

# The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Jobs Initiative Research Conference – Recent Research and Results



## Conference Highlights

*On February 27-28, 2003, the Annie E. Casey Foundation hosted the “Jobs Initiative Research Conference – Recent Research and Results.” Prominent researchers, policy experts, practitioners and funders from numerous workforce development efforts participated in the conference. Over the course of two days, conference attendees discussed “what works in workforce development” from a variety of different perspectives: participants and programs achieving economic self-sufficiency; the role of race, ethnicity and cultural competence; employer needs and perspectives; the context of local workforce politics; and continuing research and policy development.*

*Several key themes regarding workforce development programs and policies emerged from the overall conference and a discussion session facilitated by Andy Van Kleunen of the Workforce Alliance:*

### “Long-Term Investments in Workers and Their Families Pay Off”

To achieve long-term success in the labor market, job seekers and workers need programs with resources that support retention and advancement goals, and help to minimize challenges to continued employment. This means funding hard skills training, incumbent worker training, and on-going supportive services such as case management – all of which can contribute to higher starting wages, longer retention and greater advancement.

### “Training Works, But It’s Not the Total Solution”

Conference attendees indicated that the latest research confirmed the effectiveness of both soft skills and hard skills training. But the research review also highlighted the importance of providing a continuum of services and supports that go well beyond either hard or soft skills training. In addition to training, workforce development programs need to provide effective pre-screening, assistance with placement, and on-going supportive services to ensure placed workers are retained and advanced. Based on the research, conference attendees also recommended improved integration of services with clear retention and advancement goals stated at the program’s start.

### “One Size Does Not Fit All”

As much of the research demonstrated, conference attendees recognized that different workers require different programs and strategies to assist them in developing long-term attachment to the labor market. Those easier to hire – such as individuals with a previous work history – face very different challenges than those more difficult to hire – such as ex-offenders, individuals with a history of substance abuse, and those leaving the welfare rolls with no prior work experience. Although a sectoral jobs project with a demanding training curriculum may result in a high initial placement wage and good benefits for training graduates, such a program may only be appropriate for a limited group of job seekers. Workforce development programs need to offer an array of services and use a variety of employment strategies to effectively serve different client populations.

## “Make the Workforce Development System a (True) System”

To achieve scale, improving the workforce development system, and effectively using its resources, has to be a top policy priority. Conference attendees focused on the need to create a cohesive workforce development system with greater collaboration between workforce development agencies, workers, employers and educational institutions. This includes ensuring that One Stops effectively serve workers and employers, and investing in other intermediaries that have a dual customer focus.

## “Given Local Politics and Contexts, Workforce Development Coalitions Are Needed”

Workforce intermediaries exist in local environments burdened by broader social and political problems including urban disinvestment, racial disparities, and political and programmatic fragmentation. To overcome these challenges, workforce development intermediaries need to build local coalitions around a unified vision for workforce development.

*Throughout the Jobs Initiative conference, panel sessions focused on different perspectives of workforce development research. Below are key findings and themes from each session:*

### Achieving Economic Self-Sufficiency for Participants

**Moderator:** **Annie E. Casey Foundation**, Susan Gewirtz  
**Panelists:** **Abt Associates**, Laura Duenes  
**University of Pennsylvania**, Roberta Iversen  
**Erikson Institute**, Toby Herr  
**Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation**, Melissa Wavelet

### On-Going Case Management and Supportive Services for Workers

Workers face continuing and changing barriers after initial job placement that put them at risk of falling out of the labor market after achieving short-term retention milestones. Effective case management and supportive services, along with hard skills training, can mitigate such risks to continued employment and increase long-term employment success.

### Achieving Family-Supporting Incomes and Labor Market Attachment Takes Time

While many participants achieve initial employment success, research findings demonstrate that it may take several years before workers make substantive progress toward earning family-supporting incomes. During the transition to family-supporting incomes, workforce development programs must provide on-going supports and emphasize retention and advancement goals.

