



**SkillWorks**<sup>SM</sup>  
PARTNERS FOR A PRODUCTIVE WORKFORCE

## Hotel Career Center

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## Partnership Structure, Services, and Participants Served

### Partnership Mission and Structure

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The partnership between the International Institute of Boston (IIB), the Hilton Hotel Corporation, and the Massachusetts Lodging Association Education Foundation (MLA) was intended to help low-income immigrants move towards economic self-sufficiency, while at the same time helping Hilton properties train high-performing employees. The partnership was designed to provide training, placement and career coaching to pre-employment participants through the Hospitality Training Program (HTP) and job-specific language and computer skills training and intensive career coaching to incumbent employees through the Hotel Career Center (HCC). The focused career coaching helped participants develop and pursue short- and long-term career goals.

Each partner organization contributed to the partnership based on its skills and strengths:

- ❖ **IIB** provided contextualized curriculum, pre-employment training, onsite incumbent instruction, coaching, and project management.
- ❖ Individual **Hilton Hotel** properties provided jobs to HTP graduates, identified current “team members” as potential HCC students, helped to document career pathways within their corporate context, provided students with paid release time to attend class, and ensured meeting space was available for each class.

- ❖ The **MLA** became an HCC partner in Year 4 to provide expertise on national and local industry trends, by offering workshops to hotel employees about these trends and providing feedback on HCC’s training curriculum.

Additionally, over the lifetime of the project, the preexisting HTP employer network was refined and expanded to further support the pre-employment component of the project. By Year 5 there were 56 employers in this network, participating at various levels of commitment ranging from preferential interviewing for HTP graduates to providing hotel tours to HTP students to providing two-week job shadowing positions for program graduates.

### Services Planned and Delivered

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The Hospitality Training Program (HTP) at IIB program predated the SkillWorks investment. The six-week pre-employment program provides contextualized instruction to immigrants seeking employment in the hospitality industry. The program also includes hotel tours, resume/interview assistance, preparation for job placement and, during the last two weeks, job shadowing opportunities for students.

SkillWorks resources allowed IIB to expand the number of students who could be trained annually from 30 to 48, and has allowed for more extensive post-graduation career coaching for those struggling to find a job or seeking to advance in their new positions. Under this more expanded design, 26 HTP

graduates from Years 3 and 4 received career coaching assistance in Year 5.

One other way that HTP graduates received services was through IIB's partnership with the Jewish Vocational Service (JVS). Together, these two organizations successfully applied for funding from the state's Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund and formed the Hospitality Career Institute (HCI), which offers career coaching and educational instruction, building upon the HCC model, at a number of non-Hilton hotels throughout Boston.<sup>1</sup> There were 28 HTP graduates pursuing additional education through HCI classes in Year 5.

Beyond HTP, SkillWorks grant resources were used to fund the incumbent-focused Hotel Career Center (HCC). HCC was a virtual center that provided on-site instruction for employees of properties managed by the Hilton Corporation. Over the five years of implementation, 185 incumbent workers enrolled in HCC services. With SkillWorks funding, HCC's main program components were *English for Advancement*, computer classes, and individualized career coaching. HCC offered classes throughout the year and participants generally attended two days per week.

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<sup>1</sup> The Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund has been viewed by SkillWorks as a long-term strategy for sustaining sector partnerships and, therefore, a central part of SkillWorks' public policy advocacy agenda. Additionally information about SkillWorks advocacy for the WCTF is discussed in the *Public Policy Profile*.

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*"[My coach] taught me everything, how to send emails, how to send my resume if I wanted to apply for a different job..."*

*"When I talk with her, I feel like I can really do this! She pushed us to meet our goals and work hard."*

–Incumbent Participant

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The class curriculum was customized to reflect the career goals of participants and their current job needs. For example, if the class was mostly comprised of individuals working in the hotel's kitchen and banquet service areas, the course would focus on vocabulary needed for these positions and those next along the career ladder. Career coaching occurred as needed but at least once a month, and included meetings with students as well as their direct supervisors. Often supervisors would indicate specific skills a student needed to advance to the next level. The coach would then work with the student on these skills in class and one-on-one to increase proficiency.

### Participant Characteristics

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HTP and HCC staff served **425 individuals** during the five years of SkillWorks funding, **240 individuals** receiving pre-employment services and **185 incumbents** participating in onsite training and coaching.

