

## SKILLWORKS SYSTEM CHANGE – PHASE II YEAR 2

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### INTRODUCTION

This report looks at the system-related outputs and outcomes that have been made during Phase II of SkillWorks, covering the period between January 1, 2010 and June 30, 2011. The report examines the following elements of SkillWorks:

- the activities of SkillWorks funders and staff;
- the activities of the Workforce Solutions Group (WSG);
- the activities of the workforce partnerships;
- the activities related to the Green Jobs Initiative grantees; and
- the capacity-building activities.

This summary report focuses on the progress of all of these components in contributing to the Initiative’s system change agenda and includes:

1. Changes in the boundaries, perspectives, and relationships of those operating within the workforce system<sup>1</sup>.
2. The major system change-related activities during the year – the outputs.
3. Progress in achieving system outcomes.
4. Ongoing challenges.

### CHANGES IN SYSTEM BOUNDARIES, PERSPECTIVES, AND RELATIONSHIPS

One of the ways in which the evaluation is looking at the system change work of SkillWorks is through examining changes in the overall dynamics of the workforce development system. The literature on “system dynamics” identifies the following basic attributes of systems:

- *Boundaries*: Boundaries delineate everyone that is influencing and influenced by a system.
- *Relationships*: Relationships are defined as the connections or exchanges that occur among local actors within and across system levels, and, in the case of the workforce system, can

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<sup>1</sup>SkillWorks defines “the workforce development system” as including both publicly- and privately-funded programs that provide job training and related educational services to youth and adults. The workforce system also includes the broad network of community-based organizations that receives both public and private funding as well as community colleges, adult basic education (ABE) providers, welfare-to-work programs, community colleges, vocational and technical schools, school-to-career programs, and Food Stamp training programs.

include flows of information, client referrals, staffing arrangements, funding streams, and sharing of other resources.

- *Perspectives:* Perspectives are how different actors within the local system think about and approach the challenges, goals, and strategies within and across the system domains.

In many ways, the SkillWorks approach to system change has 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. In addition, SkillWorks has sought to change relationships between major stakeholders in the workforce system as well as to change the perspectives of those operating within the system.

The work of the overall Initiative during this period provides evidence that there have been changes in these system dynamics.

## System Boundaries

### ➤ SkillWorks is growing in stature as a workforce intermediary – distinct from Workforce Solutions Group (WSG) and the Boston Foundation.

Over the past two years, but particularly in 2010 and the first half of 2011, the staff of SkillWorks have taken on a more distinct and independent role in the state's workforce development landscape. In effect, SkillWorks itself has become a workforce intermediary and a key stakeholder in representing the interests of low-income and low-skilled workers in the workforce development system. Specific evidence of this work includes:

- SkillWorks played a key leadership role in the formation of the Skills2Compete-Massachusetts campaign and led the production of the *Massachusetts' Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs* report.
- SkillWorks staff have used funders group meetings as a means of educating collaborative members about workforce system issues at the local, state, and federal levels.
- The SkillWorks director, Loh-Sze Leung, has increasingly been invited to sit on boards or task forces on issues related to workforce development. The most notable example is the strengthened relationship between SkillWorks and the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC), with Loh-Sze now sitting on the PIC's Workforce Development Committee and engaged in the Boston Healthcare Careers Consortium.
- Loh-Sze has also become increasingly engaged in public policy advocacy work and has increased visibility with legislators and their staff as well as state and federal workforce development and higher education officials. Loh-Sze was invited to serve on the National Skills Coalition's 2011 Leadership Council.
- The SkillWorks Green Jobs Initiative, led by Tricia Maguire, has become recognized as an increasingly important intermediary in the Commonwealth on issues related to green

jobs. 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. In early 2011, SkillWorks was invited to participate on the Advisory Group for the 2011 Massachusetts Clean Energy Industry Employment and Workforce Needs Study.

## System Relationships

### ➤ **The strong relationships being built within the WSG Executive Team (E-Team) have resulted in improved system relationships.**

During Phase I, the E-Team overseeing the work of WSG was comprised of the Crittenton Women's Union, the Massachusetts Communities Action Network, the Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Association, and the state AFL-CIO. During Phase II, three new members were added to the E-Team – the Massachusetts Workforce Professionals Association, the Massachusetts Business Roundtable, and the Northeastern Center for Labor Market Studies. The new members added to the WSG E-Team in Phase II of SkillWorks have become important members of the team, are highly valued for their participation in the group, and believe they receive considerable value from participating in WSG. For both the Massachusetts Business Roundtable and the Massachusetts Workforce Professionals Association (the trade association representing Workforce Investment Area Administrators), participation in WSG is leading to new relationships and changing perspectives on the challenges of meeting the workforce development needs of low-income, low-skilled individuals.

