

SkillWorks Green Collar Career Pathways Initiative

Year 2 Annual Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

SkillWorks launched a Green Collar Career Pathways Initiative (SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative) in 2009, specifically targeted to support SkillWorks' efforts within the green sector, with support from the Barr Foundation, the Garfield Foundation, the Surdna Foundation, and the Chorus Foundation. SkillWorks has completed the second of what is anticipated to be a three-year initiative in the green economy. This second annual evaluative report highlights the outputs and outcomes related to the set of activities pursued by SkillWorks and offers some summary findings and recommendations on the future direction of the SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative.

Mt. Auburn reached out to a number of stakeholders so that a wide degree of perspectives would contribute to the process. This document presents a summary of the findings based on both interviews and a review of relevant documents provided by SkillWorks and other stakeholders at the city and state levels. In addition, the document highlights a review of employment outcomes related to SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative's pilot training activities.

ACTIVITIES

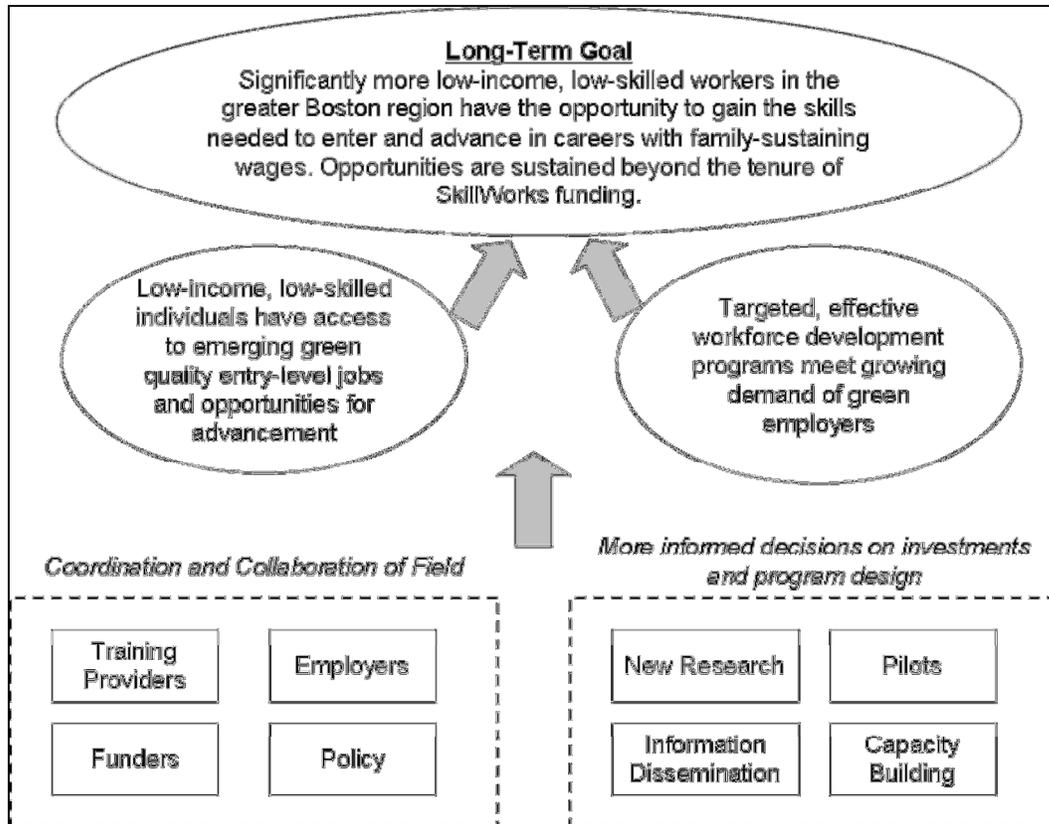
SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative spread its support in terms of both time and funds across a wide variety of activities in 2010. As was discussed in the first year evaluation of the SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative, this is a unique component of SkillWorks that has required a differentiated strategy and set of activities to respond to the fact that the emerging sector has uncertain occupational skill needs and unclear projections for job growth. The challenges of creating workforce development programs in this sector and SkillWorks' response were discussed in detail in the Year 1 evaluation, available on SkillWorks' website¹. However, the key elements of the SkillWorks Green Collar Career Pathways Initiative are as follows:

1. *Strategies that improve coordination and collaboration of the field.* This was initially discussed primarily around coordination of community-based training providers and funders, although SkillWorks has supported, to a lesser degree, efforts to encourage coordination among policy advocates and employers as well.
2. *Strategies that lead to more informed decisions on investments and program design.* While research is one tool in this area, SkillWorks is also using information dissemination, pilot/seed funding, and research grants to improve the information available to the field.

