



**SKILLWORKS PHASE II EVALUATION:  
OVERVIEW OF OUTCOMES**

**Prepared for:**

**The SkillWorks Funders Group**

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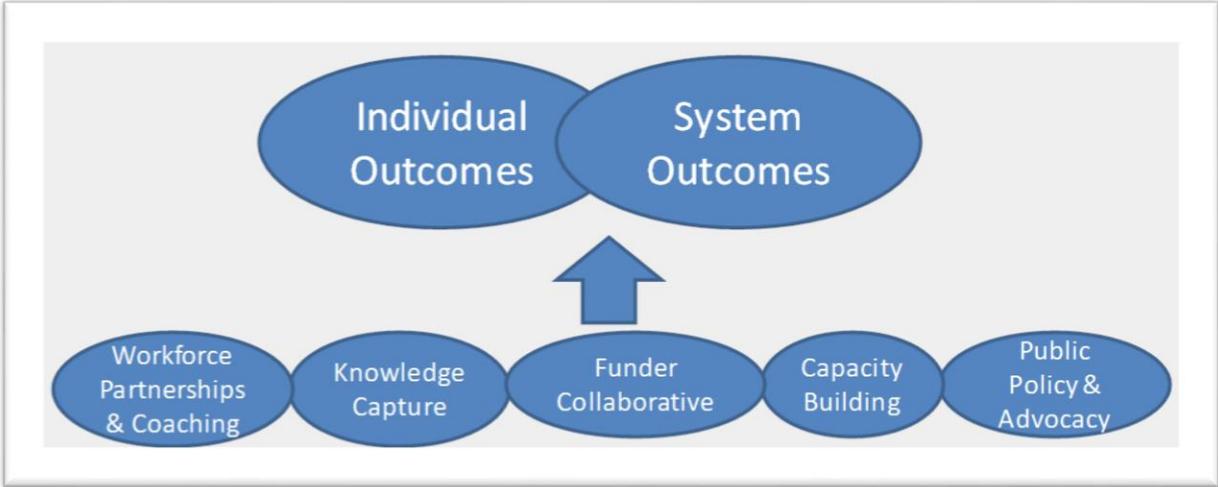
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# Introduction

SkillWorks: Partners for a Productive Workforce (SkillWorks) is a workforce development intermediary and multiyear funder collaborative, launched in 2003 by public and private funders, to support low-income individuals in the greater Boston area by providing access and advancement to family-supporting jobs, while improving the quality of the workforce for businesses. SkillWorks is focused not only on immediate results for individuals and employers, but also is dedicated to producing large-scale, enduring improvements in the workforce development system in Boston and across Massachusetts by increasing the resources available, enhancing the capacity of workforce development providers, and promoting changes in public policy

SkillWorks investments are in three phases: Phase I (2003-2008), Phase II (2009-2013), and now Phase III (2014-2018). This evaluation covers Phase II only. Evaluations for SkillWorks Phase I investments, as well as interim Phase II reports, are available on the SkillWorks website (<http://www.skill-works.org/resources-evaluation-reports.php>). This report provides a broad overview of results for Phase II. For an in-depth look at Phase II, please see the individual reports on each of the workforce partnerships, a report on the Green Jobs Initiative, a deep dive report on coaching in Phase II, and a report on system change.

In Phase II, SkillWorks invested \$9.8 million in variety of activities aimed at either achieving direct outcomes for individuals or improving the system of workforce development. In many cases, the activities served both goals.



**Workforce Partnerships.** The largest investment in Phase II, \$5.4 million, was made in nine workforce partnerships to help low- and moderate- income jobseekers and incumbent workers make progress towards self-sufficiency and to help employers meet their training and workforce needs. Four of the partnerships, funded through the Green Collar Career Pathways Initiative, were small pilots, serving an average of 25 participants each, while the other five represented substantial multiyear investments, the smallest of which enrolled approximately

75 participants and the largest, over 550. Four of the multiyear partnerships received funding at the start of Phase II: Healthcare Training Institute (HTI), Emergency Medical Careers Partnership (EMCP), Hospitality Training Center (HTC), and Year Up Financial Services Partnership (Year Up). SkillWorks initiated its final major investment in a workforce partnership, Partnership for Automotive Career Education (PACE), in 2011. SkillWorks was able to add PACE as a fifth partnership through funding from the Green Jobs Innovation Fund at the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL).

Sector	Partnership	Lead	Duration
<b>Healthcare</b>	Healthcare Training Institute	Jewish Vocational Services	2009-2013
	Emergency Medical Careers Partnership	Northeastern University	2009-2011
<b>Hospitality</b>	Hospitality Training Center	Best Corp.	2009-2013
<b>Financial Services</b>	Year Up Financial Services Partnership	Year Up	2009 (Planning) 2010-2013
<b>Automotive</b>	Partnership for Automotive Career Education*	Asian American Civic Association	2011-2013
<b>Energy</b>	Chinatown Green Collar Career Pathway Project*	Chinatown Progressive Association	2010-2011
	Energy Efficiency Technician Apprenticeship Program*	Asian American Civic Association	2010-2011
<b>Construction</b>	YouthBuild Green Construction*	YouthBuild Boston	2012-2013
<b>Manufacturing</b>	GreenSTREAM*	Action for Boston Community Development	2011-2012

\*Partnership was part of SkillWorks' Green Collar Career Pathways Initiative. Given the relatively small size and short duration of these partnerships, this report includes outcomes of these in future tables under "Other."

The workforce partnerships aggregate employer needs, connect with or provide training, and offer individualized coaching to support career and academic advancement for low-income adults and disengaged youth. During Phase II, the initiative's investment in partnerships focused on strengthening pathways to postsecondary education, training, and credential attainment for low-skilled adults.

SkillWorks' focus on postsecondary education in Phase II extended beyond its investments in workforce partnerships. Starting in 2011, with support from the Social Innovation Fund and National Fund for Workforce Solutions, SkillWorks created a college navigator position at the Boston Private Industry Council to serve SkillWorks participants attending Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC). The navigator worked with individuals from any of the workforce partnerships providing college-specific guidance with direct access to and knowledge of college information and resources. The navigator also served as a resource to partnership staff to build their understanding of college processes and connect staff to the college as needed.

**Public Policy/Advocacy.** The intent of the public policy activities was to address statewide policies and resource allocations to improve the ability of the workforce development system to help low-income individuals advance to family-supporting jobs. This included the work of longtime SkillWorks grantee, the Workforce Solutions Group (WSG), as well as the role that SkillWorks staff played in the policy work. In Phase II, SkillWorks spent \$1.3 million on public policy advocacy grants although this figure understates the full investment since a significant portion of initiative staff time was devoted to advocacy but is not captured in this figure.

