



SkillWorksSM
PARTNERS FOR A PRODUCTIVE WORKFORCE

Partners in Career and Workforce Development (PCWD)

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Partnership Structure, Services, and Participants Served

Partnership Mission and Structure

Partners in Career and Workforce Development (PCWD), led by Partners HealthCare, an integrated healthcare system founded by Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH) and Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), received \$1 million in grants from SkillWorks over a three-year period. Through the establishment of PCWD, Partners focused on expanding what its affiliated hospitals had already been doing in the area of workforce development. PCWD was a vehicle for bringing the various pre-employment and career development efforts under one umbrella. Two of the major outcomes that were of interest to the Partners system were (1) to develop new pipelines for entry-level workers; and (2) to fill positions that had high vacancy rates with existing employees who might rise up a career ladder. Partners HealthCare was also hoping that PCWD could lead to long-term institutional changes related to how the hospitals in the system addressed workforce development.

PCWD was the only SkillWorks grant that was led by an employer, Partners HealthCare. In addition to the hospitals that were part of the Partners system—MGH, BWH, and Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital—other key stakeholders included WorkSource Partners (which provided some of the career coaching services),

Project Hope (which provided the pre-employment outreach, screening, and case management services), and Jewish Vocational Service (which provided pre-employment instruction and pre-college training). Partners HealthCare staff managed all aspects of PCWD operations. PCWD benefited from consistent staff leadership over the entire five years of the SkillWorks Initiative, with an extremely strong internal Administrative Team who met regularly and oversaw the day-to-day operations of the program.

“The model that works is one in which the employer is driving the process. There needs to be feedback and listening and learning.”

—Bev Sobers, Workforce Development, Brigham and Women's Hospital

In addition to the internal management team, PCWD regularly convened a Leadership Team with representatives from each of the Partners hospitals involved in the project. This team was responsible for program direction and policy. PCWD also regularly convened a much broader Partnership Council that included its nonprofit partners and internal human resources staff from the hospitals.

Services Planned and Delivered

The PCWD effort involved two primary sets of activities:

1. *Pre-employment Services:* PCWD, learning from its earlier pre-employment program, Project Rise, provided pre-employment training and career coaching to approximately 45 individuals per year over the past five years. SkillWorks funded the first three years of the program, and the last two years were funded internally. The services have undergone numerous refinements as the staff learned what elements of the program were most effective. Nonetheless, the fundamentals have remained constant:

- ❖ a rigorous outreach and screening process by Project Hope, a community-based organization;
- ❖ commitment to relatively high standards for program participants (a high school degree, one year of consistent work history, fit in a healthcare setting, and at least an 8th grade level in language and reading);
- ❖ a supportive and nurturing approach to coaching;
- ❖ classroom training on basic workforce readiness within a hospital setting;
- ❖ an internship program placing participants in hospital departments;
- ❖ a Career Club that provided additional support to those not immediately placed in jobs; and

- ❖ post-placement support for about one year following placement.

2. *Incumbent worker services:*

Incumbent workers in the PCWD program have access to a range of career development services including career planning, career coaching, pre-college classes, and pre-college reading and writing for non-native speakers. The actual intensity of services provided and the design of the classes changed significantly over the three years of the SkillWorks grants, as PCWD analyzed outcomes and refined its program to reflect its learning. PCWD experimented with various approaches to pre-college training and over time focused more on pre- and post- training skill assessment.

3. *Other workforce activities:* In addition to the efforts focused on services to individuals, PCWD was involved in efforts to create new educational programs in the healthcare sector and to increase awareness of career development options within Partners HealthCare. These additional services included:

- ❖ development of a comprehensive career and workforce development website that provides information relevant to managers and supervisors, employees, jobseekers, human resource professionals, and youth;
- ❖ development of a hybrid Surgical Technologist program in partnership with Boston Health Care and Research Training Institute, another SkillWorks grantee, and the Mass Bay Community College

(no PCWD participants enrolled in the program);

- ❖ development of the Clinician as Educator certificate program through the MGH Institute of Health Professionals (enrollment in the program was very small);
- ❖ development of a Respiratory Technology program in collaboration with Bunker Hill Community College (no PCWD participants enrolled in the program); and
- ❖ expansion of the Organization for a New Equality financial literacy workshops delivered to pre-employment participants and to nine incumbent workers.

Within this active program context, PCWD further raised the visibility and credibility of workforce development efforts by celebrating the success of graduates and recognizing managers through designation of Workforce Development Champions.

Participant Characteristics

Over the three years of SkillWorks funding, PCWD served a total of 137 individuals as part of its pre-employment program, and 466 incumbent workers.