¹ <http://www.skill-works.org/resources-evaluation-reports.php>

Exhibit 1 visually depicts the SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative approach to achieving the long-term goals of the overall SkillWorks Collaborative.

Exhibit 1



YEAR 2 SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

Coordination & Collaboration

In Year 2, SkillWorks focused its coordination and collaboration efforts in three areas: training providers, funders, and policy. The primary tools for coordination and collaboration were convenings, but SkillWorks also used planning grants.

Peer learning network of community-based trainers.

In response to an environment previously characterized as “the wild West,” SkillWorks made an intensive effort in Year 2 to reach a greater degree of coordination and collaboration among green job training providers in Boston. SkillWorks assembled a contact list of 31 individuals representing 14 organizations that were either actively engaged in training for the green sector or were interested in that field. This group was convened four times over the course of 2010. SkillWorks assembled the group not only for informal networking

purposes but also to provide relevant and timely information to the assembled group. During the convenings providers heard from a varied set of green stakeholders including employers, the city of Boston, and the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC). Ongoing communication between meetings was handled through a shared Google docs site and email updates.

Peer learning network of public and private funders.

SkillWorks organized and hosted two briefings for funders. The briefings provided information to funders about emerging workforce opportunities and the current training programs offered in specific segments of the green sector.

Planning grant to explore coordinated support of public policy/advocacy in the green sector.

SkillWorks explored opportunities for greater coordination in the workforce development policy agenda of organizations focused on green job development and the broader workforce system. Building on conversations SkillWorks had sparked in Year 1 between the Green Justice Coalition (GJC) and the Workforce Solutions Group (WSG), SkillWorks awarded a \$5,000 policy planning grant to more formally explore synergies and overlap in priorities that might lead to a joint policy advocacy campaign. SkillWorks awarded the grant to Neighbor to Neighbor (N2N) MA, the lead on public policy and advocacy for the GJC, in partnership with WSG.

Beyond the leadership roles described above, the SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative collaborated on or offered support to numerous green job-related events and initiatives in Year 2.

SkillWorks contributed to numerous green job activities initiated by others. Some of the more notable activities that SkillWorks Green Jobs became involved in are:

- *Training directory.* SkillWorks Green Jobs participated in the development of the statewide training directory. SkillWorks staff sat on the advisory committee that offered guidance in the development of the *Massachusetts Clean Energy Careers Training & Education Directory*. The directory is a newly-created online tool for locating green-related training programs across the state. SkillWorks' presence helped ensure that the directory included community-based training programs.
- *Collaboration with the City of Boston.* SkillWorks Green Jobs jointly sponsored green training workshops with the city of Boston. With a minimal financial investment, SkillWorks collaborated with the city on workshops, such as *Green Building 101 for Contractors*, covering the networking lunches and registration costs for participants in the SkillWorks' network of community-based trainers. This small investment (under \$2,000) allowed the staff of community-based organizations with green training programs to deepen their sector knowledge and to build new connections with employers. In a few instances, participants of the green training programs also used SkillWorks-funded slots to enhance their knowledge and to network as well
- *Representation at various workforce and green forums.* SkillWorks Green Jobs staff represented the Initiative at numerous forums and convenings over the course of the

year. SkillWorks acted as a conduit of information back to community-based organizations and often ensured that SkillWorks' constituents, low-income, low-skilled individuals, and the community-based providers that serve them, were recognized in ongoing discussions of green jobs. SkillWorks staff represented the Initiative at no fewer than 15 different roundtable discussions, affinity group meetings, webinars, and other convenings.

Information

SkillWorks implemented a number of activities in Year 2 that were aimed at improving the information available to the field both to help funders make more informed decisions on green job investments and to help providers design more targeted and effective green workforce training programs. The most significant effort completed in Year 2 was the funding of two pilot training programs. In addition, SkillWorks spent extensive time laying the groundwork for additional grants (planning, research, and implementation) that the SkillWorks funders group approved at the end of the calendar year. The outputs and outcomes of those grants will not be seen until later in Year 3. However, SkillWorks' role in shaping those grants was a major activity of 2010.