- After struggling for a long time to engage employers, WSG, through the participation of the Business Roundtable, has developed new relationships with the business community and has been able to expand the number of businesses in WSG's statewide coalition. WSG has been able to leverage these new relationships in its public policy advocacy work, particularly around advocacy for the Workforce Training Fund.
  - The Center for Labor Market Studies' participation in WSG has brought increased media visibility through numerous op-eds and other articles about workforce issues, particularly around youth employment.
  - For many years, there was a sharp division between those involved in the Massachusetts Workforce Professionals Association and the state's WIB directors who were involved with the Massachusetts Workforce Board Association. Now that both groups serve on the WSG E-Team, they work together much more cooperatively. This, in turn, has strengthened the workforce coalition, with the two major statewide associations speaking with a common voice on most issues.
- **Creating a new "table" through the funders group, which brings together the public sector and the philanthropic community, has improved communication between these two 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 relationship 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 funders group have noted the importance of these new relationships. For example, it is now more common for those in the funders group to talk with each other between meetings about issues with common grantees (beyond SkillWorks) or to confer about important policy issues.

While this relationship building has been developing over the course of SkillWorks' history, efforts in the past two years have taken this to a new level. For example, over the past two years, SkillWorks staff have designed funders group meetings to align with the SkillWorks public policy agenda and provide opportunities for learning. This has engaged both the public sector and the philanthropic community in a common learning process. The sessions have ranged from featuring speakers and materials about the federal workforce system to hosting one of the funders meetings at a career center. Many of these meetings have been open not only to SkillWorks funders but also to funders outside of the SkillWorks Initiative and to grantees as well. One of the outcomes of this work has been a growing level of understanding amongst funders in the philanthropic community about the structure, operations, and funding of the public workforce system at the local, state, and federal levels.

➤ **Significant progress was made during this period improving the relationship among the SkillWorks partnerships, WSG, and the public policy agenda.**

Partnership staffs have engaged more directly in policy work, including the Skills2Compete-Massachusetts campaign, legislative meetings, and hearings. In addition, the partnerships attended the WSG partners meetings and feel, in general, that there is a greater level of effort in getting their perspective on policy barriers. Specific examples of engagement in 2010-2011 include:

- Three of the SkillWorks partnerships provided participant testimonials for the 2010 Gubernatorial Forum.
- Three of the SkillWorks partnerships participated in legislative meetings and hearings on various workforce priorities.
- Three of the SkillWorks partnerships participated in the planning process and roll out of the Skills2Compete-Massachusetts campaign and report.

## System Perspectives

➤ **WSG and SkillWorks' coordinated policy advocacy work is building increased visibility and credibility as well as changing perspectives about workforce challenges and needs in the system.**

- Legislators are increasingly responsive to meeting with WSG and SkillWorks on all workforce development-related issues. As noted by key stakeholders, legislators return calls from WSG and SkillWorks staff much more quickly and are more willing to convene meetings on key workforce issues.
- The issuance of the *Massachusetts' Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs* report created considerable visibility for workforce-related challenges in the Commonwealth. The report received

significant visibility with the press and was featured on boston.com (the Boston Globe's website). This story has been cycling on and off boston.com since the launch in 2010, and it continues to be one of the most emailed stories months after the report's release well into 2011.

- WSG and SkillWorks have actively issued regular email blasts, many of them co-authored by Loh-Sze and Sue under the banner of Skills2Compete-Massachusetts, on major federal and state legislative issues to a widening group of individuals and organizations.
  - Major media coverage of the Workforce Training Fund, Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund, and One-Stop Career Centers, placed or authored by WSG and others, is evidence of a higher profile for workforce development issues.
- ➔ **Progress has been made in developing greater consensus about major system-related barriers affecting career advancement and employment for low-income, low-skilled individuals.**
- Over the past few years, there has been greater recognition that one of the goals of the ABE system has to be related to workforce and higher education preparedness. While this is a result of multiple factors, the broader change in the perspective of those in the ABE system can at least be partially attributed to the thinking and work of those linked to SkillWorks.
  - One outcome of the Skills2Compete-Massachusetts campaign is a better understanding and greater visibility of the middle-skill gap in the Commonwealth's workforce and the need for both resources and innovation within our education and training system to address this gap.
  - SkillWorks has been an important voice for adult learners and incumbent workers in the community college system. A growing number of organizations and actors have coalesced around the need to improve the effectiveness of community colleges. In 2010, WSG, SkillWorks staff, SkillWorks capacity-building activities, and those involved in the SkillWorks partnerships were all involved in efforts to address barriers related to the success of nontraditional students in the community college system.
  - There is some evidence that SkillWorks has influenced how the commissioner of higher education is defining the issues that are part of the Vision Project. For example, the focus on alignment within the system and the use of stackable, transferable credits across the system could have the potential to address some of the barriers that adult learners face in the current higher education system. If there are, in fact, new state policies that come out of the Vision Project that reflect this thinking, they could be considered an outcome of the system change work of SkillWorks.