The pre-employment participants were largely from the city of Boston (81 percent) and most were from very low-income households (74 percent had household incomes of under \$10,000 a year). English was the primary language of most of the participants (80 percent) and the vast majority were U.S. citizens. Given the entry requirements for the program, almost all of the participants had a least a high school degree, with a small number (6 percent) having a postsecondary degree.

As one would expect, the incumbent participants were more likely to live outside of Boston, were from households with higher incomes, and were more likely to have a postsecondary degree. Interestingly, many more incumbent workers reported that English was not their primary language—50 percent of incumbents in contrast to 20 percent of the pre-employment participants.

Partners developed a framework that categorized the incumbent worker participants and their skill needs into a number of different developmental categories (see table 1). Overall, it tended to focus most of the services on individuals who had at least a high school diploma but required some pre-college work to qualify for a postsecondary degree program.

Table 1		
Type	Characteristics	% of Total Incumbents
Health Career Starters	Workers with limited work skills, limited English and basic literacy, and limited knowledge of healthcare careers	22%
College Bound	Workers who have a high school diploma or equivalent but require one to two years of pre-college work to pass the College Placement Exam	47%
College Ready	Workers who already have the educational preparation needed to pass the College Placement Exam and may, in fact, already have taken college-level courses	31%

Service Outcomes

Employment Outcomes for Pre-Employment Participants

The last pre-employment training cohort funded through SkillWorks graduated in November 2006. *A total of 111 individuals, 81 percent of the 137 participants who enrolled in the program during the three years of SkillWorks funding, were placed in jobs.*

“In the beginning, I was the only one hiring and taking on interns. More recently, I was not able to get the interns I hoped for because they went to other departments. The word has spread. And, in MGH, PCWD has now gotten a reputation of something to look into.”
 – MGH Supervisor

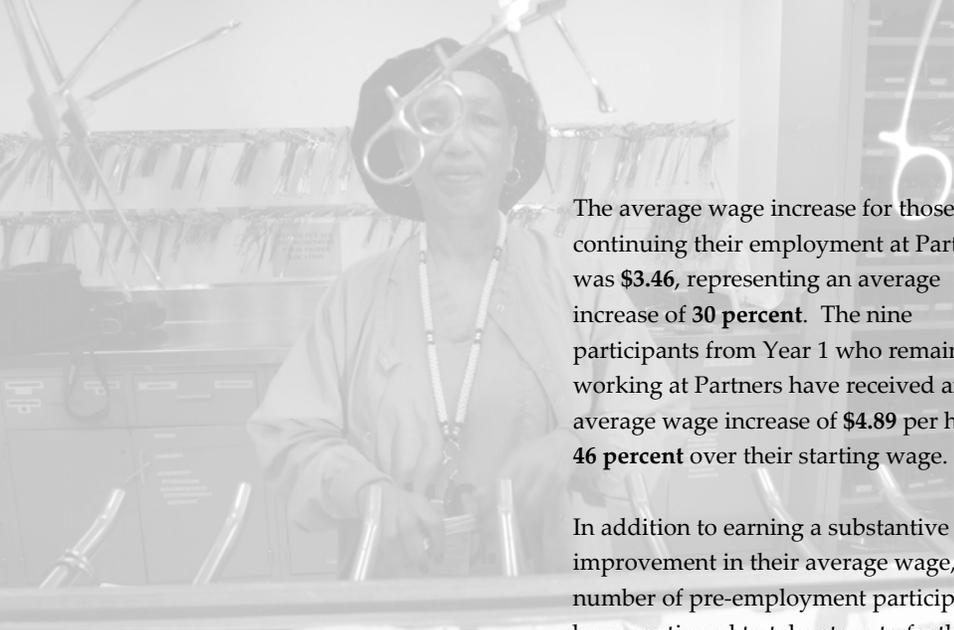
In general, PCWD prides itself on placing individuals in relatively high quality jobs within the Partners system. Over time, the quality of the jobs in which pre-employment participants were placed improved, with the average wage at placement increasing from \$11.43 for those enrolling in Year 1 to \$12.32 for those enrolling in Year 3. While no longer funded through SkillWorks, in the last two years the average wage at placement was \$13.14 in 2007 and \$14.30 in 2008.

Initially, PCWD faced some challenges in the placement of participants in full-time positions with benefits. During its first year of operation, many pre-employment participants were initially placed in temporary positions with Bulfinch Temporary Services, as a first step toward full-time employment. However, by Year 3 most participants were placed in full-time jobs with benefits. In addition, over the past five years, the average number of days it took to make a placement was reduced by almost one-third.

