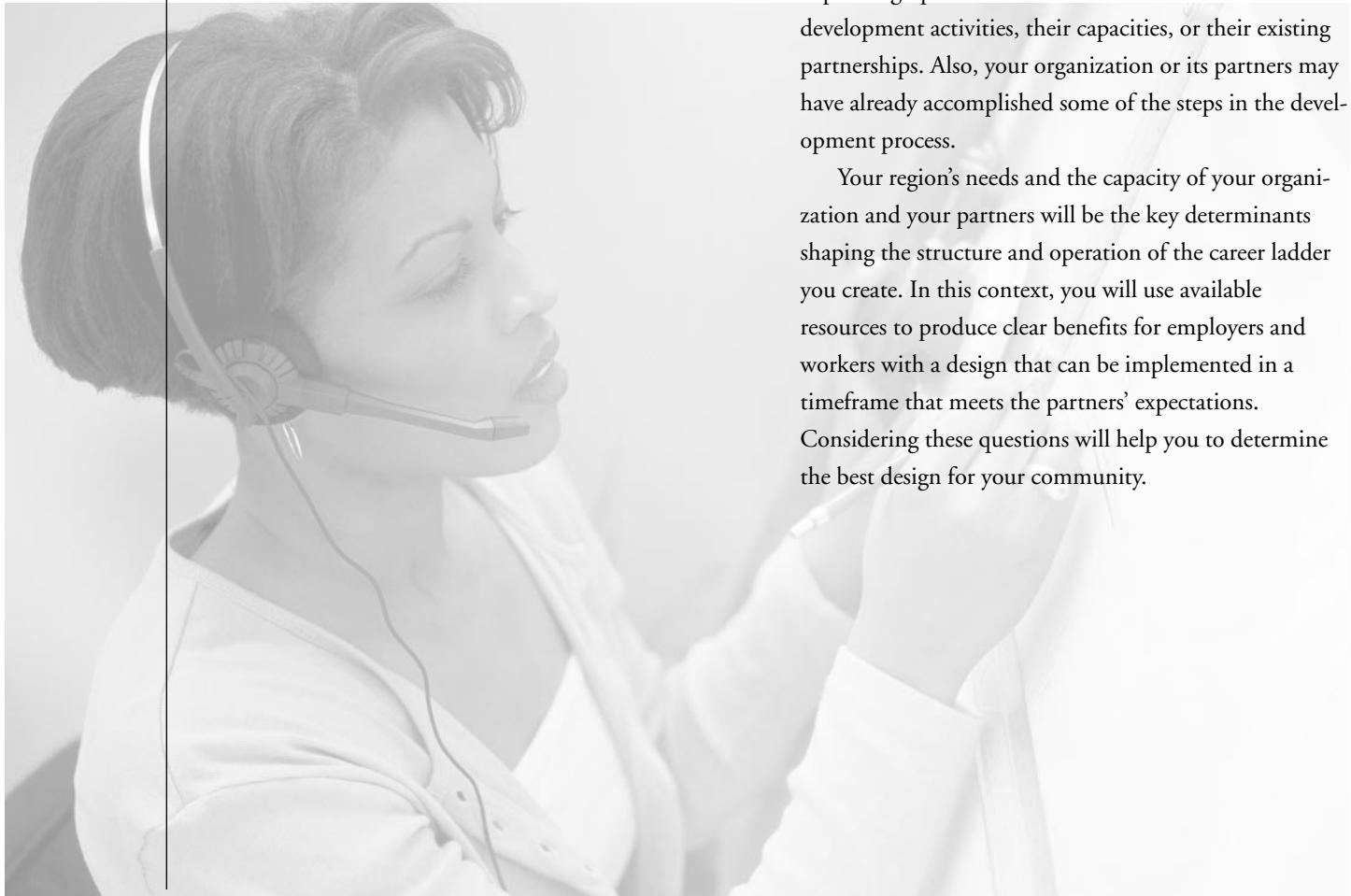
For each stage, core processes are central to career ladder development:

1. Meeting the needs of employers and workers;
2. Developing, coordinating, and managing the career ladder;
3. Developing standards for workforce development services; and
4. Involving workforce development service providers.

Track your capacity and objectives against these core processes. Use them to determine how objectives you identify in one stage connect with those you identify in other stages.

The stages are not necessarily sequential. Different intermediaries may have different starting points, depending upon their level of involvement in workforce development activities, their capacities, or their existing partnerships. Also, your organization or its partners may have already accomplished some of the steps in the development process.

Your region's needs and the capacity of your organization and your partners will be the key determinants shaping the structure and operation of the career ladder you create. In this context, you will use available resources to produce clear benefits for employers and workers with a design that can be implemented in a timeframe that meets the partners' expectations. Considering these questions will help you to determine the best design for your community.



## Stage I: Capacity Assessment and Planning

Developing and implementing a career ladder offers potential benefits to your organization—but it requires time and resources, and it may significantly deepen your involvement in workforce development. Therefore, in the initial stage of a career ladder initiative, carefully consider how your organization may benefit. If the potential merits proceeding, assess your organization's capacity to participate and plan how you will carry out the work.

### CAPACITY ASSESSMENT

*Have you analyzed your organization's capacities and willingness to develop and implement a career ladder initiative?*

This is a critical first step. The questions and objectives below can help you determine the role that your organization should play in developing and leading a career ladder.

### THE PLANNING PROCESS

*Have you determined the characteristics of the career ladder you aim to develop?* First, decide if you prefer to develop an initial plan on your own or with partners. Then, the planners identify key career ladder characteristics, such as the organization that will lead the initiative, the organization that will have operational responsibility for it, the organizations that will be partners, and the size and scope of the career ladder.

## Activities for Stage I: Capacity Assessment and Planning

### I. MEETING THE NEEDS OF EMPLOYERS AND WORKERS

*Have you identified the needs of employers and workers, as well as strategies for marketing the initiative to both of these customers?*

Consider the interests and problems of employers who might be partners and customers in your career ladder, from both a regional economic development perspective and the perspective of each employer. Gain an understanding of employers' needs for workers in high-demand occupations requiring an Associate's degree or less, as well as occupations that have concentrations of low-wage workers whose skills align with high-demand occupations.

Employer difficulties include filling vacancies with candidates who have the required skills, high rates of turnover, and the need for skill development to increase productivity. Involve employers with occupations that fit the career ladder, concentrating on those that want new solutions to problems with recruitment, turnover, or skill-based performance. Workers' needs include access to affordable training linked to family-sustaining occupations and access to support services to assist them in maintaining employment.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

- [Building Employer Participation](#)
- [Employer Focus Group Guidelines](#)
- [Employer Survey Resource](#)
- [Materials for Marketing to Employers](#)
- [Potential Employer Benefits](#)

*Have you identified which employers are interested in participating?*

Initially, these may be companies with the most pressing workforce needs or those with a business model that benefits from being the first to set up a career ladder. Can you build a career ladder based on existing occupations? More than one career ladder? Which employers are likely to participate after the initiative has built a track record?

Resources on the CD-ROM:

- [Building Employer Participation](#)
- [Employer Focus Group Guidelines](#)
- [Employer Survey Resource](#)
- [Potential Employer Benefits](#)

*Have you identified how services will improve employers' human resource practices?*

Are there advantages to both employers and workers that would accrue through changes in HR practices? Do other employers in the career ladder have occupations that could be connected in a career ladder if changes were made to HR practices?

Resources on the CD-ROM:

- [Human Resources Best Practices](#)

*Have you identified how the initiative will find individuals to fill the skill needs in the career ladder?*

Will they come from companies that have poor opportunities for promotion, high turnover, and large numbers of workers with low skills and little work experience? From recruitment/screening agencies, such as One-Stops, staffing firms, community-based organizations, or TANF agencies? From providers of education and training?

Resources on the CD-ROM:

- [Planning Questions](#)

## **2. DEVELOPING, COORDINATING, AND MANAGING THE CAREER LADDER**

*Have you determined how your organization will benefit? If so, how and to what extent?*

Determine ways in which your organization can benefit. This will clarify the time and resources your organization can invest, help you gain support for doing so, and enable you to express your interests to employers and potential partners.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

### ***Internal Marketing Material for Workforce Intermediaries***

*Have you examined other initiatives and the alternatives for leadership in building career ladders?*

Learning about other initiatives and the alternatives for leadership will assist you in determining your own goals and approach.