Piloting new models of energy efficiency-weatherization training.

SkillWorks awarded two pilot grants to emerging workforce partnerships with innovative approaches to career pathways for low-income people within the energy efficiency/weatherization sector. The two programs are:

- *Asian American Civic Association's (AACA) Energy Efficiency Technician Apprenticeship Program (EETAP).* AACA received \$76,235 to train 15 participants in two cohorts over the course of one year, from June 2010 through May 2011. EETAP was designed to train low-income, minority, immigrant/bilingual, unemployed, and underemployed residents of Metro Boston to become certified energy efficiency technicians, an occupation combining the skills of an energy auditor with the basic skills of a weatherization worker. EETAP services included case management, career coaching, pre-vocational English, on-the-job training, and classroom instruction. The program was developed with the support of a few key weatherization firms that saw the potential for the flexible job classification that could both perform audits and implement weatherization improvements.

EETAP was an innovative approach to training in the green jobs sector in two ways. First, the application of an apprenticeship model in training energy efficiency technicians was a new approach. Second, the fact that a community-based organization, not a union, sponsored the apprenticeship model was also unusual. The apprenticeship training model, which maximizes hands-on, on-the-job training, provides apprentices with a built-in career ladder to eventually attain the goal of becoming a skilled, trained, journeyman energy efficiency technician. As the apprenticeship sponsor, AACA provided case management, career coaching, classroom training, and facilitated apprenticeship placement with employer partners. The employer partners then host the apprentices for 2,000 hours of on-the-job training with one-to-one supervision from a registered journeyman before completing their apprenticeship.

- *Chinese Progressive Association (CPA)'s Chinatown Green Collar Pathways Program.* CPA received \$35,000 in funding to train 12 participants over the course of one year, from May 2010 through April 2011. CPA, which is relatively new to the area of workforce development, developed a training program to prepare limited English proficiency workers from Chinatown and the Boston area for weatherization jobs at a living wage with a long-term union career pathway. SkillWorks funding was used towards initial startup costs for a weatherization boot camp, career coaching, and case management as well as the training of the first cohort of 12 individuals.

The Chinatown Green Collar Career Pathways Program was an innovative approach in that it sought to closely couple creating demand for weatherization services with the training and hiring of local residents. It also tested an approach for weatherization jobs to be “high road” jobs that would offer better pay and benefits through union affiliation. The Chinatown Program is part of the Community Mobilization Initiatives with the Green Justice Coalition, NStar, National Grid, and the Aulson Company that seek to bundle residential weatherization work to make it more economically viable for the larger union contractor who can offer better wages than a typical contractor. CPA partnered with the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades District Council 35 for the project.

Supporting green job training beyond weatherization – grantmaking to develop new green pathways.

Recognizing that the workforce development field had focused extensively on weatherization and energy efficiency, SkillWorks made a significant effort in Year 2 to cultivate and support workforce development efforts that focused on other segments of the green sector, including water management, waste management, recycling, deconstruction, and energy efficiency administrative support. SkillWorks pursued this in a two-phase process, issuing a call for concept papers mid-year and then inviting a subset of applicants to submit full proposals in late 2010. Ultimately, SkillWorks made four grants, awarding one implementation grant for a workforce training partnership focused on green manufacturing, two planning grants (focused on hazardous waste management and administrative support for energy efficiency firms), and one labor market research contract to research the workforce needs of the recycling and deconstruction sectors. SkillWorks has continued discussions with one applicant, with the intention of funding a study of career pathways in water distribution and waste water treatment once the study plan is further refined.

Other information-related activities.

- *Convenings as a tool for information dissemination.* While the SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative theory of change distinguishes between information generation and coordination activities, the reality is that often those activities overlap. The SkillWorks-led convenings often served both purposes. SkillWorks was careful to “not convene for the sake of convening,” and carefully crafted presentations and discussions that provided a purpose and meaning to the convenings and often delivered impactful information to participants.
- *Website enhancement.* SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative has also made use of the Web to disseminate information. SkillWorks created the Green Jobs Resource page on its

website, which posts articles, reports, and funding opportunities. In addition, SkillWorks launched a blog in Year 2 as an additional mechanism to share information through blog posts on a roughly bi-weekly basis.

OUTCOMES

Intermediate Results

Has SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative led to stronger coordination and collaboration in the field?