**Capacity Building.** Capacity-building activities help staff better manage partnerships, implement promising practices, develop new programs and services, and advocate for policies and practices to improve the workforce development system’s ability to serve employers and low-skilled workers. SkillWorks developed a hybrid approach to capacity building that emphasized support for the partnership grantees, but also included workshops and learning communities open to other service providers in the city. With its investment in green jobs in Phase II, SkillWorks also engaged many funders and service providers in capacity-building convenings related to green jobs.

**Knowledge Capture and Dissemination.** SkillWorks never articulated knowledge capture and dissemination as a specific strategy, except as a component of capacity building, to effect change in the workforce system. Yet, SkillWorks supported research and evaluation activities that helped to build the knowledge of the field. SkillWorks staff also played a much greater role in disseminating knowledge about workforce development broadly in the state, and nationally, through blog posts, newsletters, speaking engagements, and convenings.

**The Funder Collaborative.** The 19 funders of Phase II include a mix of public and private, local and national, organizations. (See the side bar for a full list.) While all funders are invited to participate in collaborative meetings, a core group of between five and eight funders were most active in Phase II. The collaborative was co-chaired by representatives of the two largest funders: the City of Boston (through the Neighborhood Jobs Trust) and The Boston Foundation. Given the importance of the funders to the overall workforce system, the group itself became an important mechanism for system change over the course of Phase II.

#### SKILLWORKS PHASE II FUNDERS

The Barr Foundation  
BNY Mellon  
The Boston Foundation  
Chorus Foundation  
City of Boston's Neighborhood Jobs Trust  
The Clowes Fund  
Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
The Garfield Foundation  
The Hyams Foundation  
Mabel Louise Riley Foundation  
Microsoft Corporation  
National Fund for Workforce Solutions  
Nellie Mae Education Foundation  
Perpetual Trust for Charitable Giving,  
Bank of America, N.A., Trustee  
A.C. Ratshesky Foundation  
State Street Foundation  
Surdna Foundation  
United Way of Massachusetts Bay and  
Merrimack Valley  
U.S. Department of Labor Green Jobs

# Workforce Partnerships: Individual and Employer Outcomes

## PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW

Through its grants to workforce partnerships, **SkillWorks served more than 1,700 individuals over the five years. More than half, 923, were jobseekers. In addition, SkillWorks-funded partnerships served 829 incumbent workers** seeking to advance along career pathways within their sector. While workforce partnerships were the primary vehicle through which SkillWorks supported individuals' career advancement goals, as mentioned previously, SkillWorks also supported a college navigator position at BHCC. The navigator primarily served participants already enrolled in workforce partnerships, but was also available for referrals or "walk ins." While generally a fairly light touch form of engagement, these interactions expand the pool of those touched by SkillWorks in Phase II to more than 1,900 individuals.<sup>1</sup>

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS (AT ENROLLMENT)			
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF SKILLWORKS PARTICIPANTS: 1,752</b>		Pre-employment	Incumbent
<b># of Participants Enrolled</b>		923	829
<b>Background</b>	Average Age	27	39
	Living in Boston	67%	53%
	Born Outside the U.S.	36%	63%
	Reports English as Barrier to Advancement	17%	32%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	Hispanic/Latino	27%	23%
	Non-Hispanic/Latino		
	Asian	12%	11%
	Black/African-American	46%	39%
	White	8%	18%
<b>Gender</b>	Other/two or more races	8%	9%
	Male	51%	33%
<b>Highest Level of Educational Attainment</b>	Female	49%	67%
	Associates Degree or Higher	5%	22%
	High School Diploma (or equivalent)	85%	59%
<b>Economic Status</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade or Lower	10%	18%
	Employed	12%	100%
	Average Hourly Wage	\$10.56	\$16.59
	Average Hours/Week at Primary Job	29.4	37.8
	Low-Income Household	85%	44%

<sup>1</sup> No demographic or outcome data were collected on the college navigator's "walk in" clients so they are excluded from additional analysis.

The majority of SkillWorks participants are in their mid-20s to mid-30s, living in Boston. Participants represent more than 75 different countries with 36 percent of pre-employment participants and 63 percent of incumbent participants born outside the United States. With that international diversity come some language barriers. While only 17 percent of pre-employment candidates report English as a barrier to advancement, 32 percent of incumbents face language barriers.<sup>2</sup> The vast majority of participants have at least a high school degree, although assessments conducted by the workforce partnerships often show more academic deficiencies than are represented in those educational attainment figures. The data show the level of economic need among participants—88 percent of pre-employment participants are unemployed and 85 percent are part of low-income households.<sup>3</sup> Although incumbent workers earned wages at enrollment more than double the minimum wage, \$16.59 an hour, 44 percent still live in low-income households.

## PRE-EMPLOYMENT EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

**With SkillWorks support, 485 individuals entered employment, including 426 individuals who were unemployed when they started training. More than half of those entering employment were graduates of Year Up’s program preparing young adults for entry-level positions in financial services and information technology** through an almost yearlong program that combines five months of classroom training followed by a six-month professional internship. SkillWorks support of the pre-employment program was indirect, primarily supporting activities that could better prepare the pre-employment participants for success *after* their first industry placement by strengthening Year Up’s focus on career pathways and postsecondary preparation.

Almost **one-quarter of the placements were in the hospitality sector, graduates of HTC, many of whom trained as room attendants and ultimately placed at union hotels.** The room attendant program was quite successful in placing graduates in jobs with an overall placement rate close to 77 percent. Additional HTC participants gained employment in entry-level culinary positions, and a few as food servers. SkillWorks support enabled HTC to provide coaching for all its participants.

Most of the **remaining pre-employment participants gained employment as automotive technicians, certified nursing assistants (CNA), or entry-level green collar jobs, primarily in construction.**

**The average starting wage for those gaining employment was \$14.45.** Starting positions for CNAs and automotive technicians offered the lowest starting wages (\$11.30 and \$11.14, respectively) while the green collar (primarily construction) and financial services offered the highest (\$15.42 and 15.33, respectively). The starting wage of \$14.36 for the hospitality sector

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<sup>2</sup> Individuals assessed their own English capabilities. Actual number of participants facing English language barriers may be higher than self-reported.

<sup>3</sup> Individuals were determined to be part of a low-income household if they indicated that they were receiving any public benefits (TANF, Food Stamps, SSI-Disability, Veteran’s Benefits, Unemployment Benefits) or based on the calculation of participant-reported family size and yearly household income.

placements is particularly notable given that more than half report English language skills as a barrier and nearly one-third lack a high school diploma. The high starting wage is due to the relationship between HTC and the 29 unionized hospitality employers, which sets not only a high starting wage but also generous benefits.