Resources: See Section III:

### ***Examples of Successful Career Ladders***

*Have you identified potential goals for your initiative, a possible design, and a niche in which the career ladder can add value to existing workforce development services?*

Career ladders can start small and adopt a developmental approach. For instance, one initiative may involve only a single employer, while another is in the process of developing a program to address needs in a new sector. Is your goal a career ladder with one employer, with several employers within one industry sector, or among several employers in a number of industry sectors?

Resources on the CD-ROM:

### ***Planning Questions***

*Do you have a design on which you will base your initiative?*

Section I provides a framework for customizing the career ladder model to meet your goals. Use it to clarify the role of your organization and others. For instance, workforce intermediaries can lead efforts, while delegating certain responsibilities to others with the capacity and expertise to accomplish them. Consider the interests and resources of potential partners that could assist in your career ladder.

Resources: See Section I:

### ***Design Principles and Benchmarks for Workforce Intermediary Leadership***

and Section III

### ***Examples of Career Ladders***

*Have you developed an implementation strategy?*

Develop a strategy to implement one or more career ladders, identifying next steps, funding sources, and initial pricing for services, as appropriate.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

### ***Planning Questions***

*Have resources for initial assessment and planning of the career ladder been secured?*

You will need resources to conduct a preliminary assessment and to plan for developing a career ladder. Staff time and funding will be required to adequately determine readiness and overall objectives.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

### ***Foundation Funding for Career Ladder Initiatives***

*Have you identified potential sources for additional funding?*

Estimate the need for additional resources for program development and implementation. Identify and seek potential sources for additional funding.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

### ***Foundation Funding for Career Ladder Initiatives***

## **3. DEVELOPING STANDARDS FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

*Have you identified occupational skills and skill levels that will be addressed by the career ladder?*

Planning should identify the specific occupations, along with their required skills, that the career ladder will target. These occupations and skills will be those for which employers have expressed an existing or emerging demand. Map potential advancement pathways based on these skills. Consider methods for validating skill acquisition. Customize services based on the target community to be served by the career ladder. Determine the potential for growth in the targeted occupations. Determine how long it will take workers to advance among the various positions targeted by the career ladder. Determine which support services and education could be provided by the program to help workers to advance more quickly.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

### ***Career Ladder Research Reports***

### ***“Job Zone” Occupational Classification***

### ***Planning Questions***

**Have you identified occupations that could be incorporated into one or more career ladders?**

Consider whether occupations with a potential demand for career ladder services might fit into one career ladder or more than one. If occupations can go into more than one career ladder, consider the relationship among companies with these occupations. Do the companies have customer-supplier relationships or other business relationships with one another? Do they work together in trade associations or have other relationships based on their sector? Do they receive workforce development services from the same provider?

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Career Ladder Research Reports**

**“Job Zone” Occupational Classification**

#### **4. INVOLVING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS**

**Have you identified needs for workforce development services, as well as the capacity for meeting those needs?**

Gather and analyze information on specifications for recruitment and screening, support services, and education and training. Identify providers with the capacity to respond, especially those that already provide employers with high-quality workforce development services. Involve providers that want to align their services with customer standards. Solicit specifications from employers regarding occupational skill requirements and education and training needs. Solicit specifications from employers, recruitment and screening providers, and education and training providers regarding support service needs for individuals.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Specifications Regarding Support Services**

**Have you identified how you will provide education and training services to build skills that are not acquired on the job?**

Identify credentials for documenting the skills developed through external education and training providers. In particular, what are the relevant industry-standard credentials? Identify the support services that will make it possible for individuals to participate in the career ladder.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Community Audits**

**What transportation assistance, child care, or other services will participants require in order to participate in recruitment and screening activities? To maintain employment? To participate in education and training?**

Identify who can provide the necessary education, training, and support services. Determine if the service infrastructure required to meet workers needs exists. Are these providers good potential partners for the career ladder initiative? Do any of these providers already work closely with employers?

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Community Audits**

**Recruitment Challenges**

**Do you want to start at a large scale, or do you want to start small and build up?**

Depending on the breadth and depth of employer support, as well as your capacity as an intermediary, you will need to determine the scale of your efforts. Pilot projects, designed to prove a model, frequently target a limited number of employers and workers in a specific industry, with the objective of gradually generating broader support. Large-scale projects often emerge as a response to unusually high demand for skilled labor and tend to grow out of existing workforce development activities, such as labor-management negotiated training programs.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Planning Questions**

**Which are the easiest occupations to build into the career ladder?**

Given the regional economy and labor market, identify which occupations have the highest demand for workers. Among them, determine which require skills that will be in demand for the foreseeable future and which occupations require similar skills.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Career Ladder Research Reports**

**“Job Zone” Occupational Classification**

**Do the occupations it is important to address fit within one career ladder or more than one?**

Occupations potentially forming the career ladder should build the skills and provide the credentials necessary to prepare workers for each succeeding occupational tier. It often makes sense to group occupations to create ladders that require the development of similar skills. Identify gaps on the career ladder that require restructuring of occupations or developing new jobs. Make it clear how restructuring can benefit employers.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Career Ladder Research Reports**

**“Job Zone” Occupational Classification**

**Community-based organizations, labor unions, elected officials, and educational systems are all affected by a persistently high demand for skills.**

## **Stage 2: Partnership Building and Program Development**

The second stage of a career ladder initiative has two primary tasks: partnership building and program development.

### **PARTNERSHIP BUILDING**

The design established by initiative leaders determines the scope of activities. Yet even the simplest career ladders require partnerships: no single organization can, or should be expected to, provide the range of recruitment, retention, advancement and support services that a career ladder requires. Even a single-firm career ladder depends upon a partnership: between the human resources department and other organizations, whether social service agencies, community-based organizations, or labor unions.

The dual goals of a career ladder create common ground among various stakeholders and provide a firm foundation for developing strong partnerships for implementing career ladders. Community-based organizations, labor unions, elected officials, and educational systems are all affected by a persistently high demand for skills in some key industries.

### **PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT**

Fully operational career ladders advance workers from a variety of skill levels to meet employer labor needs, but many initiatives focus, at least initially, on a single type of worker, then expand out to more occupational levels. Starting small leads to early successes that can be used to build support for expanding the initiative.

Program developers must determine which workers would benefit most from the career ladder: new entrants to the labor market, workers returning to the workforce from the welfare rolls, dislocated workers, or incumbent workers. Decisions about the populations to be served will affect decisions about program development and the responsibilities for each partner.

**New entrants to the labor market:** First-time workers often face a number of barriers to employment retention. Emphasis needs to be placed on developing “work-readiness” skills and basic skills required for entry-level work. In addition, many of these workers require assistance with transportation, child care, and other post-placement supports.

**Transitional workers:** Welfare reform and other factors draw into the labor market many people with a poor or inconsistent work history. Many of these workers may have immediate needs relating to child care and transportation. In addition, many lack a high school diploma or even a GED, compounding difficulties with “learning to learn” on the job. Assistance with developing basic skills, increasing self-confidence, learning to work with others, or improving customer service skills is often important with this segment of the labor force.

**Dislocated workers:** These workers typically have a strong foundation of “soft skills,” as well as occupation-specific skills. Assistance with post-employment support services, such as child care or transportation, is generally less necessary for these workers than for new entrants to the labor market or transitional workers. Dislocated workers typically benefit from retraining for positions in industries that may be new to them. Consider other issues regarding the sense of identity with a former occupation, a possible loss of a sense of security, and the frequent loss in pay when accepting a new position.

**Incumbent workers:** Career ladders that primarily address the advancement needs of incumbent workers typically focus on training for jobs in the firm or industry of current employment. Training generally covers higher-order skills, with less emphasis on post-employment support services and “soft-skills” training. This population often benefits from additional assistance with work/life issues and soft-skills development (e.g., teamwork, customer service skills). In addition, many incumbent workers need help with obtaining a GED or adult basic education or improving their English-language skills.

### **Before Beginning Stage II**

Career ladder initiatives can take either of two approaches to partnership building and program development. The choice of approach affects many subsequent decisions.

*Pull together broad-based partnerships early in the initiative, before program development begins in earnest.* In these cases, a variety of stakeholders collaborate to determine the initiative’s goals, benchmarks, and day-to-day operating procedures. This helps foster shared “ownership” from the beginning. However, achieving agreements can take time, reduce employer involvement, and reduce the extent to which the career ladder meets

employer needs. This approach relies on the leadership's ability to recognize the needs of the various stakeholders and draw on their strengths—while taking care not to push them beyond what they can deliver.

*Place more emphasis on engendering commitment from employers while beginning program development and before moving toward building a broader partnership:* The leaders

of these initiatives contact employers who have expressed interest in workforce development efforts, then build initiatives and partnerships around the workforce needs of those employers. This “demand-driven” approach may be less synergistic, but it tends to proceed with a clearer impression of employers’ skill needs.