Interviews suggest that there is greater collaboration and coordination in the field than a year ago. Some of the improvement is likely due to SkillWorks' efforts, although most agree that the biggest difference is that the fire hose of funding for green jobs has subsided and, as a result, organizations are not scrambling to respond in the same way as a year ago. However, many members of the green training network who were interviewed for this evaluation noted the value of such convenings:

"We have definitely taken baby steps toward increased collaboration. The knowledge that ARRA funds would be running out changes the picture. I think it is hugely important to bring people together to learn and discuss. Last [SkillWorks] meeting, there was a lot of discussion on ways to help each other and interact. I hope it will be more than people talking at a meeting. I'm not sure if SkillWorks is in a position to facilitate collaboration beyond the convenings, but it sure is needed."

"SkillWorks convenings have been useful. For instance, the one this past spring on certifications was really useful for getting people on the same page. I personally find them helpful because they keep the network in place. The more contact we have with each other, the easier it is to organize something when we need to. It's really about preparedness."

The collaborative environment appears to be having an impact even if tangible outcomes are limited. One example of at least a good attempt to achieve greater coordination among providers has been the search for "lab" space in the Boston area for the MassGreen Initiative, a state-funded, community college-led training initiative that is initially focused on weatherization. The city already has two equipped lab facilities. Rather than simply seeking funds to build a third, there has been a significant effort to coordinate use of the existing facilities first. The issue has not yet been fully resolved so to date it is an example of an improved process if not a better outcome. The connections that were strengthened this year have also been useful as RFPs are announced. With a quick turn-around required for responses to RFPs, parties interviewed noted that having pre-existing relationships and knowledge of each other's programs help to coordinate a quick and efficient response to funding opportunities.

Improved coordination is not limited to the realm of community-based training providers. Cooperation between public and private funders has greatly increased over the course of

Year 2 as well. SkillWorks has built an even more collaborative relationship with the city of Boston, already an important partner to the overall collaborative. Perhaps a more significant change over the course of 2010 was the development of a closer relationship with the MassCEC. The MassCEC is a major force in the state on issues in workforce development related to clean energy and will likely represent a much larger portion of funding related to green jobs as federal funding is reduced. One sector leader described it:

“There has been incredible improvement in coordination and collaboration. The biggest improvement is coordination between the MassCEC and philanthropy. They are really working to not get in each other’s way. Little things like coordinating when RFPs are issued so they are not released the same week. Everyone is on each other’s lists. They show up at each other’s meetings. They specifically reach out to each other.”

While the improvement in cross-sector collaboration was clearly noted, interviews did not suggest that the SkillWorks-sponsored funder convenings were necessarily a tool to achieving that end. Discussions would suggest that more informal communication and task-based meetings seemed to be more successful means of coordination.

SkillWorks made a small investment to explore the potential for greater coordination between organizations advocating for policy change within the green sector and organizations focused on broader workforce system change, however, this investment did not yield substantial collaborative outcomes. The grant was successful in building a greater degree of understanding between the organizations, but this grant did not result in a larger implementation grant to build a joint campaign. The groups mutually decided that there was not sufficient capacity within these organizations to launch an additional campaign specific to green workforce development. The failure to develop a common policy advocacy agenda is not a failure of the tools or tactics pursued by SkillWorks as much as it is a reflection of the organizational focus and needs of both sets of stakeholders. Workforce development policy advocates have a primary need in the current legislative and fiscal environment to protect funding for current programs. Workforce needs of the green sector are not a top priority given the other issues. From the standpoint of green policy advocates, they are still determining what they want to advocate for. The preference is to demonstrate on a limited scale new models of community-based green job creation and then advocate for replication. Advocates recognize that the models have not been fully vetted yet and would not make a useful basis for policy advocacy at the current time.

Has SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative led to more informed decisions on investments and program design?