## MAJOR NEW ACTIVITIES IN 2010-2011 — ANNUAL OUTPUTS

Both SkillWorks and WSG have continued to expand their visibility, broaden their constituency, and build a statewide coalition during a time of serious economic stress and a tight fiscal environment. During 2010-2011, WSG and SkillWorks achieved the following:

- *Skills2Compete-Massachusetts Campaign.* SkillWorks and WSG co-sponsored the Skills2Compete-Massachusetts campaign, which not only resulted in a highly-visible report,

described above, but also established a specific policy agenda and a new vehicle for advocating for this agenda.

- *Gubernatorial Candidates Forum in September 2010.* SkillWorks and WSG chaired a committee, which was comprised of many of the Skills2Compete-Massachusetts campaign organizers, to plan and implement the only gubernatorial forum on jobs and workforce development. All of the candidates were present at the forum, and a broad audience was in attendance at Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC). The forum also included testimonials from three SkillWorks training participants on the value of the services they received.
- *First and Second Annual Massachusetts Jobs and Workforce Summits.* WSG has now established an annual summit that focuses attention on statewide workforce issues. Over 300 business, labor, education, and workforce leaders attended the first summit in June 2010; about 350 attended the second summit in June 2011. The summits provided an opportunity for WSG and SkillWorks to gain support for some of their important legislative priorities, to put policymakers on the record in support of workforce development priorities, and to engage businesses from throughout the state.
- *WSG Champions Awards.* As part of the summits, WSG developed an annual champions award. In 2010, this award was presented to an Employer Champion (Baystate Health), a Skills Training Provider Champion (the Massachusetts Manufacturing Extension Partnership), and an Innovative Training Partnership Champion (Pathways to Finance Careers). In 2011, two SkillWorks employer partners were recognized: Brigham and Women's Hospital received the Employer Champion award, while Children's Hospital Boston received an honorable mention in this category. The awards offer an opportunity to give attention to some of the best practices in workforce development. It is also a way to focus attention on employers who are supporting career advancement amongst their low-income, low-skilled employees.
- *Drafting and gathering support for the Middle-Skills Solutions Act.* WSG, SkillWorks, and a number of key partners worked hard in 2010 to draft, refine, and secure sponsors for the Middle-Skills Solutions Act, which was an outgrowth of the Skills2Compete-Massachusetts campaign. The Act was filed in January 2011 with over 50 legislative co-sponsors from both the Massachusetts House and Senate, and work has continued over the first half of 2011 to gain legislative support for the Act.
- *New federal grants.* In 2010, SkillWorks was awarded \$600,000 in new funding through the federal Social Innovation Fund grant through the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. SkillWorks will use these funds to expand its existing work as well as to add technology-related capacity at the Hotel Training Center, to add additional academic coaching capacity at the Healthcare Training Institute, and to hire a college navigator/coach for SkillWorks participants pursuing credentials in healthcare and business at Bunker Hill Community College through the Boston Private Industry Council. In addition, SkillWorks was included in the successful application by Jobs for the Future for funding from the U.S. Department of Labor's Green Jobs Innovation Fund. With funding of \$850,000 over three years, SkillWorks will be launching a new partnership in the fall of 2011 to prepare approximately 70 participants to become automotive technicians with specialized skills in hybrid technology.