Phase II: Pre-employment Outcomes							
	HTC	PACE	YU	EMCP	HTI	Other	All SkillWorks
# Enrolled as Pre-employment	195	74	485	25	51	93	923
# Completed a Training Track	187	62	388	2 <sup>1</sup>	43	58	739
Completion Rate	95.9%	83.8%	80.5% <sup>2</sup>	8.0%	93.5% <sup>3</sup>	65.9% <sup>4</sup>	81.3% <sup>5</sup>
# Placed	112	49	263	1	29	31	485
Placement Rate	59.9%	79.0%	67.78%	50.0%	67.4%	53.4%	65.6%
# Placed (Previously Unemployed)	81	28	263	1	27	26	426
# Placed (Previously Employed)	31	21	0	0	2	5	59
# Placed with Partner Employer	87	25	~145	0	2	11+	~270
Avg Wage	\$14.36	\$11.14	\$15.33	s	\$11.30	\$15.42	\$14.45
Avg Hours	36.6	36.9	38.2	s	30.0	37.8	37.1
Avg Increase in Wages (Previously Employed)	\$4.46	\$0.44	n/a	n/a	s	\$1.93	\$2.76

s = Suppressed to protect participant privacy.

<sup>1</sup> 12 completed the classes, but only two completed their EMT-Basic certificate.

<sup>2</sup> Calculation excludes the January 2010 cohort, which had 100 percent completion due to enrolling in SkillWorks after graduation, and the January 2014 cohort, which had not graduated before the end of Phase II.

<sup>3</sup> Calculation excludes five participants in progress in January 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Calculation excludes five YBB participants still in progress in January 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Calculation excludes all participants noted above.

## INCUMBENT EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

Overall, **213 of the 829 SkillWorks-supported incumbents, almost 27 percent, advanced in some way along a career pathway**, whether through a promotion at their starting employer, a positive job change to a new employer, or, in a few cases, both. Since some individuals enjoyed more than one advancement outcome, the total number of job advancements over the five years was actually 243.

Over the five years, **152 SkillWorks participants received promotions** of which HTI participants accounted for 80 percent.<sup>4</sup> Since HTI's work with incumbents focused heavily on postsecondary achievement, it is likely the promotions related to HTI services will continue to grow in time as Phase II participants complete certificates and degrees started during Phase II. Year Up's incumbent promotions are impressive, less for their overall scale, just 18 individuals, but for the rate of promotion. Almost half of all Year Up incumbents enrolled received a promotion during

<sup>4</sup> HTI defined its work with incumbents in close partnership with HTI employers, so HTI tracked closely the career advances of participants only with employer partners. HTI was not able to capture job advancements that occurred when participants left their partner employer as they were no longer regarded as HTI participants.

Phase II. The **average wage increase associated with a promotion was \$2.80**, although some participants received more than one promotion during Phase II, which would increase the financial impact for those individuals.

Phase II Incumbent Outcomes							
	YU	HTC		EMCP	HTI	Other	All SkillWorks
		Employer at enrollment:					
		Partner	Non-Partner				
# of Incumbents Enrolled	37	161	73	49	501	8	829
# Receiving Promotion	18	4	2	5	122	1	152
Avg Hourly Wage Increase Associated with Promotion	\$2.64	\$1.33	\$4.22	\$1.85	\$2.90	s	\$2.80
# Receiving Positive New Job Outcome	5	15	44	n/a	n/a	n/a	64
Avg Hourly Wage Increase Associated with New Job Outcome	\$5.58	\$0.95	\$4.62	n/a	n/a	n/a	\$3.89
# Receiving Job Advancement Outcome (Promotion or New Job)	22	19	44	n/a	n/a	n/a	213
Avg Hourly Wage Increase Associated with Job Advancement Outcome	\$3.30	\$1.07	\$4.60	n/a	n/a	n/a	\$3.39

s = Suppressed to protect participant privacy.

While HTI’s work focused on supporting participants’ advancement pathways within their current employer, Year Up and HTC participants advanced through a combination of promotions and movement from one employer to another. For hospitality in particular, employees already working with a partner rarely advanced, instead focusing on achieving seniority, securing more hours or better shifts. However, HTC’s work with employees in the hospitality sector not employed with a partner at enrollment had an enormous economic impact on participants. More than 60 percent of those participants gained new employment in the sector, most at a union partner hotel, and in doing so, increased their hourly wage by \$4.62.

## SKILLS, CREDENTIALS, EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

In Phase II, SkillWorks placed a heavy emphasis on postsecondary credential attainment and building connections from the workforce development programs offered by community-based organizations to postsecondary pathways offered by community colleges and four-year institutions. That focus is a reflection of the number of participants who enrolled in postsecondary courses during Phase II. In total, **405 participants, 24 percent of the workforce partnership participants, enrolled in postsecondary courses** during Phase II. In addition, the SkillWorks-supported college navigator at BHCC informally assisted roughly an additional 200 community college participants who sought periodic guidance on a variety of issues.

	HTC	YU	EMCP	HTI
<b>College Enrollment</b>	10	142	74*	179

It is not surprising that HTI participants represented the largest group enrolled in college since that was a major focus of HTI, which provided pre-college preparation and academic coaching for pre-college and college participants. The fact that so many Year Up graduates enrolled in college reflects the nature of advancement in financial services, the ambition of the young adult population, and the additional emphasis placed on postsecondary pathways by Year Up with SkillWorks support. By design of the partnership, all participants in EMCP attended either a college-level EMT-Basic course or a college-level EMT-Paramedic program.

Postsecondary Certificates	# of Credentials Earned
Paramedic	33
LPN	38
EMT-Basic	2
Medical Coding	10
Central Processing	13
Phlebotomy Technician	1
Office Information Management	1
Clinical Assistant	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>

The SkillWorks-supported college navigator at BHCC has helped a number of the workforce partnership participants successfully transition to and progress in college. To date, **the college navigator appears to be having a significant impact on student persistence.** Of the 70 students who started intensive coaching between the fall of 2011 and the spring of 2013, three completed their program, four transferred to another institution, and only 20, or 29 percent, left school without earning a credential. Forty-three were still attending

BHCC in the fall of 2013. This represents a notably high level of persistence at a school with spring-to-spring and fall-to-fall one-year retention rates of about 50 percent.

**As of January 2014, SkillWorks participants earned 111 postsecondary certificates and degrees. The vast majority, 99, earned credentials, and virtually all were healthcare-related.**

In addition to the credentials, **12 individuals earned postsecondary degrees**, including five associate's and five bachelor's degrees. Not all SkillWorks students were ready for postsecondary work, but continued to advance along an academic pathway—14 students received their G.E.D. during Phase II.

Academic Degrees	# of Credentials Earned
Associate's	5
Bachelor's	5
RN	1
Master's	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>
Diploma Equivalents	# of Credentials Earned
G.E.D.	14

Not all participants required an academic pathway to advancement. In fact, few hospitality participants pursued postsecondary courses.