Part of the reason for the improvement in outcomes has been the growing recognition and visibility the program has within the Partners system. Many of the supervisors who hired PCWD graduates had positive experiences, leading them to hire through PCWD and to spread the word about the program to other supervisors who also became champions and advocates of the program.

PCWD has also been relatively successful in retaining and advancing a large number of pre-employment participants. At the end of Year 5 of SkillWorks, a total of 52, or 47 percent of the pre-employment participants who were placed at Partners, remained working in its system. All of these individuals have now been working for Partners for at least 24 months. Moreover, individuals who remain employed have done very well—close to 15 percent have received a promotion.

	Year 1 Cohort		Year 2 Cohort		Year 3 Cohort		TOTAL	
	#	% of Enrolled	#	% of Enrolled	#	% of Enrolled	#	% of Enrolled
Enrolled	44	100%	51	100%	42	100%	137	100%
Graduated	38	86%	51	100%	36	86%	125	91%
Placed	30	68%	50	98%	31	74%	111	81%



The average wage increase for those continuing their employment at Partners was **\$3.46**, representing an average increase of **30 percent**. The nine participants from Year 1 who remain working at Partners have received an average wage increase of **\$4.89** per hour, **46 percent** over their starting wage.

In addition to earning a substantive improvement in their average wage, a number of pre-employment participants have continued to take steps to further advance their careers. In 2008, 17 of the 52 pre-employment participants who remain at Partners responded to an online survey that gathered feedback on their educational pursuits. Of those responding, five completed a pre-college or other prerequisite class; seven had applied to a college program; five were currently enrolled in college; and two were completing a healthcare-related skill training course. Moreover, all of the respondents reported that they expected to take additional steps in advancing their careers in the future.

12-Month Retention Rate	70%
Total Placed who Received Promotion	16
Employed at Partners 12/08	52
% Still Employed of Total Placed	47%
Average Wage at Placement	\$11.91
Average Wage 12/08 of Those Still Employed	\$15.69

Outcomes for Incumbent Workers

The evidence of any direct employment outcomes for the incumbent workers at PCWD is limited. Overall, the level of engagement with incumbent workers was not as strong as with the pre-employment participants. The intensity of the services provided through PCWD was relatively light, with many

incumbents attending only one of the ESOL or pre-college classes sponsored by PCWD. Contact with their coach was typically limited to one or two sessions.

All of the incumbent participants received at least one wage increase (almost all of which were cost of living increases) and by the end of five years a total of 93, or 20 percent, had received at least one promotion. However, given the relatively low intensity of services provided, it is difficult to link these wage increases or promotions to the specific services being provided to incumbent workers.

The number of incumbent participants who made significant educational gains was not as high as initially hoped. PCWD stopped formal tracking of incumbent participants with the end of its SkillWorks grant. At that point in time, the following outcomes were achieved:

- ❖ 7 participants had completed a GED;
- ❖ 5 participants had completed a certificate program;
- ❖ 40 participants had enrolled in a college program; and
- ❖ 11 participants had completed a postsecondary degree.

There is evidence, however, that many SkillWorks incumbent participants continue to be involved in some type of career advancement activity. During 2008, 28 employees who participated in PCWD continued to receive coaching services through internal Partners resources and 109 (34 percent) had received tuition reimbursement.

PCWD also sent an online survey to the 318 incumbent participants remaining employed in the system at the end of 2008 and received 87 responses (27 percent). The survey found that a relatively large number of incumbent participants remained engaged in career development activities. Approximately two-thirds reported taking a pre-college, ESOL, or skill training class in the last year. A surprisingly large number of employees, 30, or 34 percent of respondents, reported that they applied to a college program in the past year, including 16 to nursing, nine to radiology tech, and two to other healthcare programs. In addition, seven employees completed a degree program in the last year.

Employer Outcomes

Improving the pipeline for well-prepared entry-level workers is probably the most direct benefit of PCWD for the Partners hospitals. The PCWD pre-employment program is increasingly seen by supervisors as a preferred pipeline for entry-level employees. These employees are seen as preferable to those hired “off the street” because they are better screened, have a better attitude, are more prepared for the healthcare environment, and are more motivated than other entry-level employees. While Partners is hopeful that over time its investment in workforce development will help it to address internal shortages in the allied health field, to date it has not seen significant results in this area. There has also been little evidence to document the impact of its incumbent worker training on measures of productivity.