## Activities for Stage 2: Partnership Building and Program Development

### I. MEETING THE NEEDS OF EMPLOYERS AND WORKERS

*Have you identified a governance structure for operating the career ladder?*

Create a program management team that can effectively communicate with local employers and training and service providers. The team should be knowledgeable about existing and emerging labor market needs and be able to bring this to bear on the career ladder’s operation.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

#### ***Involving Employers and Other Partners in Creating Career Ladders***

*Have employers participated in launching the partnership and approving the strategy?*

Gain commitments from employers to participate in the partnership. Select employers from among those who have expressed or demonstrated a willingness to shape, initiate, and assist in operating a career ladder. Engage these employers in activities undertaken by the core group of employers where necessary.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

#### ***Involving Employers and Other Partners in Creating Career Ladders***

*Have employers agreed to specific roles and responsibilities?*

Determine roles and responsibilities for employers or consortia of employers. Negotiate agreements to implement them. Agreements among employers might address hiring, the creation of training consortia or curricula, how the initiative communicates with employers at multiple levels, how information regarding vacancies is provided, and compensation for placements.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

#### ***Employer Agreement Resource***

### ***Involving Employers and Other Partners in Creating Career Ladders***

#### **2. DEVELOPING, COORDINATING, AND MANAGING THE CAREER LADDER**

*Have you identified all potential partners who could add value?*

Create a list of all potential partners, including employers, recruitment and screening providers, support service providers, public agencies, unions, education and training providers, and community-based organizations. Based upon the plan developed in Stage 1 (Capacity Assessment and Planning), identify partners who could potentially provide services that satisfy the needs of employers and job seekers.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

#### ***Employer Agreement Resource***

#### ***Involving Employers and Other Partners in Creating Career Ladders***

#### ***Planning Questions***

*Have you formalized functions regarding human resources, finances, operations, and marketing into a business plan?*

A business plan serves as a blueprint for program development and a recruiting tool for partners. The plan may include information on who will staff the career ladder, how it will be financed, who has oversight and implementation responsibilities for operations, and how it will be marketed to employers and job seekers.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

#### ***Developing a Business Plan***

*Have you identified additional sources for funding?*

During Stage II, you will begin to shift the focus of fundraising from support for program development to support for program implementation and expansion. To finance partnership building, program development, operations, program sustainability, and expansion, you may want to consider fee-for-service financing options, as well as traditional funding activities.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

#### ***Foundation Funding for Career Ladder Initiatives***

**Have you developed an evaluation and continuous improvement system?**

Create systems for employers and other partners to provide data for evaluation and continuous improvement and for analyzing return on investment. This data will also benefit project marketing activities.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Continuous Improvement Resource**

**Have partnership members engaged in efforts to develop resources?**

Based upon the career ladder strategy and the partners' commitment to it, seek resources to begin program development and operations.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Employer Agreement Resource**

**Involving Employers and Other Partners in Creating Career Ladders**

**Have you developed a marketing strategy?**

Develop a marketing strategy that includes branding the initiative with a name that resonates with employers and workers.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Internal Marketing Materials for Workforce Intermediaries**

**Materials for Marketing to Employers**

**Have you made an initial estimate of benefits and costs for all partners?**

Based upon the strategy approved by employers, include other partners in planning the career ladder based on their strengths, as well as their potential benefits and costs.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Potential Employer Benefits**

### **3. DEVELOPING STANDARDS FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

**Have you identified which occupational skills and skill levels the career ladder will address?**

As the initiative develops, employers and other partners will need to understand, advise on, and agree about occupational skills and skill levels. Skills for these occupations must be identified, as will the relationships of skills for one occupation to other occupations in the career ladder.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Planning Questions**

**“Job Zone” Occupational Classification**

**Have employers agreed to participate in a process for identifying and agreeing about which occupational skills the career ladder will address?**

One role for employers is to confirm the skills addressed by the career ladder. A formal method for skill identification and confirmation can clarify roles of employers and other partners and make it possible to change skill requirements or add new occupations.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**General Skill and Work Activity Questionnaire**

**“Job Zone” Occupational Classification**

**Sources of Skill Requirements**

**Testing and Assessment**

**If training is part of the initiative, have you identified appropriate curricula?**

At each stage in developing and implementing the career ladder, update the list of training providers and curricula for the skills to be developed. Consider establishing a formal method for soliciting feedback on the effectiveness of curricula.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**General Skill and Work Activity Questionnaire**

**“Job Zone” Occupational Classification, Sources of Skill Requirements**

**Testing and Assessment**

**Are occupational skills for participants linked in a career ladder?**

Continuously assess the relevance of the skills being developed to occupational demand.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**General Skill and Work Activity Questionnaire**

**“Job Zone” Occupational Classification, Sources of Skill Requirements**

**Testing and Assessment**

### **4. INVOLVING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS**

**The initiative may provide recruitment/screening, education/training, or support services or help firms improve their human resources practices in these areas. If so, have you identified the capacity to meet these needs of participating employers and workers?**

Determine whether to provide recruitment/screening, education/training, and support services. Career ladder developers may want to conduct a community audit to determine the degree to which these services are available.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Planning Questions**

**Human Resources Best Practices**

**Specifications Regarding Support Services**

**Community Audits**

**If recruitment and screening services are provided, which ones?**

Providing a source of new job candidates meets employers' needs, especially as incumbent workers increase their skills and advance out of current jobs. Various approaches can be used to recruit and screen candidates for the openings. Community-based organizations, public agencies, One-Stop Career Centers, and staffing firms can all play a role.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Planning Questions**

**Specifications Regarding Support Services**

**If support services are provided, which ones?**

Support services benefit job seekers and incumbent workers by increasing their ability to participate in education and training.

Transportation assistance, child care, financial counseling, and mentoring are a few of the support services that may benefit workers in their efforts to retain employment and advance in the labor market. Community-based organizations, public agencies, faith-based organizations, and One-Stop Career Centers are often good sources for these services. Employer organizations often broker for these services on behalf of their members.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Planning Questions**

**Specifications Regarding Support Services**

**If education and training services are provided, which ones?**

Skill development services can play a key role in preparing workers to meet occupational needs that are based on the expressed needs of participating employers. Skill specifications also should be informed, if possible, by a local labor market analysis regarding growth areas of the economy.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Career Ladder Research Reports**

**Community Audits**

**Human Resources Best Practices**

**Planning Questions**

**Sources of Information on Labor Markets**

**Will the initiative develop and provide a career ladder planning process?**

Providing workers with assistance in planning their movement along the career ladder increases the likelihood that they and their employers will benefit. Such assistance supports the efforts of workers to take advantage of skill development opportunities.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Career Ladder Planning**

**What agreements will you use regarding roles and responsibilities for career ladder services?**

Determine roles and responsibilities for career ladder activities and develop agreements to implement them. Develop a process to bring about mutual agreements on roles and responsibilities among all partners.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Employer Agreement Resource**

**Involving Employers and Other Partners in Creating Career Ladders**



## **Stage 3: Program Operation and Expansion**

Program operation becomes important in Stage 3, as early wins and highly visible endorsements facilitate the growth and success of the career ladder.

### **PROGRAM OPERATION**

Day-to-day management, critical to the success of a career ladder, involves managing the operation based upon the career ladder partnership agreements, assuring that the flow of participants to jobs meets their needs and the needs of employers, recruiting and training initiative staff, financing the initiative, profiling potential

collaborators and competitors, and marketing the initiative to additional employers and candidates for advancement.

### **SUSTAINABILITY/EXPANSION**

Sustaining a career ladder and, when appropriate, expanding a successful effort involve a variety of possible activities. Among them are analyzing and documenting initial results, incorporating a continuous improvement process, pricing services, collaborating with partners to plan for expansion, adapting human resources practices, expanding financing options, and continuing to market the program.