<b>Industry-Recognized Certificates (Non-academic)</b>	<b># of Credentials Earned</b>
C.N.A.	58
Microsoft Office Specialist (Excel)	19
Microsoft Office Specialist (Word)	32
NEHA Food Safety	83
T.I.P.S. Alcohol	86
T.E.A.M. Alcohol (Level 1)	18
T.E.A.M. Alcohol (Level 2)	3
First Aid/CPR	25
CPR/AED	58
Choke Saver	25
MA Allergen	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>422</b>

Instead, **many participants sought industry-recognized credentials** that were required for some positions in the industry. The credentials related to the hospitality industry tended to be quite short-term in nature, with each credential relevant to hospitality requiring an average of 4.4 hours of study.

Both pre-employment and incumbent participants at HTI pursued CNA certificates. This was a more intensive effort on the part of the participants than the other industry-recognized certificates, requiring over 200 hours of training.

## **EMPLOYER BENEFITS**

### **Employers value the pipeline of qualified candidates that some of SkillWorks pre-employment programs provide.**

Given the recessionary economic climate during much of Phase II, it is not surprising that employers rarely reported significant shortages of applicants. Despite the volume of applicants, in many cases SkillWorks graduates rose to the top of the pile. Careful matching of participants to the employer culture increased employer satisfaction. Employers appreciated that the training programs frequently provided support after placement to help ensure that the new hire was successful. Furthermore, some employers took satisfaction in their contribution to achieving the social and economic goals of SkillWorks. For some PACE employers, the program has become the go-to source when they have an entry-level automotive opening; some no longer post jobs to the public, and instead contact the employment specialist at the Asian American Civic Association directly. Some HTC partner hotels interview HTC graduates first, and some use the HTC graduates to set the benchmark against which to compare other applicants.

### **Employers value coaching as a supplement to and leverage for their internal staff resources.**

Coaches working with participants at partner employers provide the individual support that employees might not otherwise receive. SkillWorks partnerships have successfully worked with employers to carve out unique niches of service so as not to overlap with existing employer human resources. Employers cite a number of areas where coaches complement existing services: 1) their unique understanding of the needs and barriers of the population; 2) their

ability to reinforce and enhance the professional development offerings; 3) their ability to address workplace and personal issues head on that might hinder retention of new hires; and, 4) their ability to address some of the soft skills that impact productivity like time management, communication, and organizational skills.

### **Some employers see the investment in incumbent worker training as an asset in new employee recruitment.**

Some employers noted that they believed they were more attractive to job applicants because of the reputational benefits of offering additional training for incumbent workers. Other employers noted that they were able hire employees with less experience or certifications and then rely on incumbent worker training to upgrade employees' skills once they were on site.

### **Employers value the improvements in current job performance that resulted from incumbent worker training.**

Despite the focus on career advancement through postsecondary credentialing during Phase II, employers were more likely to cite the impact of workforce development services on participants' current job placement than to reference the business need for participants to move into new positions through their new postsecondary degree or certification. Hotels appreciated the improvements in English and computer skills that BEST Corp.'s classes provided. Year Up employers referenced the assistance with retention that the coaching services provided. Hospital employers referenced the value of the competencies academic coaches taught participants, which were also useful in the workplace. Hospital employers also valued the computer competencies taught through a variety of HTI offerings that built employee capabilities for their current positions and provided opportunities for promotion. Some employers' perspectives may be due to the fact that many of their employees engaged in SkillWorks are still working toward their postsecondary degree or certificate. Just over one-quarter of the participants who had enrolled in postsecondary courses completed a degree or certificate by January 2014.

### **Across the partnerships, employers generally value the networking, information sharing, and collaboration that the workforce partnerships provide.**

Particularly in HTI, HTC, and Year Up, employers noted the benefit of partnership meetings that were a fundamental part of the SkillWorks model. Some employer partners appreciated the opportunity to focus on the needs of non-traditional hires; others appreciated the opportunity to problem-solve with colleagues on human resource issues such as recruitment; some valued the opportunity to share best practices in workforce development and ultimately "borrow" others' ideas.

# System Outcomes

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## INTERIM SYSTEM OUTCOMES

To understand SkillWorks impact on the broader workforce development system, one must consider not just funding flows or policies enacted, but also the changes in terms of system attributes—its boundaries, relationships, and perspectives. Changes in the pattern of system attributes can potentially transform how a system functions and, over time, lead to more optimal outcomes for low-income individuals and businesses. To make these abstract terms more accessible, the bullets below apply the system attributes to SkillWorks strategies in Phase II:

- SkillWorks sought to change how practitioners and policymakers think about the *boundaries* of the workforce system through expanding employer involvement; making connections between higher education, particularly community colleges, and the workforce development system; and thinking about the ABE/ESOL programs and investments as part of the continuum of services needed in an effective workforce system.
- SkillWorks sought to build deeper *relationships* between major stakeholders in the workforce system, between the workforce system and philanthropy, and between philanthropy and public sector.
- SkillWorks sought to change the *perspectives* of those operating within the system to align with SkillWorks principles of employer engagement and the focus on academic and career pathways.

To assess some of these less tangible changes, the evaluation team conducted a survey of a broad set of stakeholders in the state’s workforce development system, including nonprofit service providers, workforce investment boards, community colleges, public sector agencies, and the philanthropic community. The survey responses of the 51 individuals involved in the workforce system as well as the 16 individuals involved in the funder collaborative<sup>5</sup>, provide strong evidence that the workforce system in the commonwealth in 2013 was different along many dimensions from the system at the start of Phase II of SkillWorks, that many of the reported changes align with the principles and policy perspectives of SkillWorks, and that many of those involved in workforce development attribute some of these changes to SkillWorks.

**Survey respondents report that they perceived significant changes in the workforce development system in Massachusetts over the past five years, with many of the changes conforming to the type of perspectives that are at the core of SkillWorks.**