- *Follow-up to legislation filed in 2009.* In addition to the Middle-Skills Solution Act, WSG was involved in efforts in 2010 to make further progress on some of the legislation that it filed in 2009. In 2009, WSG filed the Workers Pathways to Self-Sufficiency Act with the support of Senator Eldridge. The bill had two parts: first, funding of the Educational Grant Rewards Program; and, second, improvements in Department of Transitional Assistance policies. This bill was reported favorably by the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities, went to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means in March 2010, and then died in this committee. In 2010, WSG authored and advocated for two budget amendments to recapitalize the Educational Rewards Grant Program. The amendments were filed, and while they received support in both the House and Senate, did not pass. In January 2011, WSG, under the leadership of the Crittenton Women’s Union, re-filed the Educational Rewards Act, which the Joint Committee on Children and Families heard in May. The bill has not yet been reported out of committee, but WSG and SkillWorks worked together to generate turnout and testimony for a hearing in May 2011, with WSG director Sue Parsons, SkillWorks director Loh-Sze Leung, and two SkillWorks employers providing testimony to the committee along with a number of student participants. In addition, a hearing was held in early 2010 on the Youth Solutions Act that was developed by WSG in 2009.
- *Representatives of WSG sit on and have influenced the work of the Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board Performance Accountability Subcommittee.* WSG informed this group of some opportunities for federal funding related to development and improvements to state data collection regarding postsecondary education and the workforce system. The subcommittee brought together representatives from multiple state departments to respond to a major federal initiative on data quality that was subsequently funded. These state departments are now working together to build out the interface for their systems.
- *SkillWorks and WSG have been better connected to the state Workforce Partners Group in 2010-2011.* Especially with the participation of the Massachusetts Workforce Professionals Association (MWPA) and the Massachusetts WIB Association on WSG, SkillWorks and WSG have had many more opportunities in 2010-2011 to learn about and connect to the work of the Massachusetts Workforce Partners Group. Loh-Sze presented twice to this group, once in July 2010 at the kick-off of the Skills2Compete-Massachusetts campaign and again in May 2011 to share some preliminary lessons learned and findings from the SkillWorks Initiative.
- *Federal workforce advocacy — preserving workforce funding threatened by H.R. 1.* WSG and SkillWorks partnered to send weekly alerts on the continuing resolution discussions in the U.S. House and Senate. H.R. 1, the House’s spending resolution, originally contained about \$3 billion in cuts to labor and workforce development programs, which would have eliminated funding for the Workforce Investment Act as well as many other programs. As part of a national coalition, WSG and SkillWorks worked to reduce the cuts, ultimately helping to reduce the total cuts to just under \$1 billion in FY 2011. SkillWorks and WSG’s efforts included multiple meetings with the Massachusetts congressional delegation, both in Massachusetts and in Washington, D.C., and organizing constituents to contact Senator Brown about the value of workforce training and job placement programs. WSG and SkillWorks continue to work together and with national partners to fight to preserve federal workforce training programs.

## PROGRESS IN ACHIEVING SYSTEM OUTCOMES

During Phase II of SkillWorks, SkillWorks staff adopted a system change framework based upon the work of the National Skills Coalition. This framework identified system change goals and strategies within three categories:

1. **Proportionate Investment.** This goal focuses on ensuring that federal and state investments in workforce development match the demands of the labor market.
2. **Career Pathways.** The goal of career pathways is to expand access to workforce education and training for all workers by better aligning adult basic education, job training, and higher education systems to create pathways to postsecondary education.
3. **Sector Partnerships.** This involves strategies that focus on the goal of meeting the skill needs of local industries and improving opportunities for workers through the development of better training, retention, and advancement strategies.

The period from January 2010 to June 2011 was important for laying the foundation for further system changes and policy successes. However, the economic, political, and fiscal environments made it particularly difficult for SkillWorks and WSG to make significant progress on the public policy agenda that they had set. In particular, the current budget realities meant that much of this 18-month period was spent trying to retain existing funding, rather than trying to increase funding for workforce development activities in the Commonwealth.

### Proportionate Investment

- *Continued funding for Workforce Training Fund (WTF).* The most important outcome in 2010 was the successful effort by WSG and SkillWorks in turning around the state's commitment to the WTF. 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. WSG conducted comprehensive outreach to prior WTF grant recipients and partners, asking them to submit letters to legislators in support of the fund. The WSG E-Team also actively lobbied the speaker of the house and the governor on funding for the WTF. Alan Macdonald (representing the Massachusetts Business Roundtable on the WSG E-Team) played a pivotal role in bringing together a coalition that included the business community and those involved in workforce development. These efforts resulted in putting \$20.5 million into the fund in FY 2011 (\$11.5 million in new funding and \$9 million in carry forward) and extending the WTF through 2015, when it was set to expire at the end of 2010. In 2011, with the support of many employer associations and partners, WSG succeeded in getting language in the budget that would turn the WTF into a trust fund, eliminating the need to fight for and protect yearly appropriations. This language was included in the final FY 2012 budget, signed into law by Governor Patrick in early July 2011.
- *Increased funding for summer youth jobs.* Working in collaboration with the Youth Jobs Coalition/Massachusetts Communities Action Network (MCAN), the WSG was actively involved in an advocacy campaign that helped to increase the amount of funding for summer youth jobs in the summer of 2010. The full \$8 million of funding was allocated as a result of

the governor “spending forward” FY 2011 funds. During 2010, WSG also helped to secure additional funding for youth jobs for the summer of 2011. In 2011 budget advocacy, WSG campaigned alongside other youth and workforce advocates to preserve funding for summer jobs in 2012, securing a total of \$7 million for summer jobs, including FY 2011 supplemental budget commitments.