## **ACTIVITIES FOR Stage 3: Program Operation and Expansion**

### **1. MEETING THE NEEDS OF EMPLOYERS AND WORKERS**

*Are employers hiring from the career ladder based on job seekers' acquisition of required skills? Are employers orienting workers to their role in the career ladder?*

Use an evaluation and continuous improvement process to monitor the reliance of employers on the career ladder for hiring and advancing workers. The initiative needs to manage employer relations, maintain communication with employers at multiple levels, gather information on vacancies, and fill vacancies.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

#### **Continuous Improvement Resource**

*Are employers modifying their human resources practices to align with the operations of the career ladder?*

Satisfaction with the career ladder may lead participating employers to improve their human resources practices. A method for assessing such changes can offer a way to measure success.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

#### **Human Resources Best Practices**

*Are you recruiting additional employers?*

Encourage additional employers to become involved with the career ladder in ways that fit their interests, understanding, and capacity.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

#### **Building Employer Participation**

#### **Employer Focus Group Guidelines**

#### **Employer Survey Resource**

#### **Materials for Marketing to Employers**

#### **Potential Employer Benefits**

### **2. DEVELOPING STANDARDS FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

*Are you updating occupational skill requirements on a consistent basis?*

As the initiative is implemented, occupational skill requirements may change. You may decide to add new occupations to the ladder, engage new employers, or respond to changes in the local economy.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

#### **"Job Zone" Occupational Classification**

#### **Planning Questions**

*Have you developed plans for expansion to an appropriate scale for sustainability?*

Envision appropriate scale and a strategy for achieving it, based on a combination of demand, capacity, and the availability of financing.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

#### **Planning Questions**

### **3. DEVELOPING, COORDINATING, AND MANAGING THE CAREER LADDER**

*Have you hired key staff members?*

Hire adequate staff with the appropriate expertise for proper implementation of the career ladder. Experience in addressing the employer point of view in the labor market is likely to be as important as experience serving job seekers.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

#### **Planning Questions**

*Does the initiative have a process for developing its own staff on a continuous basis?*

Guide the efforts of key initiative staff to implement roles and responsibilities. A staff development strategy makes it possible to train new staff and meet organizational needs if key people move on.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

#### **Continuous Improvement Resource**

**Does the business plan developed in Stage 2, Program Development, align with current operations?**

Ensure that the business plan aligns with current operations. Regularly review the business plan to improve the initiative's financial, human resources, operations, and marketing functions. The objective is to develop current operations in the context of the plan agreed upon by the partners.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Continuous Improvement Resource**

**Are you documenting outcomes as required by the initiative's funders?**

Structure a formal method for documenting and reporting outcomes into the business plan. Career ladder operators should monitor reporting to ensure accuracy and timeliness.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Continuous Improvement Resource**

**Are initial results analyzed to identify success areas, areas for improvement, and areas for growth?**

Develop a process to use data for continuous improvement. Develop a process for quickly identifying and addressing problems with operations. Improve program operations by developing analyses for external stakeholders, such as investors and supporters. Identify new opportunities, demand occupations, and employers with interest or need.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Continuous Improvement Resource**

**Is determining a market profile or niche for the career ladder initiative an ongoing activity?**

Monitor the selected niche, including employers' continuing interest/need, and commitments to ensure that the career ladder services remain valued and relevant to employer and employee needs.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Continuous Improvement Resource**

**Have you identified potential new partners? Have you identified competitors?**

Monitor commitments to participate and identify areas of increasing capacity, as well as the number and range of potential partners, for the purpose of expanding career ladder practices. Also identify and monitor potential competitors.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Continuous Improvement Resource**

**Sources of Information on Labor Markets**

**Are you marketing the career ladder to potential partners and participants?**

Use niche monitoring, identification of potential partners, and continuous improvement results in developing marketing activities.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Internal Marketing Material for Workforce Intermediaries**

**Involving Employers and Other Partners in Creating Career Ladders**

**Materials for Marketing to Employers**

**Are you monitoring agreements with service providers for compliance?**

Ensure that the initiative is achieving its objectives and that it is serving employers and workers according to the agreements.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Continuous Improvement Resource**

**Is the initiative being managed as agreed by the partners?**

Operate the program based upon the strategy approved by the partnership and the agreements that have been made with employers, recruitment/screening providers, support service providers, and education/training providers. Manage change, learning, and newly discovered stakeholders' strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities and threats they face.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Internal Marketing Material for Workforce Intermediaries**

**Involving Employers and Other Partners in Creating Career Ladders**

**Materials for Marketing to Employers**

**Have the partners considered pricing services and charging for them?**

Develop a stable source of program revenue, leverage other sources of funds, and measure the value of career ladder services.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Developing a Business Plan**

**4. INVOLVING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS**

**Are workforce development services being improved and expanded?**

Ensure that the program continues to respond to the needs of employers and other career ladder participants. The identification of dissatisfaction with any part of the career ladder may result in the modification of services by participating providers.

Resources on the CD-ROM:

**Continuous Improvement Resource**

## SECTION III

### EXAMPLES OF CAREER LADDERS

The program descriptions in this section demonstrate a variety of approaches and strategies. You can use them in thinking about how your organization will develop a career ladder initiative. A wide range of career ladders are presented, varying by intermediary, industry, and scope. The examples are grouped by the main types of career ladder: single firm, single industry, sector initiative-based, and cross-industry.

#### **■ Single-Firm Career Ladders**

##### **CAPE COD HOSPITAL, HYANNIS, MASSACHUSETTS**

An agreement between Service Workers International Union Local 767 and management at Cape Cod Hospital created a career ladder program that is entering its 20th year of operation. Union members in non-professional occupations, such as housekeeper or dietary assistant, can take classes that make them eligible for promotion to higher-level jobs, such as medical records clerk and pathology technician. The hospital has restructured jobs and changed its human resources practices to facilitate its workers' use of the career ladder program.

The program is based on a commitment to promotion from within, filling 80 percent of all job openings by promotions from lower positions. A lattice of opportunities within the hospital permits workers to move from department to department, and across occupational groups, affording them even greater opportunity for advancement.

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##### **PARTNERS HEALTHCARE, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS\***

Partners HealthCare, which operates Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, contracted with WorkSource Partners, Inc., a Boston-based industry con-

sulting firm, to develop career ladders for its workers in order to widen the pool of recruits and improve retention among its existing workforce.

In 2000, responding to a severe shortage of skilled nurses, Brigham and Women's Hospital, WorkSource, and Bunker Hill Community College created "Partners in Care," a program designed to help patient care assistants and environmental service workers advance onto tracks leading eventually to careers in nursing. The approach combines three critical elements:

- WorkSource and hospital managers created an ongoing Program Management Team to integrate career development planning into their operations.
- The hospital dramatically increased workers' access to education by increasing the number of educational opportunities available on site and by helping workers identify off-site options at Bunker Hill Community College and elsewhere in the community.
- The hospital provides ongoing career counseling and support to help workers identify career goals and action steps and to facilitate connections with Bunker Hill and other colleges.

This partnership has resulted in:

- The design and implementation of a program to encourage workers to upgrade their jobs within the hospital;
- Increased loyalty among program participants;
- Increased confidence among management in the participants' ability to serve the hospital's patients; and
- A high rate (75 percent) of participating patient care assistants who have begun college programs on nursing and/or medical assistant tracks.

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\* This profile is based on a presentation by Mary Culhane, Vice President of WorkSource Partners, Inc., to a meeting of the Boston Workforce Development Coalition, February 6, 2003.

## ■ Industry-Based Career Ladders

### **SAN FRANCISCO WORKS LEGAL SERVICES CAREER LADDER, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA**

San Francisco Works, the non-profit workforce development arm of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, has developed a multi-tiered career ladder to address workforce shortages among local law firms. In 1997, SFWorks partnered with Volunteer Legal Services (VLS), the pro bono arm of the San Francisco Bar Association, to create the Legal Employment Action Program. LEAP targets low-skilled, low-wage workers for training in entry-level occupations in law firms.

SFWorks and VLS then contracted with the non-profit Urban University for soft-skills training (communication skills, workplace etiquette, etc.) and with City College of San Francisco for hard skills training (computer hardware and software, keyboarding, etc.). The bar association and SFWorks worked together to gain agreement from 16 law firms to hire LEAP graduates and provide mentors for them.

The training program includes:

- A two-week appraisal period;
- Six weeks of classroom-based training in soft skills and hard skills;
- Twelve weeks of paid work experience (three days a week) concurrent with continued hard-skills/soft-skills training (two days a week).

The 63 program graduates since 1998 have earned full-time employment in occupations that include: accounting assistant; administrative assistant; billing clerk; case assistant; document clerk; office services technician/reception relief; practice assistant/legal secretary in training; receptionist/office support; and records clerk. Their pay in the new jobs ranged from \$24,000 to \$36,000.

SFWorks expanded this training program in 2003 to include training for higher-paying and higher-skilled legal services occupations. SFWorks, partnering with Jewish Vocational Services, contacted LEAP graduates and recruited seven people to participate in the first of several proposed cohorts of its Legal Skills Training and Advancement Resources program (Legal STAR). Legal STAR gives LEAP graduates the opportunity to learn additional skills that prepare them for advancement into paralegal, legal secretary, and office administrator occupations.