IIB succeeded in attracting and serving its primary target population – low-income individuals who are recent immigrants to this country. However, it was less successful in enrolling Boston residents; 15 percent of pre-employment

	Year 1 Cohort		Year 2 Cohort		Year 3 Cohort		Year 4 Cohort		Year 5 Cohort		TOTAL	
	#	% of Enrolled	#	% of Enrolled								
Enrolled	52	100.0%	53	100.0%	50	100.0%	44	100.0%	41	100.0%	240	100.0%
Graduated	42	80.8%	50	94.3%	50	100.0%	44	100.0%	37	90.2%	223	92.9%
Placed	40	76.9%	42	79.2%	40	80.0%	40	90.9%	29	70.7%	191	79.6%

and 10 percent of incumbent participants have been Boston residents.<sup>2</sup>

The educational attainment of HTP and HCC participants at enrollment was very different. The HTP enrollees were a considerably more educated cohort (31 percent had post-secondary degrees at the time of enrollment), many having attained these levels before they immigrated to the US. In contrast, 85 percent of HCC participants had attained no more than a high school diploma or GED. Because of their more advanced educational foundation, HTP graduates were generally placed into positions more advanced than those held by HCC participants already working at the hotels.

All participants had household incomes below Family Economic Sufficiency Standards (FESS).<sup>3</sup> Ninety-six percent of HTP participants had incomes less than \$25,000 (though more than half in Years 3 and 5 did not report income). The

<sup>2</sup> Serving Boston residents has always been a challenge for HTP and HCC because they can not (and philosophically will not) choose to exclude immigrant clients from services because of where they live.

<sup>3</sup> FESS calculates a basic budget of costs, including housing, childcare, healthcare, food, transportation, and taxes. It shows what constitutes an adequate income and how this varies across family types and locations (<http://www.liveworkthrive.org/reports.php>).

household incomes of HCC participants were higher, with 53 percent of participants with household incomes of more than \$25,000. However, these higher incomes reflect the fact that many participants worked two jobs.

## Service Outcomes

Participants and employers saw positive outcomes as a result of HTP and HCC services. The following sections will describe these outcomes in greater detail.

### Pre-Employment Participants

The HTP program has very high graduation rates, with 92.9 percent of participants successfully graduating from the program. Placement rates were also high, particularly in Years 1 through 4. Placement rates in Year 5 dropped slightly, perhaps largely due to the economic downturn that resulted in layoffs at both partner hotels and throughout the larger hospitality sector.

Still, nearly 80 percent of all enrolled participants were placed overall. The high placement rate speaks to the quality of the graduates and to the employers' affinity for hiring HTP participants.

The average placement wage of HTP graduates in Year 5 was \$13.03. For those who were employed at enrollment, this represents an average wage increase of \$3.27 over the wage they were making when they enrolled in the program, a 37 percent increase.<sup>4</sup>

The 12-month retention rate for the 40 Year 4 participants who were placed was 64 percent. While the economy created its own degree of volatility and turnover in the sector, the retention levels were also impacted by more positive factors; according to HCC coaches, some component of the reduced retention rate may have been participants' successful pursuit of better employment opportunities.

The educational outcomes of HTP participants represent IIB's commitment to career advancement opportunities for all participants. While the HTP program formally ends at graduation, the staff continues to coach and train participants through other IIB programs and external referrals. As a result of these efforts, two participants entered college and seven enrolled in, and six completed, a hospitality sector training (e.g., Front Office Training).

In Year 5, 28 participants participated in IIB's Hospitality Career Institute classes, which are offered in partnership with JVS and funded by the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund.