## Career Pathways

While there have been a number of outputs associated with promoting career pathways over the last 18 months, there have been few concrete outcomes of the work to date. WSG has been actively seeking to get the legislature to support its Educational Rewards Grant Program, and this legislation was still in committee as of July 2011. The Middle-Skills Solutions Act was filed in January 2011, which aims to create better pathways to middle-skill credentials and degrees as well as jobs. This legislation will be heard in committee in October 2011. Since the Boston Foundation has not yet issued its policy recommendations related to community colleges, and direct SkillWorks and WSG work in this area has been somewhat limited in the last year, there have not been any concrete outcomes in terms of the community college system at this time.

## Sector Partnerships

There are a variety of ways in which the work of the partnerships can lead to system change outcomes:

1. Activities lead to changing practices or culture within the employer partners that have potential impact and sustainability beyond SkillWorks partners, participants, and funding.
2. Changing practices in one employer are extended to other employers in the partnerships.
3. Changing practices amongst the service providers involved in the partnership lead them to change their approach to serving their clients.
4. Activities of the partners lead to changes in the broader “sector.”

The following section examines progress toward these types of system change and any system change outcomes that have resulted from the SkillWorks partnerships.

### ➤ Healthcare Training Institute (HTI)

While it is impossible to attribute changing employer practices entirely to Healthcare Training Institute, employers are indeed taking incremental steps that demonstrate their commitment to helping entry-level workers advance while addressing specific workforce needs. Below are some examples:

- Children’s Hospital successfully implemented a new tuition advancement benefit covering both SkillWorks participants and employees enrolled in its Minority Nursing Program. The importance of this as a system change will depend upon it being extended to all low-skilled workers in the hospital or to other healthcare institutions in Boston. This has not yet occurred, but general guidelines have been set that might facilitate such a transition. For example, participants receiving this benefit must be receiving career coaching and must be

pursuing a certificate or degree in an area designated by the hospital as “high demand” or “critical.”

- Bay Cove Human Services offered a forgivable loan to cover the cost of its CNA training program.
- Hebrew Senior Life has introduced a new internship program for its LPN graduates.
- Brigham and Women’s Hospital is now expanding its HTI services to include career coaching, after seeing the success that HTI has had with other participants/employer partners in the labor market area.
- Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) and Children’s Hospital Boston began working on a new partnership with Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Human Sciences (MCPHS) in 2011. Similar to the model used for the Central Processing Department program, the partnership is aiming to develop a complete pipeline for billing and coding employees to enroll in a contextualized ICD 10 certification program at MCPHS. The pipeline includes academic assessment, college prep, academic coaching, and onsite college classes. Outreach began in June, assessments were scheduled for mid-July, and pre-college classes were scheduled to begin the first week of August 2011.

In addition to the changes and new programs being developed with employers, JVS, through its HTI work, has developed new relationships with Bunker Hill Community College that have significant system change-related potential. Through incremental efforts over the past two years, BHCC is beginning to understand the capacity of JVS in terms of preparing and supporting students for community college. This new relationship has the potential to change the overall approach to developmental education and to solidify new partnerships between BHCC and JVS.

Finally, the work through HTI has also helped to build the overall capacity of JVS, allowing it to advance its work beyond the SkillWorks-supported activity. Advances have included increased coaching capacity, new methods for providing pre-college services, and new credibility in terms of employer relationships.

### ➔ **Hotel Training Center (HTC)**

HTC is working to expand the “boundaries” of its work to other employers and training providers in the Boston hospitality sector. It has met with other Boston hospitality training providers with the goal of establishing better communication and working relationships among providers and exploring opportunities for future collaboration. Representatives of JVS’ Culinary Arts Training Program, International Institute of Boston’s Hotel Career Center, and Community Servings’ Food Service Training all attended meetings organized by HTC. The group surfaced several ideas for increased collaboration. One immediate outcome is that Community Servings now uses HTC’s computer lab for training. HTC and Community Servings are in active discussions about developing an agreement where culinary participants could practice skills at Community Servings. The information exchange has also enabled the training providers to cross refer candidates from one training program to another.

## ➤ Year Up

Through its SkillWorks grant, Year Up is making greater connections between postsecondary institutions and its career advancement strategies. During the planning phase, Year Up developed articulation agreements with Roxbury Community College, New England College of Business and Finance, and University of Phoenix. In 2010, Year Up signed agreements with Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology, Bunker Hill Community College, Kaplan, and MassBay Community College. Year Up is also negotiating with area community colleges to enter into a dual enrollment partnership.