SkillWorks is using its own grantmaking processes to spur improvements in program design. SkillWorks played a more activist role in soliciting grants with the intention of using the process to encourage more targeted and more effective approaches to green job development. SkillWorks received praise in interviews for avoiding the oversaturated weatherization training field. By narrowing the applicable green sub-sectors, SkillWorks was modeling desirable grantmaking for the sector: first, SkillWorks moved beyond the broad categorization of “green” and focused on narrower areas of opportunity; and, second,

SkillWorks tried to broker specific partnerships among potential grantees to both avoid the competition for resources and to foster more effective partnerships. A review of application materials suggests that SkillWorks' activist role in the grantmaking process does appear to have led to more focused proposals as a result of the intervention. Below are some examples:

- JFYNetWorks originally submitted a concept paper expressing interest in an implementation grant to support training for 20 individuals in hazardous waste management. The original proposal discussed the development of a career track, but SkillWorks pushed for further refinement and focus on the career pathway, inviting JFYNetWorks to apply only for a smaller planning grant with that specific focus. If the grantee is successful, it will then be invited to apply for additional funds to train workers. SkillWorks used the juncture from concept paper to full proposal to provide direction, and then used the grant agreement to further lay out not only desired grant outcomes, but also grant conditions that push the provider to integrate community colleges into its planning process.
- Operation A.B.L.E. originally submitted a concept paper in hopes of securing an implementation grant to train 30 individuals for administrative positions in energy efficiency firms. SkillWorks used the process to increase the provider's focus on the demand side of workforce development. SkillWorks responded with an offer to apply for a planning grant encouraging the provider to enhance its focus on employer needs and translating those needs into relevant curriculum. Operation A.B.L.E. did respond with a proposal that focused on those areas, and SkillWorks reinforced the focus with a grant agreement that includes outcomes related to employer feedback and MOUs with employers.
- SkillWorks encouraged applicants to improve program design and then, later, encouraged grantees to share information with one another for improved program design. SkillWorks first tried unsuccessfully to encourage organizations to submit joint proposals. Given overlapping areas of interest, SkillWorks brokered conversations with Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety (MassCOSH), Green Beginnings Institute (GBI), and the Environmental Business Council of New England (EBC). The parties were unable to find common areas of interest. All three submitted proposals and only one was funded. SkillWorks continued to foster information sharing for improved program design by encouraging collaboration in less structured ways. For example, SkillWorks encouraged EBC to sit on an advisory board for Action for Boston Community Development, Inc. (ABCD), which received a SkillWorks' grant in support of job training in recycling and green manufacturing, which is closely aligned with EBC's labor market analysis of the deconstruction industry.

While SkillWorks itself has undertaken practices that lead to more informed and targeted funding and program design, it is not clear that these practices have led to systemic changes in the sector. Ultimately, SkillWorks is trying to achieve system change in the green sector in which success would be defined as other public and private funders making more informed funding decisions and providers developing more effective programs based on

improved information. There is little evidence that the desired system change has been achieved in the green sector on these dimensions.

SkillWorks Green Jobs also has the potential in 2011 to use the findings from its grants as a learning tool. This applies not only to the information research grants, but also to the pilots that are intended to test new models of training for the green sector. In addition to its own grants, MassCEC has assembled a significant amount of data on its first round of Pathways Out of Poverty grants that offer more insights on what it takes to run an effective training program in the green sector. The SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative to date has tended to focus on information dissemination that helps funders and organization better understand the field, focusing on topics like types of industry certification. In addition to this type of information sharing, SkillWorks has a real opportunity to engage its stakeholders in a discussion of program effectiveness. The challenge of this effort is that it will need to highlight what is *not* working as much as what is. Interviews suggest that some providers will be wary to share information about their programmatic missteps for fear that it will affect their chances of receiving future funding, not only from SkillWorks, but also from the funders that comprise the SkillWorks collaborative.

Long-Term Outcomes

Have the results described above led to desired outcomes for low-income, low-skilled individuals and green employers?

SkillWorks Green Jobs is aligned with the overall SkillWorks Initiative in that, ultimately, it seeks to create opportunities for low-income, low-skilled individuals to enter and advance in careers that can offer family-sustaining wages. For SkillWorks' Green Jobs Initiative, the path to achieve this goal involves understanding and building the capacity of green workforce training far more than it does the funding of training. System change that leads to direct impacts on low-income individuals is generally a long term process. By the end of two years, it is not surprising that direct outcomes related to employment and advancement of individuals are negligible.

Direct participant outcomes to date are linked to two pilot projects (described on pages 4-5) that tested innovative models, but yielded very few jobs. CPA conducted training for 12 participants in the summer of 2010. The one-week intensive training in weatherization techniques was intended to prepare people to work with one specific contractor, Aulsen, which was to pilot a new model of aggregating demand for weatherization in Chinatown, a project supported by the utilities. While CPA considered the training "successful," the marketing of the weatherization program in Chinatown was delayed as was the subcontract that would enable Aulsen to provide the work. Participants were primarily non-English speakers so they were not able to pursue job opportunities other than the specific one that was targeted for Chinatown. Aulsen hired three bilingual participants at a rate of \$18.50 an hour with benefits.