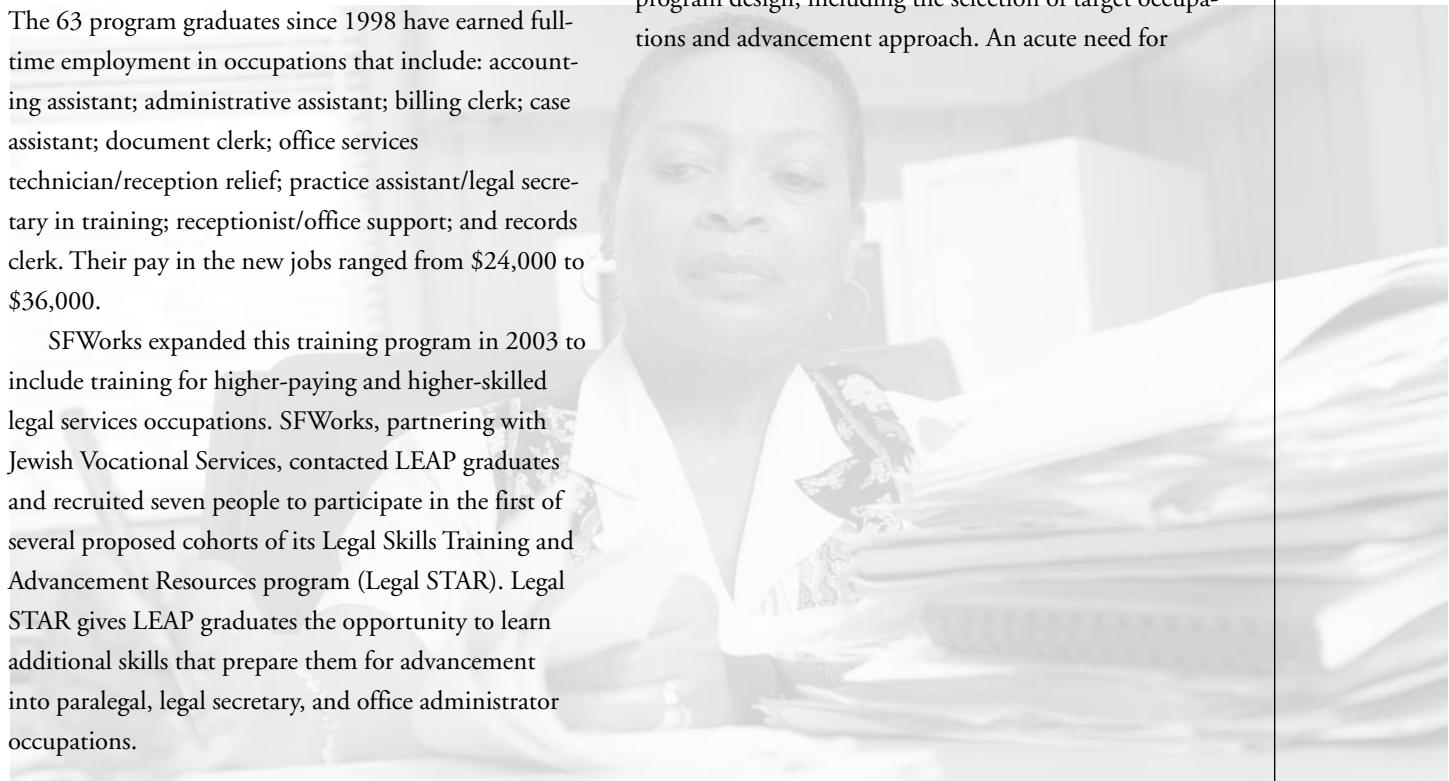
The Legal STAR curriculum is divided into six modules that are taught over three months, two days a week, from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., with participating employers contributing one hour of paid leave each morning. The modules include training for Microsoft Office, communications, career development, workplace intelligence, personal finance, and a professional empowerment seminar. Graduates are also prepared for, and encouraged to take, the National Association of Legal Secretaries exam.

*Contact: Terri Feeley, Executive Director, SFWorks, 414.217.5183, tfeeley@sfworks.org*

### **GREATER CLEVELAND GROWTH ASSOCIATION: HEALTH CARE CAREER LADDER**

The Greater Cleveland Growth Association is the Chamber of Commerce for Northeast Ohio, with a mission to serve as the catalyst for economic growth and jobs creation in the region. GCGA's career ladder is an employer-administered career advancement model that advances entry-level nurse assistants through three tiers, culminating in the transition to specific health care specialty training programs (i.e., Licensed Practical Nurse and Medical Technician). Participants are incumbent workers who receive leave time and pay increases after completion of each level of training.

GCGA has leveraged its role as an organization that employers trust to involve them in the initial stages of program design, including the selection of target occupations and advancement approach. An acute need for



health care workers in Cleveland has led to the creation of a career ladder that targets relatively low-skilled Certified Nursing Assistants, many of whom are former TANF recipients, for training to become Licensed Practical Nurses. Led by GCGA, the career ladder offers workers in long-term care facilities the opportunity to advance to higher-skilled, higher-paying occupations in local hospitals and clinics. Eventually, the career ladder will include training for radiology and surgical technician positions, as well as training to become Registered Nurses. Once complete, this career ladder will be an advancement route from public assistance to high-paying, family-sustaining occupations in health care.

The program's key features (e.g., criteria for assessing and selecting participants training curricula) are designed to employer specifications. Employers are members of the program's governance board and are intimately involved in making key decisions about program direction and implementation. Employers are also involved in reviewing program performance, and they help to recruit other employers to the program.

For workers, GCGA's model offers a wide range of services, in addition to the formal career ladder program for training and advancement. These include:

- Information on job openings;
- Skill assessments;
- Career/educational counseling;
- Case management/job retention services to help with work/family demands; and
- Referrals to training programs and training providers.

As part of the WINs initiative to develop career ladders, GCGA has:

- Built partnerships with two of the region's three major hospital-based health care systems, Menorah Park nursing home, a school of practical nursing, and a community college to design and implement a health care career ladder;
- Begun work with Menorah Park to design curricula that will add a third and higher step to its current two-step career ladder for Certified Nursing Assistants, with a Clinical Technician III curriculum that will ready workers to pass the Nurse Entrance Test; and

- Trained 30 workers in its Clinical Technician I course, enrolled 15 workers in its Clinical Technician II course, and back-filled its CTI course with 21 new workers. (Upon completion of each course, workers have received a 50 cent per hour pay increase, beginning at a base wage of \$8.79 per hour.)

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#### **WORKSYSTEMS INC. AND OREGON HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY, PORTLAND, OREGON**

Worksystems Inc. (WSI), a Workforce Investment Board serving the city of Portland and three Oregon counties, established a health care career center in collaboration with the Oregon Health and Science University and AFSCME Council 75. The center coordinates the delivery of training for incumbent health care workers. It prepares them for advancement in patient care, administrative support, and information technology occupations. Participants have moved into such jobs as Certified Nursing Assistant, patient access resource specialist, administrative assistant, desktop support tech, and help desk analyst.

The center is part of the efforts of worksystems Inc., to make the workforce development system more responsive to employers. WSI, which previously had worked with the local Healthcare Workforce Consortium, a local consortium of health care employers, to help the industry meet its workforce needs, designed the career center to demonstrate the value of an employer-specific One-Stop. As Portland's largest employer, with a shared commitment from AFSCME and management to worker training and development, Oregon Health Sciences University became the site for this pilot of a sector-specific One-Stop effort.

The program design followed partly from a survey of health care workers, which revealed the need for workplace-based education and training. The workers cited time and money as the two biggest barriers to participation, and they perceived that employer-driven training would result in salary rewards.

The center's activities have included a career mapping that led to the creation of JobLink, a Web-based application that enables workers to match their skills to jobs and career ladders at the university. Certification processes developed by the university and the union

emphasize customization to the hospital context and responsiveness to target populations, including employees needing job-specific and general ESL classes, on-site training, and supportive services. A career counselor helps workers identify their skills and interests and develop individual career plans.

The center provides access to many of the career advancement resources available at a traditional One-Stop through its connections with certified One-Stop service providers. To assist entry-level workers with addressing linguistic barriers, the center has provided ESL classes, including job-specific ESL in Russian and Spanish. It offers a course in medical terminology as a foundation for other health care training. The center also offers a series of administrative support trainings using self-guided curricula.