The SkillWorks grant is leading to changes in the national Year Up model — extending the benefits beyond the SkillWorks participants in Boston. Specifically, the focus on long-term labor market retention, career advancement, and postsecondary education outcomes is relatively new to the network of Year Up sites around the country. Year Up Boston’s work influences the national network in the following ways: (1) shifting the outcomes’ focus from job placement to career advancement; (2) developing multiyear, post-placement outcomes that focus on career advancement; and (3) demonstrating how changes in the organizational structure and increased integration across program areas can support career advancement. An emerging national strategic plan for 2012-2016 is reported to underscore Year Up National’s commitment to these objectives.

## ONGOING CHALLENGES

### ➤ **The growing complexity and overlap of the multiple efforts focused on community college system changes.**

While there is a growing consensus that improvements are needed in the state’s community college system, the current approach to identifying the strategy and tactics for achieving this change are very fragmented. During 2009 and 2010, SkillWorks made significant progress in identifying the challenges that low-income, low-skilled adults face in trying to enter and succeed in postsecondary education generally, and in community colleges in particular. Through work at the partnership level and through the Initiative’s capacity-building efforts, a couple of convenings were held that brought together the partnerships with their postsecondary education partners. At the same time, SkillWorks staff worked to develop a strategy of addressing some of the challenges in the community college system.

Some of this work became part of the Skills2Compete-Massachusetts campaign. Through this new effort, SkillWorks brought together some of the key stakeholders who had been involved in previous work related to improving the community college system, including a number of partners who had not previously been engaged with SkillWorks. The Skills2Compete-Massachusetts recommendations included:

- appointing a high-level council or organization to improve the transition from adult education or developmental education to college;
- better aligning ABE and pre-college programs with postsecondary institutions;

- aligning courses of study within and between institutions; supporting transition to college; expanding integrated programming; and creating more evening, weekend, modular, online, and nontraditional courses;
- increasing financial aid to part-time students, and including student support services along with that aid; and
- tracking college completion and credential attainment rates for all students, including adults.

The Skills2Compete-Massachusetts campaign successfully placed these items on the public agenda by creating a common set of priorities that WSG, SkillWorks, and many of their partners could use in meeting with administration officials and legislators. Speaker Robert DeLeo and Senate President Therese Murray, Commissioner Richard Freeland, and Secretary of Labor Joanne Goldstein all met with SkillWorks and/or the Workforce Solutions Group and reacted favorably to the campaign and its goals.

The Middle-Skills Solutions Act (SB921/HB2713) emerged from the work of both WSG and the Skills2Compete-Massachusetts campaign and has as one of its goals increasing postsecondary degree and certificate attainment and aligning ABE/developmental education with community college/postsecondary education requirements.

Three other related activities occurred during this period that complicated the overall approach to system change related to community colleges. First, and most importantly, the Boston Foundation, the lead funder of the SkillWorks Initiative, hired a consultant to convene focus groups that would provide input on changes needed in the state's community college system. The consultant was to help identify an agenda for change, and the Boston Foundation was to bring together the business community to support this agenda in a way that was similar to the work leading to education reform in Massachusetts.

In addition, the state's commissioner of higher education established the Vision Project, and considerable work was undertaken in 2010 on a number of issues related to successful college completion and the alignment of the state's public higher education system with the state's workforce needs. Alan Macdonald of the Massachusetts Business Roundtable, and a member of the WSG E-Team, is part of the Vision Project. His involvement has been critical for forging new relationships with Commissioner Freeland and for understanding the current barriers and issues in the state's community college system as well as for ensuring that the Vision Project goals focus on adult learners and not just the more traditional K-16 pipeline.

Finally, in 2009 and 2010, the healthcare employers involved in the Boston Foundation's Allied Health Initiative became interested in "exploring options for collective action to increase the responsiveness of community colleges to employers' needs." In particular, they were interested in creating greater consistency across the colleges in terms of the skill levels of graduates. This led to the creation of the Working Group on Boston Region Higher Education/Hospital Partnership that met a number of times to develop common curriculum across multiple colleges.

One result of these multiple efforts, some of which include SkillWorks funders, is that it is somewhat constrained when and how WSG and SkillWorks could work on their own agenda. Issues developed around what the agenda should be — should there be a separate “inside” approach (Vision Project and/or the Boston Foundation work with the Department of Higher Education) and an “outside” organizing effort, or do they both need to be totally aligned? Issues also arose about who should engage the employer community and how it should be engaged. This played out particularly in the development of specific components of the Middle-Skills Solutions Act as well as in WSG’s and SkillWorks’ efforts to engage business leadership in supporting the Act.

The Boston Foundation is still working on its own report with a specific policy agenda around changes in the community college system. Continued communication between SkillWorks and the Boston Foundation will be needed to ensure a collaborative strategy in this area going forward.