The other pilot project, the EETAP program run by AACA, also has limited outcomes. While the program was intended to enroll 15 individuals, to date the program enrolled six individuals, two of whom dropped out. Of the remaining four, all are currently fulfilling their

apprentice requirement, one at a large weatherization firm and early partner in the program, the other three with small weatherization contractors. After the EETAP program had been funded, MassSave changed its requirements for how energy auditing and weatherization services would be provided, which made the apprentice model less desirable to weatherization firms. Key employer, Next Step Living, a major weatherization contractor in Boston and early supporter of EETAP, never actually brought on an apprentice. EETAP in its current form will no longer be offered since the time commitment and inflexibility of the apprentice model turned out not to be well suited to industry needs at this time.

SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

Successes

SkillWorks has been highly effective in getting a seat at the table on statewide and local discussions related to green jobs. It has moved from newcomer to the field to a credible leader and sector intermediary.

SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative leadership has become recognized as a key stakeholder on issues related to green jobs. In doing so, SkillWorks is able to be a voice for both community-based organizations and the low-income, low-skilled constituents they serve. SkillWorks is then able to be a conduit of information back to these organizations keeping them better informed and engaged in discussions. SkillWorks' staff receives a lot of credit for establishing the Green Jobs Initiative as a recognizable leader in the sector:

"[SkillWorks staff] is active in all key conversations...She really figures out who the actors are and who the players are and how to make an intervention that makes sense...[SkillWorks staff] is in the inner-circle of leadership on this issue. We couldn't imagine having a leadership meeting without her there."

The Year 1 evaluation of the SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative noted that the traditional SkillWorks grantmaking model did not match the needs of the green sector and that the true need in Boston was that of a green sector intermediary for the Boston region. It was unclear at that time whether SkillWorks had the interest or capacity to play such a role. Year 2 shows evidence that SkillWorks has successfully stepped into that role and has established a leadership position in the sector ensuring that the interests of low-income, low-skilled workers are recognized in key discussions of green job development.

SkillWorks has been quite effective in informing the field of new developments.

The SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative capitalizes well on its leadership presence to connect other organizations with information gleaned. Many community-based training providers are not exclusively focused on green job training, which can make it difficult to stay abreast of developments in the sector. Given those conditions, all parties value SkillWorks' intermediary role of aggregating and disseminating relevant information to a wider body of organizations. As one state official noted:

“SkillWorks has been a really good resource for broadcasting information. It has proven to be an excellent way of getting more information out to the field.”

The value of SkillWorks’ information dissemination is seen both among those trying to get the information out and among those that are receiving information. Training providers commented on the Web page and emails as well as the information shared at convenings as being very helpful.

The SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative has developed a savvy grantmaking approach that is well suited to the sector.

The SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative has taken a targeted approach bringing the focus to underserved sub-sectors, making small grants in keeping with the scale of emerging opportunities, and focusing investments where new models of service delivery are needed. As one sector leader described:

“SkillWorks is really trying to achieve outcomes – trying to be targeted not just get money out the door.”

SkillWorks Green Jobs grants, even implementation grants, are relatively small. The largest training grants made to date are still in the range of \$75,000. While training providers are eager for more funds, SkillWorks is wise to maximize the “return” on its investments by not funding a program for a scale that would make job placement difficult. In addition, as an emerging sector, there is still a greater degree of uncertainty than in a more mature industry. Making multiple small catalyst investments in programs helps to offset the risk of overinvesting in any one sub-sector or specific occupation.

SkillWorks has worked hard to go beyond the all encompassing term of “green” and delve into the specific sub sectors. Even more importantly, the Initiative has sought to expand the narrow focus on weatherization. The Call for Concept papers that made explicit reference to the sub-sectors of interest was a valuable signal to the field that funders and service providers need to think more broadly *and* get more specific about green job opportunities for low-skilled workers.

Challenges

The mismatch between expectations and the reality of green job creation may continue to have negative ripple effects for some time to come.