## Incumbent Participants

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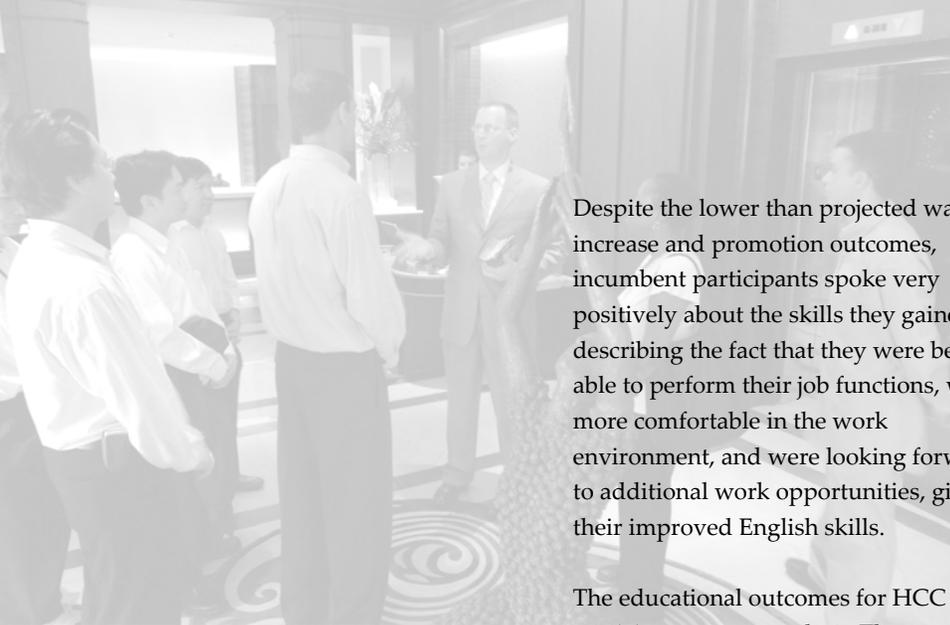
Of the 185 workers who participated in the HCC program, 127 (69 percent) are still working at a Hilton property. This matches the initial program target of partner employers retaining 70 percent of their enrolled participants.

One hundred incumbent participants received wage increases over the five years of implementation, about 54 percent of all enrollees. This fell short of the program's goal of having 100 percent of participants receive a wage increase during the lifetime of the initiative.

Over one-quarter of all participants (50) received one or more promotions, which has contributed to the earning potential of these individuals. Initial projections were much higher, expecting over 150 promotions over five years. One of the reasons why initial projections were not met is because project staff assumed that workers would be willing to move between properties to take advantage of advancement opportunities. This hypothesis was not fully borne out. Employees were reluctant to move to new properties where they were unfamiliar with the work culture or the management. They also had less flexibility in their work schedules than program designers anticipated. If a promotion would potentially shift a person's work schedule, they would often decline because of existing commitments to a second job or to their family.

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<sup>4</sup> About two-thirds of placed HTP graduates were employed at enrollment, though many of the jobs were lower-paying, part-time service jobs.



Despite the lower than projected wage increase and promotion outcomes, incumbent participants spoke very positively about the skills they gained, describing the fact that they were better able to perform their job functions, were more comfortable in the work environment, and were looking forward to additional work opportunities, given their improved English skills.

The educational outcomes for HCC participants were modest. Three participants entered college, one of whom graduated. Seven enrolled in a credentialed program, such as bartending, and three received the credential. Four participants enrolled in the sector-specific Front Office Training and three completed the course. These outcomes are not surprising given the low skill levels of enrolled workers and the fact that post-secondary training was not an explicit goal the partnership or its activities, as it was originally defined.

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*“Before, I was afraid to talk with people, but after the program I feel like I can talk with anybody. I don’t have fear anymore. For me, the program was a big help. Now I know what I am doing and how to respond to questions.”*

– Incumbent Participant

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Many participants were functionally illiterate in their native language (40 percent had attained less than a GED or high school diploma) so they had to begin at the most basic skill levels and work from there. Those who received HCC assistance may still continue their education, now that their foundational English and computer skills have been improved.

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Employer describing the progress of trained employees: *“many went from being shy with no confidence to thriving and wanting to learn. They’ve become more assertive in their positions and are considering transferring; they turned out to be the star employees in their departments.”*

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*“I really feel that I learned a great deal. I think my English improved a lot and the computer class was really wonderful. As I mentioned, I still use the things I learned in that class today.”*

– Incumbent Participant

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## Employer Outcomes

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Employers were pleased to report a few positive outcomes that resulted from their participation in HCC:

- ❖ Productivity increases caused by improved worker self-esteem and communication skills;
- ❖ Increased employee confidence resulting in improved communications between management and staff; and
- ❖ Higher rates of job retention for HTP graduates and HCC participants.

Employers also found employees to be more comfortable working independently, taking initiative, and responding to clients’ requests. One employer even said that “some employees have moved from being functionally illiterate and barely able to communicate to take on responsibilities like training fellow staff and dealing with vendors.”