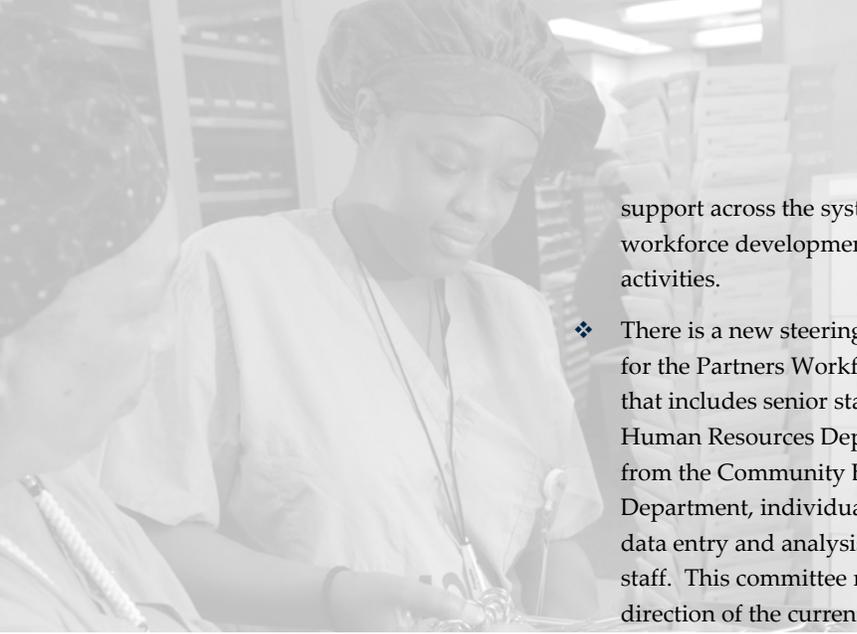
Systemic Changes

Changes in Employer Practices

PCWD’s most significant outcome for the Partners system is the role that it played in changing the culture in terms of leadership’s commitment and support for the career development of its employees. Senior managers at Partners HealthCare believe that their participation in SkillWorks has helped to bring the workforce development function at Partners to a new level. While Partners hospitals were involved in a variety of workforce development-related activities previously, being part of SkillWorks allowed Partners to be more intentional about its approach to workforce development and to bring it to a higher level of scale and visibility within the organization.

Senior managers note that PCWD is no longer just a community outreach project, but a more integral part of their broader human resource system. They noted the following indicators of this shift in perspective:

- ❖ Within Partners, a number of senior staff from the Human Resources Department are now involved directly in the workforce development activities.
- ❖ A data analyst is now working with PCWD to track the employment status and compensation of all employees involved in workforce development programs.
- ❖ Partners has created a new position in the Human Resources Department, Partners Workforce Development Manager. This new manager is overseeing the Boston Foundation-funded Allied Health Initiative and provides overall



support across the system for workforce development-related activities.

- ❖ There is a new steering committee for the Partners Workforce System that includes senior staff from the Human Resources Department, staff from the Community Benefits Department, individuals involved in data entry and analysis, and PCWD staff. This committee reviews the direction of the current workforce activities within the Partners system, identifies data needs, helps to bring system resources together around workforce issues, and vets new workforce development-related ideas.
- ❖ Internal Partners resources continue to fund the pre-employment program. The Human Resources Department has given the program increased attention. For example, following the graduation of a pre-employment class, a vice president in the department sent out an email in order to assist graduates in job placement. Partners has also increased its financial commitment to this program by adding a post-graduation paid internship component that keeps students engaged in a structured work environment, provides assistance to managers, and allows students to obtain a modest income during the job search phase.
- ❖ Partners HealthCare has purchased specialized software—Efforts to Outcomes—to enable it to track the progress of all employees involved in workforce development activities.
- ❖ As a result of a pilot class funded through SkillWorks, Partners has a new appreciation of the importance of financial literacy training and is in

talks with local nonprofits about delivering ongoing financial literacy training.

The direct impacts on individual hospitals have differed. BWH has significantly enhanced its workforce development as a direct result of its work with SkillWorks. Its manager of workforce development has been elevated to a more senior-level position. The hospital has opened a storefront workforce office and developed an internally funded relationship with Project Hope as a community “funnel,” recruiting and screening neighborhood residents for jobs within the hospital. Finally, BWH has developed its own internal coaching capacity and furthered its commitment to hiring from within for staffing the new Cardiovascular Center. Beginning in 2006, the hospital has supported a \$1.2 million annual budget for workforce development.