The Year 1 evaluation report described the chaotic atmosphere created as community-based training providers sought to respond to the flood of federal stimulus money focused on energy efficiency. While the frenetic response has died down as the funding has subsided, the legacy is that job placements have not been as successful as had been hoped. A service provider described the impact of stimulus funds:

“ARRA funds made a mess of things. There are some structural flaws in the way workforce development is funded and ARRA funds only exacerbated it. Everybody ran to that side of the boat and the boat started to tip. Things happened in a very illogical

sequence. Training funds came out on a hope that this was going to be a magic bullet...a magic green bullet."

Now the concern expressed in interviews is that funders, public and private, will lose interest or patience with the emerging sector. Some training providers are anxious about how they will sustain some of their current green training offerings. There is some concern that funder timeframes are not well suited to the emerging industry. Creating both an employment pipeline and a workforce development infrastructure to support that pipeline is a lengthy process.

"Workforce development is as much preparing for the future as preparing for tomorrow. Funders have a finite view. They have a funding cycle and expectation of outcomes. We need a longer-term view of what the workforce needs."

One provider suggested that the field needs a series of ongoing planning grants in order to be prepared to act quickly when employment demand spikes.

With the disappearance of ARRA funds, the emphasis on job opportunities for low-income, low-skilled workers may decline. ARRA was a critical force in putting attention on the potential for low-skilled workers in the sector. With ARRA funds disappearing, there is concern that new funds will not target that population.

"Without ARRA, the measures of success against that metric [serving/advancing low-income/low-skilled individuals] will decline. It will just make the work of an organization like SkillWorks all that much harder."

The current environment shows not only the need for the SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative, but also the difficulty in sustaining the effort. SkillWorks' mission of improving outcomes for low-skilled workers will become even more important in the post-ARRA environment. SkillWorks' role as an intermediary will continue to be important to connect community-based organizations with information on changes to the sector and with information on future funding opportunities. At the same time, the SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative is entering the last of three years of funding. Sustained funding for the Initiative may be difficult where job growth — and job placements — have been lower than what some expected.

Synchronizing training to the demand for energy efficiency services has been difficult.

SkillWorks' pilot training programs in energy efficiency suffered from the unpredictability of the industry and highlight the unique conditions in this sub-sector. Changing program requirements of MassSave can wreak havoc on energy efficiency contractors' and subcontractors' ability to secure work and can impact how they deliver services. One training provider described it this way:

"This is an industry that is heavily dependent on incentives and heavily controlled by a central agency. [MassSave] creates rapid ripple effects. Employers are trying to ride the wave of changes."

Training providers who prepared workers for anticipated jobs discovered how quickly the environment can change. For instance, a number of energy efficiency contractors were unable to perform work this year until guidelines were established on how the four prime contractors could select subcontractors to perform the work. The prospective subcontractors were unable to hire until the uncertainty was resolved. In other cases, MassSave revised how energy efficiency services would be delivered, which altered the anticipated occupational demand.

NEXT STEPS FOR SKILLWORKS: RECOMMENDATIONS

To support learning in the field, encourage greater transparency among training providers regarding not only their successes, but also their challenges.

Learning is a critical goal of the Initiative that requires sharing lessons learned from both successes and missteps. As was discussed earlier in this document, the SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative places less emphasis on immediate training outputs than it does on learning through coordination and information dissemination. The theory of change suggests that the shared learning will lead to better outcomes as the sector expands and training needs increase. To reach this goal, SkillWorks needs to encourage open dialogue about the lessons gleaned from the training to date. The needed dialogue is not about the “performance” of specific training programs; rather, the dialogue should focus on the characteristics of program design and the factors in the implementation process that affected outcomes. This effort will assist in the design of future training programs, supporting the efforts of providers to better sync training with industry needs.

Fostering this type of open dialogue among training providers will be challenging. While no one likes sharing mistakes, there are unique factors in the SkillWorks’ structure and the green sector that make sharing particularly difficult. Providers may not be entirely comfortable opening up about disappointing results if they think the information will be rapidly shared among the funders that comprise the SkillWorks collaborative. These concerns are perhaps magnified within the green sector where the discussion of green jobs and its underlying driver, climate change, are highly politicized. Training providers may be less willing to share missteps if skeptics are looking for any validation that training for the sector is “wasteful.”