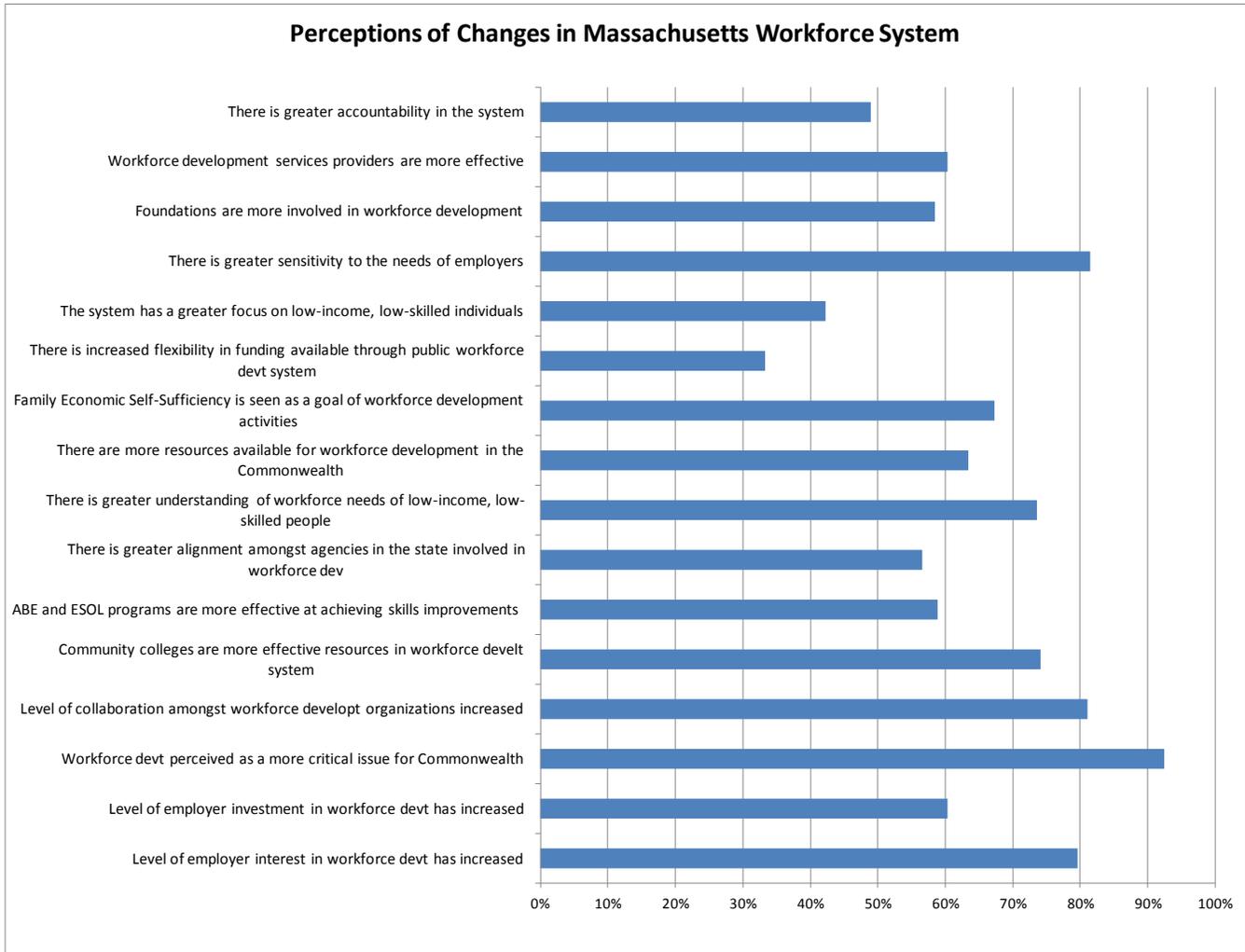
Most notably, over three-quarters of those responding to the survey believe that workforce development is now perceived as a more important issue, that there is greater sensitivity to the

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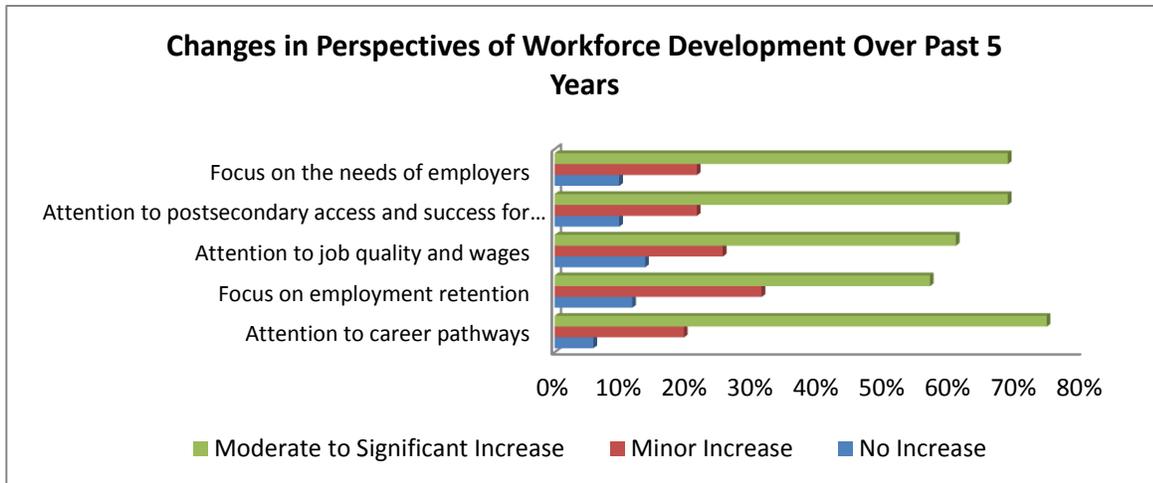
<sup>5</sup> 19 percent response rate to workforce system survey and 31 percent response rate to funder survey

needs of employers, that there is more collaboration amongst workforce system providers, and that the level of employer interest in workforce development has increased.

Most notably, over three-quarters of those responding to the survey believe that workforce development is now perceived as a more important issue, that there is greater sensitivity to the needs of employers, that there is more collaboration amongst workforce system providers, and that the level of employer interest in workforce development has increased.



There has been increased awareness of the need to focus on postsecondary access and success for adults in addition to career pathways. The survey of workforce stakeholders provides evidence that there is a growing understanding about the importance of postsecondary access and success (about 70 percent report an increase in their perception of its importance) and career pathways (about 80 percent report an increase in their perception of its importance).



**Organizations involved in workforce development report significant changes in their relationships over the past five years.**

Over 50 percent of the workforce development stakeholders responding to the survey report that, as compared to five years ago, they have increased their relationships with state legislators, employers, community colleges, and other workforce development organizations.

**Creating a new “table” through the funder collaborative has helped to create new relationships across the philanthropic and public sectors and has increased coordination around their workforce-related activities.**

One of the more important system-related outcomes of the SkillWorks initiative has been its role in changing the relationships between policymakers at the state level and those at the city level, as well as between the public sector and the philanthropic community. Many individuals involved in the funder collaborative have noted the importance of these new relationships. Individuals responding to the survey also noted the following impacts resulting from their participation in the funder collaborative:

- developing deeper relationships amongst funders, which has translated into more candid conversations and collaboration;
- learning has shaped workforce investment strategies of funders, including placing greater emphasis on postsecondary credentials and self-sufficiency wages; and
- creating greater understanding between the philanthropic community and the public sector, leading to some changes in how each has invested.

**WSG and SkillWorks' coordinated policy advocacy work has increased the perceived importance of workforce development amongst state policymakers and has changed perspectives about workforce challenges and needs in the system.**

One of the most commonly reported outcomes of the SkillWorks policy work has been the increased visibility of workforce development-related issues in the commonwealth. Evidence from the survey indicates that WSG and SkillWorks have been very successful in this area. The perception of over 90 percent of those responding to the survey is that workforce development has become a more important issue in the commonwealth.

