



Press

SkillWorks
PARTNERS FOR A PRODUCTIVE WORKFORCE

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SkillWorks Announces Grant to ABCD for Community Health Worker Initiative
Grant focuses on improving quality of care by investing in frontline workers

Boston, April 13, 2006 – *SkillWorks: Partners for a Productive Workforce* today announced a \$50,000 planning grant to Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) to create career ladders and advancement opportunities for Boston’s community health workers, who perform a wide range of services that increase access to health care for underserved communities. After the planning grant period, ABCD and its partners will be eligible to request a multi-year SkillWorks award totaling approximately \$1 million to implement a Workforce Partnership for community health worker career advancement.

In “Community Health Workers: Essential to Improving Health in Massachusetts,” the Massachusetts Department of Public Health reported that community health workers are an essential, if overlooked, part of the public health system. They work in diverse settings and under myriad titles to improve access to health care for underserved populations. SkillWorks’ own research found that despite their importance, community health workers are often not well-rewarded, job tenure is unstable, and turnover is high. Systematic skills sets, credentials, and defined career paths are lacking. Employers are constrained from investing more deeply in training and rewards, owing among other factors to third party payer reimbursement arrangements and to dependence on grants for funding health outreach work.

“ABCD is excited to be leading a team to develop career advancement programs and policy recommendations that help these critical health care employees progress to family-sustaining incomes and contribute more to improving the health of Bostonians, especially from underserved neighborhoods,” said Robert Coard, ABCD’s president.

As lead partner, ABCD will coordinate the planning process and later the implementation of a SkillWorks Workforce Partnership. The employer partners are Whittier Street Health Center; East Boston Neighborhood Health Center; Partners in Health/Brigham and Women's Hospital; ABCD's own public health division, and DotWell, a community-based coalition of Codman Square Community Health Center and Dorchester House Multi-Service Health Center.

Other key partners will include: Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries; Boston Private Industry Council; Bunker Hill Community College; University of Massachusetts; Boston College of Public and Community Service; Massachusetts Department of Public Health; Massachusetts Department of Mental Health; Massachusetts Community Health Worker Network; and the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers.

"ABCD's proposal was impressive for the involvement the agency has secured from 24 diverse partners," notes SkillWorks director Loh-Sze Leung, "In particular, ABCD's employer partners are committed to developing career ladders for their community health workers. This initiative will benefit in many ways from their experience."

SkillWorks' Community Health Worker Advancement Initiative is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which has awarded SkillWorks a grant of nearly \$1.7 million to expand its career advancement programs to frontline health care workers.

"Expanding Skillworks' training and career development opportunities to employees of the community health agencies that deliver education, outreach, and community based care affirms their value to our health system," said Victor A. Capoccia, Senior Program Officer of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. "Everyone will benefit from this expansion, which will lead to better wages for employees, a more stable and skilled workforce for employers, and most important, consistent quality for consumers."

SkillWorks, the largest public/private investment in workforce development in Boston's history, seeks to change the way employers hire and promote entry-level workers from the city's neighborhoods. It is an ambitious effort on the part of philanthropy, government, community organizations, unions, and employers to create a workforce development system that helps low-skill, low-income residents move to family-sustaining jobs and helps employers find and retain skilled employees. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant brings the total investment funds committed to SkillWorks to over \$13 million.

Workforce Partnerships are central to the SkillWorks strategy for changing how employers hire and promote Boston's entry-level workers. These partnerships of employers, community organizations, and training providers receive large-scale, multi-year grants to offer an array of educational and other resources that help workers attain career-oriented first jobs and opportunities to advance. Currently, five partnerships receive SkillWorks funding to help workers in the health care, hospitality, service, and automotive industries move into family-sustaining jobs.

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ABCD is Boston's antipoverty agency, serving more than 100,000 low-income Boston-area residents each year. Established in 1962, the agency provides a broad range of services with offices and programs in every Boston's neighborhood as well as in several Greater Boston cities and towns. ABCD programs and affiliates include Health Services/Family Planning, Head Start, Child Care Choices of Boston (CCCB), Youth Explorations, SummerWorks, University High – an alternative high school operated in collaboration with the Boston Public Schools, Housing/Homelessness Services, Foster Grandparents, Elder Services/Intergenerational Programs, Fuel Assistance/Weatherization, LearningWorks-Career Development Services, the fully accredited Urban College of Boston, management of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Employees Charitable Campaign (COMECC) and the City of Boston Employees Campaign (COBEC); an Independent Living Program serving low-income persons with disabilities, and many others.