Through 2010, SkillWorks’ information sharing focused more on sector developments and understanding occupational demand. These topics were valuable to the provider network and also helped to establish a foundation of trust and dialogue that will hopefully pave the way for the more difficult discussions of “lessons learned” to date. Fostering a “safe” environment in which providers feel that they can share with organizations with whom they may compete for funds will be critical. Limiting funder presence at the discussion could help. Perhaps an outside facilitator rather than SkillWorks staff could manage the discussion (similar to the format of peer learning among other SkillWorks partnerships). An alternative approach to achieve the same goal would focus more on information dissemination through written material. SkillWorks could support the creation of a field-building written document that summarizes lessons learned to date from recent green sector training efforts. The report could draw from a larger sample of green training

programs beyond the city boundaries, likely including those supported by MassCEC through its Pathways Out of Poverty grants. Such a report would have a greater breadth of programs to draw from that would allow findings to be abstracted while preserving greater anonymity to the underlying programs or providers.

Leverage existing SkillWorks workforce partnerships to identify workforce development opportunities related to the greening of traditional industries.

It is now widely accepted that many green jobs do not necessarily reside in the green sector. Traditional industries are increasingly adopting green practices. In fact, sectors in which SkillWorks already has a strong presence, such as hospitality and healthcare, are grappling with ways to make their operations more environmentally responsible. This represents an opportunity for SkillWorks to explore workforce development needs among employers already connected to the collaborative's other workforce partnerships. These employers may need to upgrade the skills of incumbent workers to support new green practices. The area of interest for SkillWorks would be occupations within existing employers in which the enhanced skill set provided by green training was valuable enough to the employer to warrant a wage increase upon completion.

Explore the potential for a convening of small green employers, starting with energy efficiency contractors, to discuss workforce development issues.

Green jobs look quite different from jobs in other sectors in which SkillWorks has invested. Employers are much smaller and less savvy about the workforce development system. Labor market information does not do a good job predicting occupational needs. These factors have contributed to the challenges of training providers to accurately assess the training needs and occupational demands of the industry. Greater coordination of these small employers would both better inform training providers, allowing them to be more employer-responsive, and build a stronger pipeline for participants graduating from training programs. Such a forum would also give employers better visibility into pools of talent, a voice in shaping the training provided, and a better understanding of the public and philanthropic workforce development funding that can support skill development for current or future employees.

While SkillWorks had previously tried to convene employers to discuss their workforce development needs (in Year 1), the assembled employers were too diverse to offer targeted, useful information for the training community, and the one-time event did not build a forum for ongoing dialogue needed to track the changing occupational demand. Should SkillWorks decide to support the launch of a workforce advisory group for green employers, the group should focus on a particular sub-sector, most likely energy efficiency contractors, the largest green sub-sector in the Boston area. SkillWorks will likely gain more traction by building workforce conversations into an existing employer forum rather than seeding a brand new group. Small employers with limited or no human resource capacity are more likely to participate in a networking forum that meets multiple business needs rather than exclusively workforce development.

Seek opportunities for even closer coordination and alignment with MassCEC.

SkillWorks has made great strides in 2011, building closer communication and collaboration with MassCEC. SkillWorks' staff were involved in reviewing grant proposals to MassCEC and advised in the development of the statewide green training directory supported by MassCEC. SkillWorks can build upon this foundation to further enhance the relationship. SkillWorks' unique focus on the needs of low-income, low-skilled individuals adds a critical perspective that can add to MassCEC's work. Close alignment of the two agendas should help to preserve a focus on job opportunities for low-income individuals at a time when the disappearance of ARRA funds could jeopardize availability of green training funds for this SkillWorks' vulnerable population. SkillWorks should explore opportunities for community-based training providers to partner with the MassCEC-supported MassGREEN training programs. SkillWorks should encourage and possibly support the development of cooperative programming in which CBOs conduct outreach and additional academic support for targeted participants interested in the MassGREEN training. A deeper partnership with MassCEC should also lead SkillWorks to be more deeply involved in state policy issues which have a significant impact on sector growth and related job growth.

CONCLUSION

The SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative has been successful in fostering communication and collaboration within the green job training community in Boston and in establishing itself as a credible leader in the sector in the state, earning itself a "seat at the table" in key discussions regarding green job training. While its early green training pilots have not produced significant participant or employer outcomes, as long as SkillWorks disseminates key lessons learned from these pilot activities, the efforts can still contribute to the field. In Year 3, the SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative should seek to consolidate its progress to date, staying true to its theory of change, which focuses on building the system to support the emerging sector. Efforts to further build the green workforce system this year should focus on increasing transparency among training providers, building a stronger connection with and among small employers, more closely aligning efforts with state entities, and exploring green workforce development needs within traditional industries.