Beyond just raising visibility, perhaps one of the greatest impacts that SkillWorks has had is in changing perspectives amongst policymakers and service providers about the type of workforce challenges the commonwealth faced. The issuance of the *Massachusetts' Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs* report created considerable visibility for workforce-related challenges in the commonwealth. The report received significant press and raised considerable awareness around the issue related to middle-skill jobs. For example, in the survey of stakeholders, over 70 percent reported a moderate or significant increase in their understanding of what middle-skill jobs were.

**DIRECT SYSTEM OUTCOMES: CAPACITY**

Achieving interim outcomes in terms of changing relationships, boundaries, and perspectives has already led to more concrete changes in practices, policies, and funding flows within the workforce system.

**SkillWorks contributed to system capacity improvements directly through capacity-building grants, and indirectly through workshops, learning communities, publications, and presentations.**

SkillWorks most intentionally built capacity through a series of planning and capacity-building grants made through its Green Collar Jobs initiative. With its capacity-building grant, the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) revised its system for providing jobs training, employment, and contract opportunities for its residents. The BHA designed and implemented revisions to its Section 3 policy, which includes a Section 3 Training Fund and a focus on working with industry leaders to provide employment and training opportunities to BHA residents, including a Building Pathways Building Trades Pre-Apprenticeship Program. In addition, Operation A.B.L.E. used the capacity-building grant to design a new training curriculum for administrative positions at weatherization companies and was able to leverage other grant dollars to implement the new curriculum.

Even workforce development organizations not directly funded by SkillWorks reported that they have adopted new practices that align with SkillWorks goals. The stakeholder survey, completed in May 2014, assessed how SkillWorks has affected the workforce field in terms of capacity and practices. The results provide strong evidence that there have been some fundamental changes in workforce development organizations over the past five years. The areas with the most significant change were in the use of data, the use of

coaching, and working with employers, all major elements that SkillWorks promoted, documented, and supported during Phase II.

**SkillWorks' most significant capacity-building impact is the result of the investments in the workforce partnerships.**

Five years of deep program investments, combined with technical assistance, peer learning, and other capacity-building activities, yielded substantial capacity enhancements for the lead organizations that served as the backbones for the workforce partnerships. Examples of the enhanced capacity are:

- **BEST Corp. strengthened its relationship with employers and community partners.** BEST Corp. credits the SkillWorks grant award with increasing the trust built with hotel management. The support of SkillWorks, a well-regarded organization without close ties to the union, lent BEST Corp. legitimacy that drew employers to engage more actively. Over the course of the SkillWorks grant, BEST Corp. deepened the partnership with employers by implementing a staffing structure that ensured clear lines of communication between employers and the provider.
- **Year Up has made lasting changes in multiple aspects of its service delivery to hone the organization's focus on long-term success for its alumni.** Year Up adopted a number of approaches to encourage students and alumni to pursue higher education. The changes involved a mix of additions in the core classroom offering, changes in the professional development curriculum offered during internships, new tools for employers, and new agreements with colleges.
- **Year Up has better aligned its organizational culture, structure, and accountability mechanisms with the goals of long-term graduate success.** The SkillWorks grant led to a range of organizational shifts at Year Up, including staffing changes, interdepartmental alignment, and revised outcomes measures. All of these efforts are the result of Year Up's recalibrated commitment to participants' long-term graduate success. This not only guided activities in Boston, but also influenced Year Up's national organization and affiliates.
- **JVS refined a number of components of its workplace education model, improvements that will benefit future JVS clients long after SkillWorks funding ends.** Two particularly notable examples of improved practices are around coaching and assessment. JVS went on to codify its coaching approach in a handbook for employees so that it could apply certain key practices and standards for coaching across the organization's programs.
- **SkillWorks funding of HTI provided a platform for JVS to provide "proofs of concept" and demonstrate its capacity to employers in new arenas, which ultimately resulted in additional fee-for-service revenue.** At the start of the SkillWorks grant, hospitals held JVS in high regard as an ESL training provider. HTI's focus on postsecondary pathways to advancement provided JVS the opportunity to establish its competency in new areas such as pre-college preparation and academic coaching. As JVS built a reputation for success

working with a subset of HTI employer partners on postsecondary pathways, other hospitals, which had observed from the sidelines, made the move to work with JVS on similar workforce development efforts on a fee-for-service basis. Ultimately, JVS did not only deepen its ties with current employer partners, but also was able to adapt the lessons learned in HTI to pursue new strategic partnerships with employers outside of healthcare as well.

- **HTI's work with BHCC through the SkillWorks grant contributed to a deepened partnership between JVS and the community college, which became institutionalized through a new formal co-enrollment agreement.** BHCC was a partner at the HTI table and engaged in aspects of HTI's programmatic work. As the lead agency of the SkillWorks-funded partnership, JVS gained additional credibility with the college. In addition to the collaboration through HTI, JVS leaders worked to build closer connections with the college. The years of gradually improving relationships, accelerated with leadership changes at BHCC, culminated in the 2014 contract between JVS and BHCC enabling JVS' Bridges to College students to co-enroll at BHCC.

## DIRECT SYSTEM OUTCOMES: POLICY

**SkillWorks policy advocacy work resulted in several legislative and funding successes.**

SkillWorks and WSG can point to several legislative and funding wins:

- **Increased funding for the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund.** WCTF is a state-funded workforce development initiative administered by Commonwealth Corporation that supports programs in critical industry sectors in Massachusetts. Created during Phase I of SkillWorks, as a key component of the 2006 Workforce Solutions Act, it was funded with an initial investment of \$11 million. Recapitalizing the fund was a priority in Phase II. In 2012, SkillWorks, WSG, and legislative champions, successfully advocated for a direct \$5 million allocation to the WCTF, which was included in the Economic Development and Jobs Bill.<sup>6</sup> In the 2014 legislative session, stakeholders, including SkillWorks and WSG, also successfully lobbied for a \$2.5 million appropriation for the WCTF and the establishment of the Middle-Skills Job Training Fund. Aside from the benefits of actual funding dollars from the WCTF, there have also been improved systems alignments due to the structure of the regional training partnerships that were outlined in the Middle-Skills Solutions Act. By requiring career centers, community colleges, workforce investment boards, career and technical high schools, and community-based organizations to partner together to meet local labor needs, the resulting training programs were able to leverage the particular strengths of each partner to improve sustainability and employment outcomes. Employers also helped ensure that the training was accurate and accepted according to industry standards, and

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<sup>6</sup> For more information, see the 2013 evaluation report by Mt. Auburn Associates, *Assessment of WSG and SkillWorks Public Policy Advocacy Efforts during the 2012 Legislative Session*.

pledged jobs and paid internships as part of their investment in the partnerships. Through this vehicle, employers became strong partners in developing these training pipelines with the state workforce system, and have increased their own advocacy in support of the WCTF.