➔ **Clarity about roles in the advocacy and system change work – convergence of WSG, SkillWorks, Skills2Compete-Massachusetts, Crittenton Women’s Union, and the Boston Foundation.**

Related to the community college issues noted above is the complexity of the public policy landscape in the workforce arena. At various times, different actors who are also part of Skills2Compete or WSG are meeting with legislators and their staff, convening workforce stakeholders and employers, and meeting with state and city officials. Most of the time, there is a common agenda. For example, Crittenton Women’s Union has taken a very strong role in some of the legislative initiatives, and some legislators think of it as the lead. At the same time, WSG and SkillWorks are very actively involved in meeting with legislators and other key stakeholders on the same legislation. In some cases, the policy staff at the Boston Foundation are also engaged.

There are two diverging perspectives on the multiple layers of players involved in the workforce policy system change work:

1. Some of those involved in public policy and advocacy work strongly feel that the more actors the better. The fact that legislators and state officials may sometimes see policy work being done through WSG, sometimes through SkillWorks, sometimes as part of Skills2Compete-Massachusetts, and sometimes through the Boston Foundation on similar issues may mean that the message is stronger and that the likelihood of system change is greater. Having one public relations firm, the Strategy Group, working with many of these groups ensures that there is a common message and that activity is strategically aligned. According to this view, multiple, but aligned, activity is a strength in terms of advocacy, particularly for state legislators and the media.
2. Others believe that there is growing confusion and multiple “brands” out there working on similar issues. This perspective notes that the strength of WSG was supposed to be having multiple entities in the workforce system speak with one voice. A few policymakers interviewed for this report noted that the involvement of both multiple

coalitions as well as individual stakeholders within these coalitions does create some confusion amongst policymakers and may not be the optimal strategy for seeking policy changes in the workforce area.

### ➤ **Reduced funding and the structure of the state’s Employment Services Program.**

While in many states the education and training-related programs through the state’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)-related programs are coordinated with the state’s workforce development system, this is not the case in Massachusetts. In the Commonwealth, the state Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) oversaw the Employment Services Program (ESP), which provides some workforce-related services. In previous years, WSG was engaged in some efforts to try to better align and integrate the ESP with the workforce system. With the proposed elimination of all funding for ESP in the FY 2012 budget, the focus is now on simply restoring support for the ESP-funded activities. The loss of this funding could have a serious impact on the availability of education and training services for low-income individuals in the Commonwealth. At the end of the day, \$7.1 million was restored to the ESP line-item in the FY 2012 budget, which is far less than the \$24 million that was in the FY 2010 budget, but much better than the governor’s budget (\$0) or the house and senate budget proposals (\$6.7 million and \$4.4 million, respectively).

### ➤ **The sustainability of WSG.**

WSG is now in its last year of funding through SkillWorks, which provided a three-year grant in 2009. While initially established as a very close affiliate of SkillWorks, WSG is an increasingly independent collaborative that has developed a wide constituency and a “brand” in the policy field. Those involved in the E-Team have come to believe that the benefits of speaking with one voice on workforce-related policy issues in Massachusetts are extremely strong. As a result, they have now reached consensus that they would like to seek sustainability beyond WSG’s current SkillWorks funding. SkillWorks needs to consider what role, if any, it wants to continue to play in supporting WSG beyond this final year of funding. SkillWorks could work with WSG to explore additional funding or sustainability options.

### ➤ **The geographic scope of the system change work.**

While SkillWorks was initially established as a Boston-based collaborative, its policy work has primarily been statewide in scope. Clearly, WSG is a statewide organization that has a partner network in every region of the state. The system- and policy-related challenges that are specific to the Boston (or metropolitan Boston) region have never been the focus of attention of either WSG or SkillWorks itself. However, in many ways, there are some unique challenges in the Boston region, and there are perhaps some areas of policy or system change that could be addressed through SkillWorks. For example, encouraging better coordination between regional economic development and transportation-related policy efforts with workforce development is an area that may deserve attention. In addition, the specific issues related to the operations, management, and structure of the community colleges within the Boston metropolitan area could be another issue that SkillWorks might address. Finally, thinking about “sector” level system

change in the Boston region in the hospitality, financial services, and healthcare sectors may be an avenue to pursue.

➤ **Maintaining a focus on adults, while linking to and leveraging work related to youth.**

Since its establishment, SkillWorks has defined the target of its work as low-income, low-skilled adults or nontraditional learners. For the most part, it has not been engaged in youth or K-12 education issues. There was somewhat of a tension over this issue in 2009 when WSG began to focus more attention on youth issues. In particular, Andy Sum of Northeastern, a member of the WSG E-Team, has received considerable national attention for his work on the significant employment challenges faced by youth.