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#### **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TECHNOLOGY CENTER, MORTGAGE FINANCING PROGRAM, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA**

The non-profit Community Development Technology Center works to build the skills of residents of low-income neighborhoods and help them become competitive in the labor market. In 2000, it partnered with the Los Angeles Trade Technical College to launch the Mortgage Finance Program to help unemployed and underemployed individuals develop careers in the local financial services industry. The MFP serves financial institutions as a pipeline for entry-level workers while helping individuals access a career ladder through training that prepares new and incumbent workers for the positions of homebuyer educators, loan processors, loan officers, underwriters, and community development officers.

An employer-led advisory committee provides direction around curriculum, outreach, fund development, internships, and mentoring opportunities. The MFP has two funding sources: employers pay fees for MFP's training services, and the program receives foundation grants.

About a third of MFP participants are welfare-to-work candidates, a third work in low-wage tellers jobs in the banking field, and a third are unemployed. About half the participants are African Americans and half are Latino. Virtually all the participants have a high school

diploma or GED, and some have some college credits. However, the levels of English and math skills are low, and barriers to employment include lack of employable basic and technical skills, single parenthood, and lack of transportation.

The MFP has two tracks: one for entry-level workers, the other for incumbent workers. Entry-level workers take at least 160 hours of coursework at the community college and do an internship at a lending institution or non-profit organization involved in home ownership. Generally, the placement is with a community-based organization, where the intern is involved in homebuyer education/outreach or in providing loan-processing support services. During the internship, students take 160 hours of coursework leading to a certificate in mortgage finance. Once the internship is completed, the MFP places students in permanent full-time positions, except for those who choose to continue working toward an Associate's degree.

The incumbent worker track serves employees who want the skills to advance from low-wage banking positions to new career opportunities. These individuals learn various computer software applications and financial underwriting techniques to help them move to professional positions.

To date, the program has placed about 100 students in various levels of full- and part-time employment, from the entry level to management. Many of these students were previously unemployed or stuck in minimum-wage jobs.

The MFP provides a comprehensive range of services, including skill assessments, career/educational counseling, case management to help clients with work/family demands, and referrals to training programs and training providers. In addition, it provides training in job-seeking skills, basic employability skills, basic literacy/math and computers, English as a second language, advanced soft skills (e.g., project management, conflict resolution), and supervisory and management skills.

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**WORKSOURCE PARTNERS, INC.,  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS**

WorkSource began operations in 1995 by helping individuals on long-term public assistance make a successful transition to the workforce. It partners with a number of long-term care providers across Massachusetts to design and implement employee development programs to help entry-level workers advance their careers through a continuum of services, including workplace support, career counseling, and education. These programs are geared primarily towards helping Certified Nursing Assistants and service staff (housekeeping/dietary) advance on educational tracks towards professional nursing careers.

WorkSource employs three strategies to achieve its goals:

- Working closely with employers to identify workforce needs, promote the idea of internal career development for entry-level employees, and generate managerial and supervisory support for its programs;
- Providing ongoing outreach, career counseling, and support for employees and participants, helping them to build confidence, develop long-term career goals, and access important resources (e.g., financial aid); and
- Building links between each employer site and community colleges to increase employee access to education through on-site programs (both ABE and college) and institutional support.

In 2001, WorkSource and its employer partners created the Campus on a Campus Program, seed-funded through a state grant from the Massachusetts Extended Care Career Ladder Initiative. The goal of the program was to create a permanent, campus-wide, employee development program, offering college-level and developmental-level courses to employees. Thus far, over 130 employees have expressed an interest in returning to school for nursing. Of those, more than 70 have begun taking pre-college and college courses on that track, and retention of CNA's has improved. The program has been recognized by the Commonwealth Corporation as a Best Practice Model, and it has received an American Healthcare Association Quality Award. There are plans to incorporate a satellite campus through one of the community colleges.

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**COWS: JOBS WITH A FUTURE,  
DANE COUNTY, WISCONSIN**

The Jobs With A Future project consists of partnerships focused on workforce skill and training issues in the manufacturing, health care, and finance and insurance industries. The project was initiated in 1996, when the Dane County Executive reconvened the Dane County Economic Summit Council, a commission of public, private, and non-profit sector representatives, including leaders from the business community. As part of their mission, the members of the Summit Council wanted to ensure that all Dane County residents had access to jobs that offered opportunity for advancement. The council retained the Center on Wisconsin Strategy (COWS) at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, to analyze the labor market, help design a better integrated system of labor market administration, and ultimately develop the industry partnerships.

Public agencies and private employers in Dane County founded the finance and insurance, health care, and manufacturing partnerships. These industry-based partnerships provide workers with better information about employer demands, required skills, and training opportunities. They provide businesses with better indicators of worker experience and skills and with improved incumbent worker training systems. They also send better signals on workforce needs and priorities to training providers, technical colleges, and school-to-work programs. Success in this initiative has depended on the collaborative effort of organizations within industries.

Job seekers and those working in high-turnover, dead-end jobs are referred by the Dane County Job Center to pre-employment training programs in one of the three sectors. The Job Center also arranges support services. Employers hire individuals who complete the training program. They also participate in multi-employer training that provides incumbent workers with skills that make them more productive and qualified for higher-level jobs.

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## Career Ladders Based in Sectoral Initiatives

### THE WISCONSIN REGIONAL TRAINING PARTNERSHIP

WRTP is a membership-based organization of employers and unions that is dedicated to the development of family-sustaining jobs in a competitive business environment. It helps member firms improve the recruitment, retention, and advancement of low-income community residents in targeted industry clusters in the Milwaukee metro area.

WRTP develops employment-linked training programs that enable low-income community residents to obtain family-sustaining jobs at member companies. The menu of services includes essential skills training, worksite mentoring networks, formalized work-based learning, positive attendance policies and practices, financial literacy and asset-building programs, and bilingual services. WRTP also helps member firms develop post-placement career advancement training for their workers, and it brokers relationships with appropriate training providers. It also fosters change in human resources practices among its employer members.

WRTP training is tied directly to employment, from entry-level occupations to high-paying, high-skilled jobs in the manufacturing, construction, hospitality and health care sectors. WRTP has created a continuum of employment and training opportunities that both advances workers and meets employers' continuous need for skilled employees. WRTP has trained over 1,000 workers and served over 50 employers in the Milwaukee area.

WRTP's construction program places individuals into pre-apprenticeship job classifications and helps them qualify for apprenticeships. The health care program places individuals into jobs as Certified Nursing Assistant and helps them move up to jobs like Certified Medication Assistant.

WRTP is in the process of developing a model for workers to obtain diplomas and degrees. Currently, the manufacturing program places individuals into entry-level production jobs and helps them access internal resources and career ladders to qualify for advancement opportunities within their shops.

Employers were involved in the front-end design of the program, including the selection of target occupations and advancement approach. The program's key fea-

tures (e.g., criteria for assessing and selecting participants, training curricula) are designed to employer specifications. Employers are members of the program's governance board, and they are involved in making key decisions about program direction and implementation. They are also involved in the review of program performance and in helping to recruit additional employers to participate in the program.

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### THE SAN FRANCISCO INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY CONSORTIUM

The San Francisco Information Technology Consortium operates an innovative, career-ladder workforce development program based on three tiers of increasingly skilled, high-quality training and job placement. Serving current and former TANF recipients who face multiple barriers to employment, it targets jobs in information technology through a public, private, and non-profit collaboration.

The consortium brings together six non-profit employment and training agencies (Arriba Juntos, Bay Area Video Coalition, Glide Tech, Jewish Vocational Service, OpNet, and Goodwill Industries of San Francisco, San Mateo, and Marin), along with several public agencies involved in workforce development (City College of San Francisco, the San Francisco Department of Human Services, the San Francisco Housing Authority, and the Private Industry Council of San Francisco). The network integrates previously isolated programs to ease participants' access to career-ladder training and support services leading to employment at sustainable wages.

The consortium partners provide an array of training in office technology, digital media, and networking. City College faculty teach credit-bearing courses in A+ certification, Cisco and UNIX, and Windows networking, with the classes held at a community agency rather than the college to ease access. Training is tied to industry-identified job needs, and each participant follows a defined career-progression strategy, mastering increasingly advanced skills while obtaining valuable work experience.

### **1199C, SKILLS TRAINING AND UPGRADE FUND, PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA**

The New Faces Program, a health care career ladder developed by AFSCME District 1199C, is based on the premise that the shortage of nurses and allied health professionals will continue and increase and that new employees can be recruited from non-traditional populations: the unemployed, immigrants, and health care workers in entry-level positions. The program uses a career-ladder model, accepting applicants at any level and moving them from entry-level positions to technical and professional positions. One career ladder moves from home health worker, to nurse aide, to Licensed Practical Nurse, to Registered Nurse, and to Baccalaureate nurse. Another moves individuals into radiology careers.