On the other hand, the changes at MGH have not been as significant. While the hospital remains committed to providing workforce development services for its employees and sees the benefits of collaboration, it views PCWD as an extension of what it was already doing. Rather than develop its own internal coaching capacity, MGH continues to see its human resources generalists as the point of contact for employees interested in career advancement. However, MGH staff do report that participation in SkillWorks has contributed to MGH’s learning about workforce development and has provided its employees with additional resources.

Enhanced Capacity of Service Providers

Participation in SkillWorks has also had a significant, longer-term impact on one of

its service providers—Project Hope. According to Project Hope staff, its participation in the PCWD program not only provided the organization with new opportunities in the workforce development arena, but also led the organization to build internal capacity and change its overall approach to addressing the needs of its constituency.

“Our relationship with Partners has opened up our services to the community. We have been able to expand our programming and now have a separate department, Employer Partnerships, with a staff of five.”

– Project Hope Staff

As a result of its work with PCWD, Project Hope developed a number of new programs focusing on pipelines for low-income residents into healthcare careers. Project Hope realized as a result of its outreach activities for the PCWD pre-employment program that there were a large number of individuals in the community who could not qualify for the services because they lacked basic computer skills or because they had some minor issues on the reading and language portion of the TABE test. To meet the needs of these individuals, Project Hope established a *pre*-pre-employment program, the Community Partners in Health Professions Program, a six-week training program partially funded through the Boston PIC.

In addition, Project Hope is under contract with BWH to provide the outreach, recruitment, and screening for identifying entry-level workers to staff its new cardiovascular facility. More importantly, Project Hope’s involvement with PCWD has changed its overall institutional approach to workforce

development. It has gained a greater understanding of how to work with an employer, a much deeper appreciation of the specific skills needed in the healthcare sector, and increased capacity to provide effective coaching services.

Conclusions

Partners HealthCare utilized its three years of funding from SkillWorks to innovate, pilot, and learn in the workforce development arena. During this period, Partners provided services to 603 individuals, helped 111 very low-income residents attain jobs, and provided the remedial training and support needed by existing employees in the system to make progress along a career path. In particular, the program made a significant difference in the lives of the 52 pre-employment participants who still worked in one of the Partners hospitals at the end of five years. For many incumbent workers, the services provided through PCWD allowed them to take the next step in their educational pathway. Perhaps most importantly, the learning achieved through their participation in SkillWorks has helped to elevate the importance of workforce development throughout Partners HealthCare.

While Partners decided not to pursue continued funding through SkillWorks after Year 3, PCWD remains an ongoing self-funded project within the Partners system. PCWD considers itself to be an internal system-wide workforce development resource that will pilot and explore new models for increasing the skill levels of Partners employees. In addition, PCWD will continue the pre-employment program, increasing the number of participants from about 44 to 64 per year.

Key Lessons for Workforce Partnerships

- ❖ *Develop a strong learning culture with an emphasis on continuous improvement.* One of the hallmarks of PCWD is that it has embraced learning and continuous improvement over its five years of operation. PCWD staff were continually reviewing data on the participants in their classes and making changes in class design and curriculum based upon what they learned. They also regularly surveyed the participants to better understand the barriers affecting their advancement and the value of the services that PCWD was providing. Finally, PCWD realized that to better determine the effectiveness of its training required more rigorous and consistent pre- and post-training assessments. PCWD was also willing to abandon efforts that did not work and to explore and pilot new innovative approaches. This learning orientation has led to continuous refinements in PCWD's services and to improved outcomes for participants.
- ❖ *Nurture relationships with supervisors and managers in order to increase their commitment to program participants' success.* PCWD staff have developed strong ongoing relationships with managers through their internship program and other activities. These managers have become internal "ambassadors" for the program. This was most notable in the pre-employment program – managers have begun to consider the PCWD pre-employment program as their first solution for filling open positions. Moreover, the relationships built with the managers have been important to employee retention. As a result of these relationships, managers will call PCWD staff or coaches when a problem develops, and they jointly work to address issues before a crisis occurs.
- ❖ *Set high standards for participants to ensure hiring managers' expectations are met.* PCWD set relatively high standards for those entering the pre-employment program, reflecting the expectations of the managers who would be hiring program graduates. PCWD expected participants to meet the high threshold that was set. The result is that those who graduate the program have a good chance of being hired and being successful in their jobs.
- ❖ *Coaching needs to be flexible and able to address the different needs of participants.* PCWD found that its pre-employment participants required intensive hand-on coaching both pre- and post-placement. On the other hand, some incumbent workers only needed one or two short "consultations" in order to take the next step in their career. A one size fits all approach to coaching and support did not work; coaching required customization based on the needs of the individual participant.

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.

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