A number of organizations involved in issues of workforce and skills for low-income populations are also involved in improving the K-16 pipeline and credential attainment rates and outcomes for young people. There are also many groups that focus exclusively on improving educational and employment outcomes of traditional students and youth. These groups are often focused on some of the same issues as SkillWorks and are offering some similar policy solutions.

One major area in which issues of low-skilled adults and youth converge is around college preparedness. Both adults and high school graduates are entering college unprepared academically. The K-12 system is developing innovative programs that better link high school curriculum to college readiness. The ABE system is also trying to address this issue. While SkillWorks needs to remain focused on adults, it can help to ensure that the workforce and ABE communities are sharing learning and working collaboratively with those in the K-12 system working on similar issues.

One good example of linkage between these two populations lies in the SkillWorks college navigation “coach” funded by the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grant and modeled on the effort by the Boston PIC to provide support for Boston Public School (BPS) graduates going to community college and needing additional support. In placing its coach at the PIC, SkillWorks was able to leverage the PIC’s experience and connections gained through its work with BPS students. However, it remains to be seen if SkillWorks’ additional coach for adult college students is sustainable or if in the long run it makes more sense to jointly seek support for one group of coaches that might support all students, no matter what their age group or status.

➤ **Responding to serious reductions in federal funds and the potential reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA)**

With the end of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding, and with the considerable uncertainty about the level and type of federal support for workforce development, those concerned about low-income, low-skilled individuals need to think creatively about how to move forward. SkillWorks and WSG have taken an increasingly active role in lobbying for continued federal support and funding and thinking about the approach to WIA reauthorization. Beyond getting more involved in federal policy and funding issues, SkillWorks faces the challenge of addressing a scenario in which there is considerably less discretionary funding at the

state level and there are reduced resources to support the current workforce development infrastructure. Thinking about the implications of these changes for its constituency will be a critical challenge for the remainder of Phase II of SkillWorks.

## IMPLICATIONS

### **1. Continue to support and work with WSG in its effort to develop a sustainability plan.**

SkillWorks has taken the important step of funding a consultant to work with WSG on a sustainability plan and has made inquiries of potential funders in other parts of the state. In addition to helping WSG, SkillWorks needs to think through its own role in workforce system change. SkillWorks should integrate decisions regarding its future funding of WSG into further thinking about the role of SkillWorks in the future and its potential approach to system change and its public policy agenda at the federal, state, and regional levels.

### **2. Provide greater clarification and coordination of multiple workforce policy advocacy efforts.**

Multiple actors and voices pushing the same agenda are good, but it is also important that the benefits of speaking with “one voice” not be lost and that confusion about the multiple entities advocating for policy changes to improve the workforce development system does not lead to inefficiency and distraction from focusing on the real issues at hand. Since SkillWorks is involved in many of these activities, it can play a key role in working on clarification and coordination. As a first step, some additional work can be done to explore how legislators and state policymakers have perceived the multiple players in the field. A targeted set of interviews or a survey could focus on “brand” recognition and perceptions related to WSG, SkillWorks, the Boston Foundation, and others active in the policy advocacy arena. Second, the strategic planning efforts related to the WSG sustainability plan should also consider the implications of multiple players in terms of WSG’s future. This work may help SkillWorks become even more effective in advocating for its policy and legislative agenda and help WSG position itself for long-term sustainability after SkillWorks’ funding ends.

### **3. Increase focus on administrative and practice changes at the community colleges operating in the Boston region.**

Given the work of the Boston Foundation on community colleges, perhaps SkillWorks should put a greater focus on the community college system in the Boston Metropolitan Area and on what it proposed as “administrative changes” and “practice changes” in its well-conceived policy memo on postsecondary education that it developed in 2010 before the Boston Foundation entered this arena. In addition, SkillWorks can play an important role of ensuring that the ongoing work around community college improvement is sufficiently sensitive to the needs of adult learners and workers trying to gain middle-skill jobs and credentials.

#### **4. Develop a more deliberate strategy for taking to scale some of the workforce practice innovations developing through the activities related to SkillWorks.**

System change in workforce means much more than simply the public policy work and the level of funding for workforce development programs. In the long term, changing employer practices in a way that is more supportive of career development for low-income, low-skilled employees could be at least as important, particularly in the current fiscal environment. In addition, creating more effective and efficient practices amongst providers of workforce services — from community colleges to local adult education providers — could also be an important component of a system change agenda. While SkillWorks recognizes the importance of bringing to scale changes in practices, it does not yet have a specific strategy for how to disseminate learning and how to work towards helping to institutionalize some of the best practices emerging from its work, as well as the work of the partnerships, the capacity-building activities, and WSG.