Services include education and support for every level, including preparatory classes, such as GED instruction, mentoring, job placement, and training in the workplace. Because the New Faces Program is directed toward health care, the training fund's 35,000-square-foot Learning Center is open seven days a week, fourteen hours per day, to accommodate every work shift. Educational classes are worker-focused, using materials and experiences related to health care employment. In some cases, students receive financial support to attend degree programs at schools of nursing, allied health, or behavioral health.

Whether the educational program is offered at the Learning Center or a college or vocational school, successful completion is always linked to employment in the consortium of 60 contracting health care employers and the larger number of employers in the Delaware Valley. Instruction is integrated: each program contains basic preparation for the next step on the career ladder, a concept that is emphasized to students in every class.

Over the past 30 years, 1199C has helped thousands of workers gain the skills needed to advance. In addition to training workers at many rungs in its career ladders, this highly successful operation meets both worker and employer needs through a range of activities, including:

- Taking job orders from employers and screening, matching, and referring candidates to employers;
- Assessing workforce development needs;
- Soliciting employer input for training curricula skills standards;
- Designing and providing training services to prepare new hires;

- Designing and providing customized training services to enhance the skills of current workers;
- Brokering training between employers and publicly supported workforce development providers and community-based organizations for education (e.g., ABE, ESL, GED);
- Providing job counseling or other services to help employers retain new hires;
- Helping employers access public funds to support delivery of training and other career advancement services; and
- Linking employers to services that facilitate worker access to child care, transportation assistance, counseling, etc.

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cfeldman@1199ctraining.org*

### **NEW CENTURY CAREERS MANUFACTURING 2000, PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA**

New Century Careers, a regional non-profit, recruits and prepares minorities and residents of low-income neighborhoods for careers in manufacturing, beginning with training for entry-level positions as machinists or welders. New Century Careers has taken a lead role in a regional consortium of vocational schools, community colleges, universities, and Workforce Investment Boards to identify, target, recruit, screen, train, place, and develop individuals in skill-based manufacturing careers.

Manufacturing 2000 and Manufacturing 2000 Plus, two programs from New Century Careers, are designed as career ladders, building on entry-level training with modular training in advanced skills and apprenticeship skills. Manufacturing 2000 has identified and developed 16 modules as building blocks to take the entry-level machinist up an advancement ladder to a highly skilled manufacturing position. Similarly, Manufacturing 2000 Plus has identified and developed seven welding modules to take the entry-level welder to a highly skilled manufacturing position.

More than half of New Century Careers' entry-level students are unemployed at the time of entry into the Manufacturing 2000 training program. After being placed in employment, apprentices begin a modular training program that provides progressively higher levels of skill attainments over a four-year period. The training programs are closely connected with a variety of courses

in degree-granting institutions, leading to certificate programs in manufacturing technology and manufacturing engineering. Participants are tested for basic literacy and an aptitude for manufacturing work.

The programs, which are funded through government and foundation resources, are offered free to participants and address such barriers as transportation and schedule conflicts by offering multi-site courses. New Century Careers works with companies to arrange release time for training and to offer training on-site. NCC has received special funding to integrate women into the program and uses its funds to help with child care, transportation, clothing, and other types of assistance.

*Contact: Barry Maciak, President, 425 Sixth Avenue, Suite 2610, Pittsburgh, PA 15219, 412.325.1565, ext. 28*

#### **GOOD FAITH FUND INDUSTRY PARTNERS, PINE BLUFF, ARKANSAS**

Good Faith Fund helps its low-income participants move into progressively higher-skilled and higher-wage positions in the local health care industry. GFF began as a program of Southern Financial Partners, a non-profit affiliate of Southern Development Bancorporation, a multi-bank holding company with operations in Arkansas and Mississippi. GFF has evolved into an independent non-profit that operates lending programs for the company, working to increase the income and assets of low-income and low-skilled residents of the Arkansas and Mississippi Delta. Most GFF participants have incomes below \$5,000 a year, and about a third are TANF recipients.

GFF launched its Careers in Health Care Sectoral Employment Initiative in 1996 to train and place Certified Nursing Assistants, following a market analysis that demonstrated that health care offered the most entry-level opportunities for the region's chronically unemployed welfare recipients. The initiative, implemented in partnership with local health care employers, began by training low-income individuals for a single entry-level position, CNA.

GFF and the health care partners next identified other potential positions for employment and advancement, while paying considerable attention into developing relationships with nurse supervisors, recruiters, and facility administrators. This effort identified a need for Licensed Practical Nurses and Registered Nurses. Using relationships built with employers, GFF developed a career progression model, partnering with Southeast

Arkansas College (SEARK), to turn its health care initiative into a career ladder. (Although some CNAs had gone on for further education to become LPNs, RNs, and emergency medical technicians, there had been no systematized approach to advancement.)

GFF's career ladder program begins with an eight-week nursing assistant course. The course provides 240 hours of instruction, including four weeks of clinical experience in local hospitals and nursing homes. This is 145 more hours of training time than required by legislation. For participants in training, GFF offers support services to overcome barriers posed by access to reliable child care and transportation. Upon entry into the program, students are tested for their functional education levels, then placed into adult education classes or directly into training. Some graduates join local LPN and RN programs, while GFF has teamed with SEARK to develop a "bridge" course for those who have less than adequate academic proficiency. This bridge course, which students take along with prerequisite courses before entering the LPN or RN programs, provides an introduction to pharmacology, medical terminology, and nursing process, as well as sessions on study skills. SEARK, in turn, has added slots to its LPN program for students who successfully complete the bridge course.

As students near completion of the CNA training, an on-site adult education instructor helps them with job placement, retention, and career development. Using a case management model, each CNA student works with staff to develop a career plan that includes both immediate employment and goals for moving up the career ladder. To address barriers such as child care and transportation, GFF's career consultants work with graduates and employers to match support services to workers' needs.

Upon graduation from the CNA program, students get assistance from GFF career consultants in finding employment at hospitals, nursing homes, home health agencies, adult day care facilities, or other health care employers. The career consultants maintain monthly contact with all graduates for up to two years to help them retain employment or find other jobs. They also help graduates enroll in nursing and other allied health programs at local colleges and universities.

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## **Cross-Industry Career Ladders**

### **CASCADE ENGINEERING AND BUTTERBALL FARMS, INC., GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN\***

Cascade Engineering, among the largest injection molders in North America, employs 1,100 workers in skilled mid-level and high-level jobs at ten manufacturing locations worldwide. In 2000, it partnered with Butterball Farms, Inc., a manufacturer of butter-food products, and the Kent County, Michigan, Family Independence Agency, which initiated the partnership and serves as intermediary. Together, they created a cross-industry career ladder that advances workers from entry-level jobs paying less than \$8.00 per hour to jobs that pay more than \$14.00 per hour.

Each partner had its own reason to collaborate in the career ladder initiative. Cascade Engineering's goal was to hire skilled workers. Butterball Farms sought to improve the retention of lower-level workers. The Family Independence Agency sought to help people move out of poverty.

Cascade Engineering trains supervisors and workers in understanding how generational poverty affects workers, companies, families, and communities. With the help of specialists from Family Independence Agency based at Cascade Engineering, the company offers counseling in all areas of personal life and provides referrals to local providers of a range of support services, including parenting guidance, nutrition information, time and money management courses, domestic violence counseling, child care, transportation assistance, and relocation assistance. Cascade Engineering also provides each new worker with a job coach, who is assigned to them for first two weeks on job.

New workers enter Cascade Engineering as affiliates for a 90-day period, then advance along a four-rung career ladder, including: Level A, basic level production skills paying \$10.00 per hour; Level B, advanced production skills paying \$11.00 per hour; Level C, technical or leadership competence paying \$13.25 per hour; and Level D, technical and leadership competence paying \$14.50 per hour.

Butterball Farms provides its workforce with access to the same support services. However, after one year of a favorable work history, Butterball Farms workers can interview for better jobs at Cascade Engineering. They are also referred to a bilingual caseworker (55 percent of Cascade Engineering's workforce is Hispanic with low English proficiency). The caseworker helps the employee identify and address barriers to employment and also reviews and approves referrals to Cascade interview pool.

Through the agreement between Cascade Engineering and Butterball Farms, health insurance is covered during the transition to Cascade. Butterball Farms will rehire workers if they choose to return.