When asked how their company was affected by participation in HCC, one employer said that the most significant change was “the increase in the self confidence of participants as they gained skills, such as language and computer skills, in order to advance themselves personally and professionally.” Even if not promoted, employers perceived they

became more effective in their positions and roles within the organization.

Finally, HTP graduates' retention rates were noteworthy. Management's perception was that HTP graduates were of "superb quality" and generally were retained longer than average; at one property, only one HTP hire has ever left.

## Systemic Changes

The HTP and HCC programs were designed to bring about systemic changes in the way partnering employers interact with their low-skilled employees and in the way that IIB provides workforce development services. The partnership was able to achieve changes in both areas.

### Changes in Employer Practices

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The two Hilton properties that participated with HCC for the duration of the project implemented substantial changes in their work benefits and policies. These changes stemmed from their enhanced understanding of the needs of low-skilled employees and included expanding tuition reimbursement policies to allow for adult basic education and developing creative ways to build employee skills (e.g., job shadowing and creating jobs that functioned in dual roles).

Hotel human resource staff described their increased awareness of the different resources available to low-income/lower-skilled workers (e.g., courses focused on credit management, home buying, computer skills, process of building English skills, citizenship) and how important these competencies are in promoting a productive workplace.

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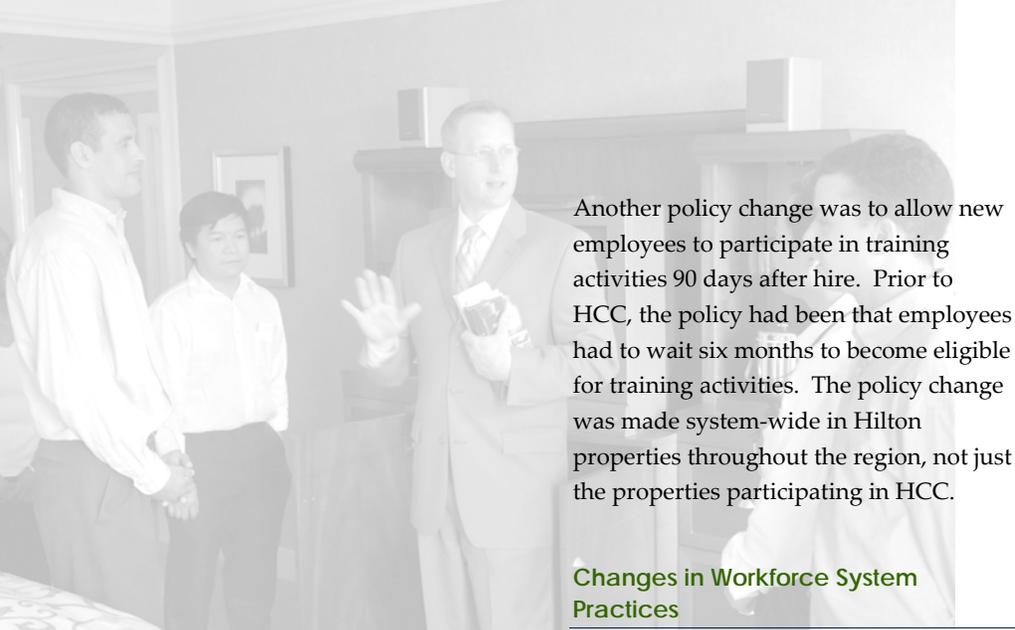
*"Management staff have learned that it is important to develop workers – not just in terms of increasing productivity (since the classes actually result in a temporary loss in productivity) but because they are people."*

– Partner Employer

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In general, managers who were exposed to the skill gains experienced by HCC participants began to show an enhanced commitment to employee advancement. In fact, a management representative at one property said that HCC had a "significant positive impact" on their commitment to advancing existing employees. The commitment was evident when the direct supervisors would work around participant class schedules or encourage new individuals to participate.

Property management also demonstrated its commitment by allowing greater flexibility in the types of classes that could qualify for tuition reimbursement (e.g., writing courses, ESOL courses). At first, properties would only pay for classes related to employees' current jobs. For example, someone employed as a cook could only use tuition reimbursement for cooking classes. HCC coaches helped employers understand that writing, English, and computer classes can be equally valuable in improving skills. Eventually, any course that a coach said was part of a worker's professional development would be approved. Over time, a precedent was established for funding ABE classes and this trend is expected to continue since employers now have a greater understanding of the ESOL/adult learning process.