- **Continued funding for Workforce Training Fund Program (WTFP).** WSG and SkillWorks were successful in advocating for sustained state support for the WTFP, a state fund financed by a very small surcharge on the Unemployment Tax paid by Massachusetts employers. Its purpose is to provide resources to Massachusetts businesses and workers to train current and newly hired employees. In 2011, with the support of many employer associations and partners, WSG succeeded in getting language in the budget that would turn the WTFP into a trust fund, eliminating the need to fight for and protect yearly appropriations. This language was signed into law in July 2011. While not solely responsible for this success, many stakeholders interviewed attributed a good part of the credit for the success to the extensive advocacy work of WSG and SkillWorks.
- **Increased funding for summer youth jobs.** Working in collaboration with other youth and workforce advocates, WSG was actively involved in preserving and often expanding funding for summer youth jobs. A review of funding trends by the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center reveals that the youth development area is the one category within the Jobs and Workforce Budget that has received significant increases in state funding.
- **Inclusion of funding for Community College Workforce Development Grant Fund.** SkillWorks and WSG were instrumental in FY12 in getting an inclusion as an outside section in the fiscal year 2013 state budget of a Community College Workforce Development Grant Fund modeled after the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund, but overseen by the Board of Higher Education. Resources for the fund will come from \$12 million a year of revenue associated with gaming license fees in Massachusetts. In addition, the Fund's advisory board includes WSG partners.

**SkillWorks and WSG were unable to prevent the decline of workforce development funding. At best, they helped minimize the loss.**

SkillWorks focused a large proportion of its time and resources associated with public policy advocacy work on state funding for workforce training and career readiness. Every year, WSG developed a detailed set of Workforce Budget Priorities that, in addition to funding the WCTF, included its expectations about funding for the employment services program, one-stop career centers, at risk youth, ABE/ESOL funding, and a variety of other priorities over the years. The reality was, however, that for most of Phase II of SkillWorks there were serious fiscal challenges facing the commonwealth because of the Great Recession. As a result, much of the advocacy may have led to minimizing budget decreases versus getting the budget to the level appropriate to meet the workforce challenges in the commonwealth. Over the five years of Phase II of SkillWorks, state funding for workforce development declined by about \$14 million, or 27

percent.<sup>7</sup> Much of this decline, however, is related to the Employment Services Program of Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children, which was not a key WSG priority in the last five years.

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<sup>7</sup> Based on data on Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center's online tool (funded by SkillWorks in Phase III).

## Lessons from Phase II Work

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The successes and missteps witnessed over five years of investment in both direct workforce development services and policy advocacy offer numerous lessons for both practitioners and funders. More insights can be gleaned from the detailed evaluation reports on the workforce partnerships and SkillWorks efforts to achieve system change but below are some of the cross-cutting lessons that emerged from the work.

### LESSONS REGARDING SERVICE

**Deep engagement with employers that recognizes the unique cultures and customized needs of each organization is key to participant and partnership success.**

The workforce partnerships consistently demonstrated the importance of both building a sector table that encourages collaboration and also nurturing strong ties between the provider and the individual employer so that services can better respond to the employers' individual needs. This played out in pre-employment settings in the "matchmaking" function. For instance, HTC's high placement rate of room attendants was, in part, based on the recognition of the unique personality of each hotel and careful matching and preparation of job applicants to match culture of the brand.

Employer relationships were even more paramount in the case of incumbent services. The partnerships that were most successful in supporting participants' advancement within employer partners developed close relationships with employers. HTI staff was in close communication with staff at employer partners. Together, they closely monitored participant progress, discussed effectiveness and specific programs, and jointly strategized solutions to a variety of issues. Services were located on site or near the employers. Year Up deepened ties with employers in order build stronger pathways for its alumni. Year Up conducted research to deepen its understanding of the career pathways within the financial service companies, worked directly with human resources staff to align and leverage services, and gained access to worksites to deliver direct services to alumni.

**On-site cohort-style training, in partnership with a single employer, is a highly effective and valued means of delivering incumbent workforce development, but ultimate success depends on employer commitment and capacity to then provide advancement opportunities.**

Cohorts provide an efficient vehicle for delivering services and create a natural peer network for support. EMCP's most successful academic classes were the on-site paramedic classes offered through a partnership with Boston EMS. The on-site model was able to tailor the offering to both the employer's and employees' needs and schedule, which led to a high rate of success in the course and greater employer satisfaction. That said, graduates have had few opportunities to advance as a result of their paramedic certification because Boston EMS has not had openings. Similarly, HTI LPN training with Hebrew SeniorLife was highly successful until the employer no longer forecast a need for LPNs and faced difficulty absorbing all of the

graduates it had supported through training. HTI's support of employees in specific departments of Boston Children's Hospital, central processing and medical coding, offers another example of cohort-style learning. The model provided a successful way for a large group to attain needed skills with extensive supports in place to support the population. In these cases, the emphasis was more on upgrading the skills of the department than on individual participant advancement, although as a result of SkillWorks' requirements, the hospital did agree to provide wage increases for participants who successfully completed training and earned certification.

**Coaches provide critical ongoing support that allows participants to stay focused on their goals.**

By cultivating strong relationships with participants and communicating with them in an ongoing manner even after they complete their partnership training programs, coaches enhance and prolong participant engagement in partnership programs, services, and events, which connects them to an ongoing web of support. The coaching model offers a promising, if labor-intensive, alternative to traditional workforce models that have focused heavily on rapid job placement. The coaching model creates an ongoing support system for participants during training, in college, and in the workplace. The benefit is a more robust system to support individuals when challenges arise and help keep them on as steady a path as possible toward advancement.

**Coaching resources located directly at the community college, but accessible to community partners, provide a valuable bridge to the college for participants and partnership staff.**

Given SkillWorks strong focus on postsecondary degree achievement in Phase II, the addition of the college navigator who maintains regular office hours at BHCC—the college enrolling the highest number of SkillWorks participants—was a win for many stakeholders. Data and interviews suggest that the college navigator's assistance has helped participants in many ways, including the transition to college, the application for financial aid, the sequencing of courses, and the selection of degree programs.

## **LESSONS REGARDING SYSTEM CHANGE**

**To achieve success in workforce policy work requires a mix of patience, strategy, and opportunism.**

WSG and SkillWorks have spent a decade building a constituency for workforce development. This work has led to some legislative successes over this period, often through effective advocacy work and persistence, while remaining flexible, during the legislative process. WSG and SkillWorks have looked at every opportunity to make linkages between the workforce challenges in Massachusetts and other key issues, and have looked for opportunities to infuse workforce-related elements to other pieces of state legislation.