Initial results from this cross-industry career ladder are impressive. Quarterly retention rose at Butterball Farms from 60.8 percent in the first quarter of 2000 to 78.8 percent in the second quarter of 2001. Workers who transferred to Cascade are on a career ladder to earning as much as \$30,000 per year after two years.

### **EDUCATION DATA SYSTEMS, INC., DEARBORN, MICHIGAN\*\***

Education Data Systems, Inc, a private, for-profit company, operates a "tiered employment" career ladder model in Philadelphia, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Ft. Lauderdale. EDSI's career ladder advances workers from entry-level occupations into higher-skilled, better-paying positions.

Key elements of the tiered employment model include:

- Negotiating a defined set of expectations among a group of employers regarding setting a standard for hiring and promoting entry-level workers;
- Creating a "new worker protocol" that communicates advancement opportunities and expectations to participants;
- Training staff on how to counsel participants regarding opportunities offered by the tiered employment model; and
- Establishing internal controls to track the progress of participants through higher tiers of employment within prescribed timeframes.

The Tiered Employment model targets jobs in various industries, including: clerical/customer service, mental health, housekeeping, food service and health care.

Tier 1 occupations are entry-level occupations that provided work experience and skills and pay between

\* This profile is based on "Addressing Retention and Advancement through Career Ladder Strategies: Evaluation of the Detroit Regional Chamber Job Ladder Program," Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, December 2002.

\*\*This profile is based on an interview with Ray Eibel, Business Manager, EDSI, April 2001, Philadelphia.

\$5.50 and \$6.75 per hour with no benefits. Participants must maintain a 95 percent attendance rate and demonstrate skill development to become eligible for Tier 2 occupations.

Tier 2 occupations pay \$6.75 to \$9.00 per hour plus benefits. The same conditions apply regarding attendance and skill development before a worker can become eligible for promotion to a Tier 3 occupation.

Tier 3 occupations pay \$8.50 per hour plus benefits and typically can lead to a career (bank tellers, Certified Nurses Assistants, etc.)

EDSI matches each worker with an employment consultant who helps access support services and reten-

tion bonuses. EDSI works with employers to identify skill needs and monitor how they change over time.

EDSI markets its services to employers as a no-cost recruitment source that could reduce turnover and improve worker performance. To date, hundreds of employers have been recruited by the prospect that participation will provide them with a reliable source of qualified workers.

*Contact: Educational Data Systems, Inc., 15300 Commerce Drive North, Suite 2, Dearborn, MI 48120,  
kmall@edsincorporated.com*



## RESOURCES ON THE CD-ROM

Most of these resources are available on the CD-ROM accompanying the *Career Ladder Guide*. Several, as noted on the CD-ROM, are available on the Web. This compendium of tools, guidelines, and other resources will facilitate the development of your career ladder. Your region's needs and the capacity of each partner organization will be key determinants of the resources that you decide to use. Develop a model that produces the clearest benefits for the employers and workers who participate in the career ladder.

***Building Employer Participation***

***Career Ladder Planning***

***Career Ladder Research Reports***

***Community Audits***

***Continuous Improvement Resource***

***Developing a Business Plan***

***Employer Agreement Resource***

***Employer Focus Group Guidelines***

***Employer Survey Resource***

***Foundation Funding for Career Ladder Initiatives***

***General Skill and Work Activity Questionnaires***

***Human Resources Best Practices***

***Internal Marketing Material for Workforce  
Intermediaries***

***Involving Employers and Other Partners in  
Creating Career Ladders***

***"Job Zone" Occupational Classification***

***Materials for Marketing to Employers***

***Planning Questions***

***Potential Employer Benefits***

***Potential Roles for Intermediaries and Employers***

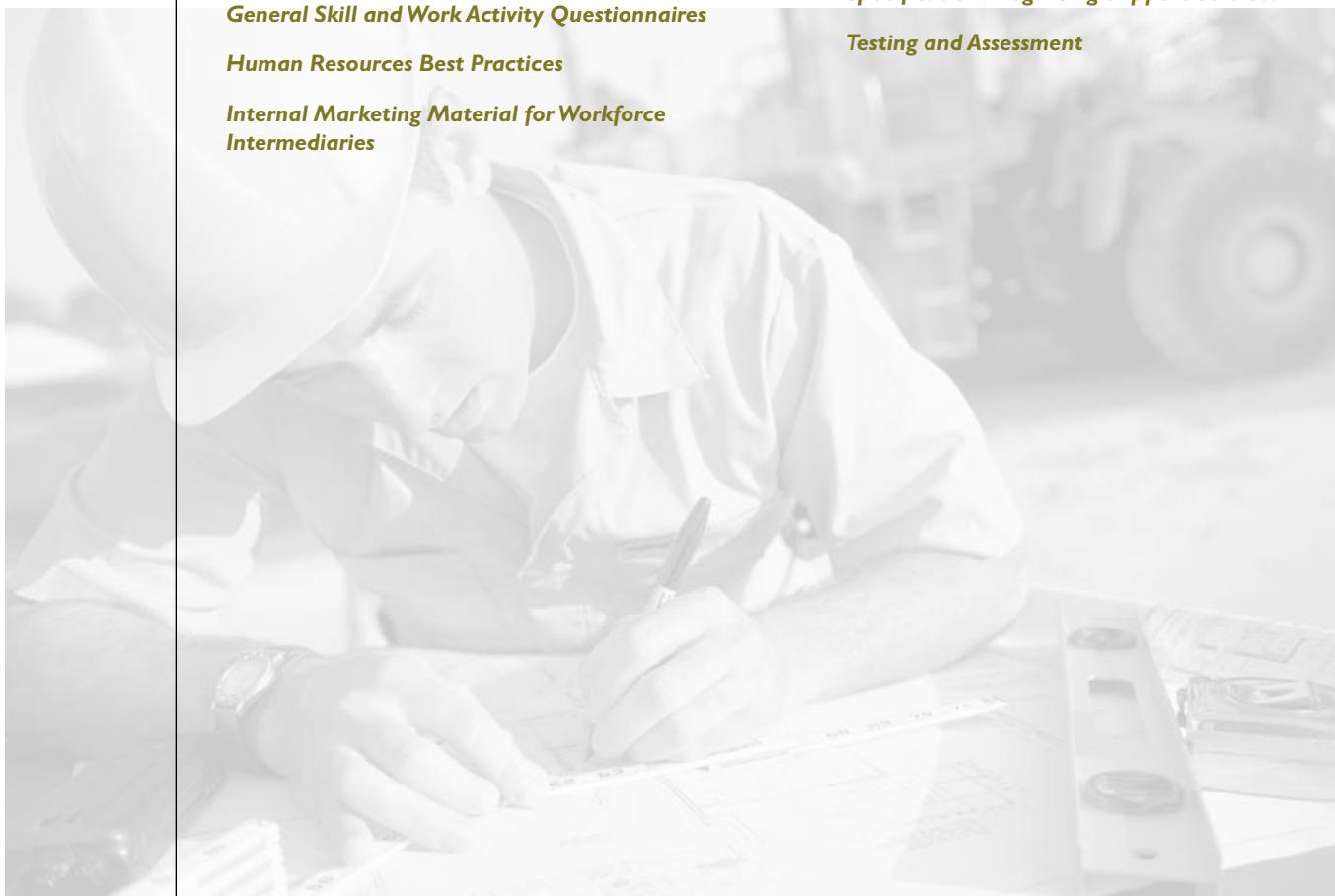
***Recruitment Challenges***

***Sources of Information on Labor Markets***

***Sources of Skill Requirements***

***Specifications Regarding Support Services***

***Testing and Assessment***





## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Jack Mills**, a program director at Jobs for the Future, leads research and development, best practice analysis, and policy design related to workforce development initiatives that meet the needs of employers and low-skilled adults. He has co-authored *Business Participation in Welfare-to-Work: Lessons from the United States* with Richard Kazis and *Employer-Led Organizations and Skill Supply Chains: Linking Worker Advancement with the Skill Needs of Employers* with Heath Prince. He has a Master's in Public Administration from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

**Heath Prince**, senior project manager at Jobs for the Future, specializes in state and federal workforce development policy analysis related to building economic opportunity for low-wage workers. He has authored several JFF Issue Briefs, including *Retention and Advancement in the Retail Industry: A Career Ladder Approach, Mentoring, High-Leverage Governance Strategies for Workforce Development Systems*, and, with Jack Mills, *Employer-Led Organizations and Career Ladders*. He leads research on several components of Workforce Innovation Networks—WINS—for JFF. He has a Master's in Public Affairs from the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas, Austin.



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