Another policy change was to allow new employees to participate in training activities 90 days after hire. Prior to HCC, the policy had been that employees had to wait six months to become eligible for training activities. The policy change was made system-wide in Hilton properties throughout the region, not just the properties participating in HCC.

### Changes in Workforce System Practices

Significant changes have occurred at IIB since it received the SkillWorks grant five years ago. IIB staff believe these changes are due, in large part, to the experience designing and implementing a worksite-based sector training program. A summary of the most compelling changes reported includes:

- ❖ Employer relationships: IIB has developed the ability to identify employer partners' priorities and developed a refined understanding of how to manage the logistics of running a program at employer locations.
- ❖ Becoming outcomes driven: IIB has learned great lessons about the importance of tracking and the way data can be used to improve services and performance. This awareness has evolved into a new internal quality control process. IIB is now collecting and tracking data on all of the programs, looking at outputs and outcomes. Starting next year, staff will be evaluated based on their individual outcomes. This process is intended to help the organization's board use data to make decisions.
- ❖ Institution-wide commitment to career ladders: Staff throughout IIB's Workforce and Education

Department are discussing how to not only get clients jobs but how to strategically pick the first job so that there is a logical next step that can be taken.

- ❖ Improved service delivery techniques: The IIB curriculum has evolved to use any course to teach multiple skills. For example, in a literacy class the instructor might now be considering how to tie in other skill deficiencies like math and computers to maximize the learning and the time invested.

## Conclusion

IIB and its partners were able to spend five years investing in the lives of nearly 500 low-skilled, low-income workers. Through a combination of contextualized English courses, basic industry skills trainings, and intensive career coaching with individuals, supervisors, managers and human resource directors, 191 individuals were placed into employment in the hospitality industry, 50 individuals received promotions, over 100 saw their wages increase, and many more experienced improved quality of life as they were better able to interact with their co-workers and managers.

Employers praised the program for helping to increase the skills of its workforce and creating an environment where supervisors and staff were able to interact more fully because of employees' improved language skills.

Systemically, employers adopted improved practices that will have lasting implications for the way they operate and invest in their employees. IIB, as the primary service provider, experienced changes as an organization as well. The provider is already incorporating many

changes into the fabric of its organization and is poised to implement new sectoral training programs as the opportunities arise.

In the immediate future, HTP will continue to train 48 participants a year. This represents a permanent increase of 18 training slots that were initially

funded with SkillWorks resources. HCC in its current form is not continuing, though there may be continued ESOL services provided as needed by employers. In the meantime, HCC participants have been invited to attend classes held at IIB as part of the Hospitality Career Institute.

### Key Lessons for Workforce Partnerships:

- ❖ Establish upfront goals and track progress against goals. Invest time and effort up front in identifying participant needs and program goals and then articulate how you're going to track them. Over time, IIB discovered the importance of tracking participant outcomes for program improvement and participant satisfaction. In all future initiatives, IIB will place a priority on establishing goals from the outset and then committing to tracking their progress.
- ❖ Be willing to evaluate progress and change mid-course. The HCC partnership found early on that participants generally were not willing to move between properties. With this information, the partnership began to talk with participants about cross-training so that they would be ready for multiple position openings, rather than a single target position for promotion. HCC members realized that if an approach to service delivery is not working, the best course of action is to establish a timeframe for changing directions.
- ❖ Approach employer relationships with a business mentality. In planning for the sustainability of HTP and HCC, IIB realized that it needed to shift the way it communicated with employer partners. In order to gain employers' financial investment, the employer relationship needs to be managed with a business, not a nonprofit, mentality. "The employer is your customer, and it's your responsibility to figure out what will motivate them to continue buying your services." In future projects, IIB plans to incorporate this mentality into the program design to better build in long-term stability.

## **SEEING OPPORTUNITIES. CREATING SOLUTIONS.**

**SkillWorks**, a public-private partnership, is addressing the needs of employers for more skilled workers and of workers for more and better access to jobs that pay a family-supporting wage.

### **SkillWorks Phase I Funders:**

- **The Annie E. Casey Foundation**
- **Bank of America Charitable Gift Fund and the Frank W. and Carl S. Adams Memorial Fund, Bank of America, N.A., Trustee**
- **Boston 2004**
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