**Changing the perspective of policymakers is perhaps the most enduring type of system change, but nurturing this type of change takes time.**

SkillWorks and WSG have done considerable work to change the perspectives of policymakers both in state agencies as well as in the legislature. Perhaps the best example of this has been the work related to middle-skill jobs. The *Massachusetts' Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs* report in effect changed the conversation around workforce. Interviews with state legislative leaders found that because of their interactions with WSG and SkillWorks, they have a new understanding of the workforce needs and opportunities in the state and a number now seek to identify the workforce development possibilities in other legislation. The full success of the policy work of WSG and SkillWorks may be realized over the next five years as legislators, influenced by SkillWorks, work to get job training embedded in many other state bills. These future successes will be the result of the groundwork that has been laid over the past 10 years.

**Policy advocacy is a critical, but not the exclusive, path to system change.**

System change is a lot more than changing state legislation, it involves changing how those within the system think and work, changing how public sector agencies act, and transforming the culture of individual employers. Enduring system change can include a community college developing a new approach to working with adult learners, an employer developing a new way of supporting educational advancement of employees, and service providers developing new ways of working with employers. The survey of those within the workforce system revealed that SkillWorks affected more than state legislation and led to many such changes in the policies and practices of many of the stakeholders operating within the system.

**Knowledge creation and dissemination can be a powerful system change tool if done in more deliberate manner.**

While SkillWorks never defined knowledge capture and dissemination as a specific system change strategy, during Phase II it was supporting research and evaluation activities that helped to build the knowledge of the field. SkillWorks staff also played a much greater role in disseminating knowledge about workforce development broadly in the state, and nationally, through blog posts, newsletters, speaking engagements, and convenings. SkillWorks did not see this work as part of its system change strategy, yet the work did have an impact on changing perspectives on workforce development, highlighting some potential practices that could be scaled up, and identifying some barriers to success. Some of this work could have had even a greater impact if there was a deliberate system change strategy associated with it. Perhaps the best example of this is the case study completed on employer-paid tuition assistance. With limited exposure to this practice, it is not surprising that other employers have yet to replicate the practice.

**LESSONS REGARDING FUNDING**

### **Long-term funding like that provided by SkillWorks in Phase II is critical to many of the individual and organizational outcomes achieved.**

In partnerships such as HTI, the long-term funding was critical because it aligned with the lengthy academic pathway of participants and the tenure of support required by HTI to follow students along their postsecondary journey. For some HTI participants, five years of Phase II funds was not enough. HTI is receiving funds in Phase III to continue academic coaching for those still pursuing their education.

Long-term support was critical to the capacity gains associated with the workforce partnerships as well. Long term funding enabled organizations to not only run a pilot or program, but also to assess initial successes and failures, learn, modify, and eventually codify best practices. Long-term funding enabled organizations to add and develop existing staff and deepen capacity in areas such as data analysis. The long-term funding also kept employers at the table and fostered deeper relationships both among the employer partners and between the employers and the lead organizations. Finally, for Year Up, it provided the time to change the internal systems so that, regardless of future SkillWorks funding, Year Up training will be more closely aligned with the goals of long-term graduate success.

### **Investments in data systems to track participant progress do not necessarily yield quality data or data-driven organizations.**

In response to data challenges in Phase I, SkillWorks invested in a data platform for use by all workforce partnerships in Phase II to ensure consistency and accuracy across partnerships. Building from an existing state data platform, SkillWorks began collecting participant-level data on participation, progress in services, and career and educational advancement. While the SkillWorks database was a step forward in transparency and comprehensiveness of data collection, it is important for funders to consider the limitations of such systems. SkillWorks faced a number of challenges. For instance, it was difficult for a standard database to capture the range of outcomes that were relevant for one sector but not another. It was also difficult to capture progress for students on a postsecondary path when the workforce partnerships did not provide the courses. Perhaps most importantly, a data system does not ensure that partnerships see data as a critical management tool. If the partnership itself did not see the data as critical to operations, the quality suffered. If strong systems were not in place to ensure accurate *collection* of data, then the data quality also suffered. If staffing was not dedicated and consistent for managing data at the partnership, entry and use of the data declined. For strong data, grantees must value data and regularly use it to manage their operations. Those that have such practices in place, generally already have strong database systems, in which case an initiative system potentially makes redundant work. For those grantees that do not have strong data practices in place, the provision of a database is unlikely to be a panacea.

### **Active grantmaker engagement can accelerate progress.**

SkillWorks in Phase II proved successful in pursuing an activist style of grantmaking in which staff and funders deeply engaged to ensure that investments yielded the greatest returns. On the Green Collar Careers Initiative, staff played a highly active role in catalyzing the

development of the nascent sector, disseminating information, encouraging collaboration, and building capacity.

At times, staff and funders took a tougher approach. The most successful example of funder intervention in a workforce partnership in Phase II was with Year Up. The type of change envisioned by Year Up and supported by SkillWorks is difficult to achieve. The momentum of the existing program, initial staff resistance, competing priorities, and multiple organizational restructurings all posed barriers to change. Over the five-year SkillWorks grant period, Year Up struggled at times to meet a number of the grant conditions. To keep Year Up focused on its articulated goals required the attention and prodding of SkillWorks staff and the engagement of SkillWorks funders. It appears unlikely that a more passive style of grantmaking could have achieved the results that Year Up was ultimately able to produce.

The Emergency Medical Careers Partnership led by Northeastern University was also the target of grantmaker intervention. While ultimately SkillWorks and Northeastern were unable to reach agreement on the approach needed to make the partnership successful, Northeastern's early termination of the partnership freed resources that could be deployed in more productive ways.

Active grantmaker engagement was not limited to interaction with providers. In at least one example, SkillWorks used its grantmaking power to ensure incumbent participants an economic benefit for upgrading their skills. In approving funding for the Boston Children's Hospital (BCH) central processing cohort, SkillWorks asked BCH to provide wage increases for clients who successfully completed the training. BCH agreed and, at the end of the day, provided wage increases for training completion, certification, and continuing education. This model then carried over into the medical coding cohort as well.

### **The funder table itself can be a powerful tool toward achieving initiative goals.**

Long before the term collective impact was coined, funders gathered around the SkillWorks **cross-sector** table to work toward a **shared vision for change**. With SkillWorks staff serving as a **backbone** function, funders agreed to a **metrics** on which to monitor progress. Through the funders meetings, stakeholders engaged in regular **structured communication** and built trust. The results were new relationships, new forms of collaboration, and deeper system knowledge for funders. Later in Phase II, SkillWorks began to venture into the final pillar of collective impact that the group had not yet tackled— **mutually reinforcing activities**. While traditionally SkillWorks operated as a pooled investment for funders, and the funders table acted as the overseers of that investment, SkillWorks eventually sought to look at the broader funding landscape for workforce development in Boston. Funders shared their portfolio of workforce investments and the group collectively began to think about gaps and opportunities. This effort was a start that perhaps can be built upon in Phase III.