### Programs Must Be Flexible to Accommodate Different Needs, Different Populations

Unemployed job seekers and underemployed workers face a host of employment barriers, and confront the task of achieving long-term employment attachment and advancement from different starting points. Workforce development programs should ensure that education and training are both useful and accessible to different populations such as incumbent workers, welfare recipients, ex-offenders, and immigrants. Similarly, programs must be flexible for workers on different “pathways” since, for some, sustained employment is not achieved merely by completing training or getting an initial placement.

## Achieving Economic Self-Sufficiency with Programs

**Moderator:** **Abt Associates**, Rick McGahey  
**Panelists:** **Abt Associates**, Scott Hebert  
**Aspen Institute**, Ida Rademacher  
**Mathematica Policy Research**, Anu Rangarajan  
**Public/Private Ventures**, Anne Roder

### Soft Skills Needed for Initial Placement While Hard Skills and Education Are Better Predictors of Long-Term Retention

Soft skills training provides program participants with some of the requisite skills to achieve employment connections. Along with initial case management and supportive services, this training greatly assists the newly hired to get established in the workforce. However, hard skills training and higher education are better predictors of long-term retention and advancement in the labor market.

### Supportive Services and Training That Are Better Integrated Yield Better Results for Participants

Participants fare better when programs provide a continuum of services and training. Pre-screening, recruiting, placement, case management, supportive services, and training all contribute to initial employment opportunities for participants as well as retention and advancement.

### Greater Collaboration Between Intermediaries and Other Stakeholders Is Critical

When programs are built on collaborative partnerships between workforce intermediaries, community-based organizations, employers and job seekers, participants have greater employment success. When these stakeholders work together on common goals, participants are better served.

## The Role of Race, Ethnicity and Cultural Competence

**Moderator:** **T. L. Hill Group**, Talmira Hill  
**Panelists:** **Abt Associates**, S. Rhae Parkes  
**University of Massachusetts, Lowell**, Chris Tilly  
**Bendick Egan Economic Consultants**, Marc Bendick

### Employees and Employers Can Benefit from Cultural Competence Training

Employees new to the workforce can benefit from cultural competence training, in terms of helping them to better understand expectations in the workplace. Similarly, cultural competence training can assist employers in managing a diverse workforce and creating a culturally open work environment. Workforce development intermediaries must take the lead in this effort by ensuring that issues of race, ethnicity and culture are addressed for job seekers, new employees, and employers at all stages of connecting people with workplaces, including recruitment of both employees and employers, hiring, retention, advancement, and reforming workforce systems.

### Tight Labor Markets Provide Greater Opportunities for People of Color

Employer surveys and participant research demonstrate increased employment opportunities during periods of tight labor markets. While negative perceptions of some racial and ethnic minorities still persist, in most cases these are balanced by positive images and experience. However, African-American men continued to face negative stereotyping and fewer employment opportunities even in an expanding economy.

## Carrots and Sticks Are Required to Reduce Employment Discrimination

Discrimination in the workplace remains prevalent, as demonstrated by attitudes of surveyed employers and comparison testing of job seekers. Reducing employment discrimination will require engaging employers by providing assistance – such as cultural competence training – as well as continuing to use discrimination testing and audits.

## What Do We Know About Employers – The Other Side of the Dual Customer Model

**Moderator:** **Jobs for the Future**, Jerry Rubin  
**Panelists:** **Abt Associates**, Anne St. George  
**Jobs for the Future**, Judith C. Taylor  
**Georgetown University, Public Policy Institute**, Harry Holzer  
**U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Center for Workforce Preparation**, Beth Buehlman

## Effective Employer Engagement Is Essential to Long-Term Success of Low-Income Workers

Intermediaries can build relationships with employers to provide access to jobs that would otherwise not be open to low-income people. Employers value a wide range of services including recruitment and screening, training, and on the job supports to reduce turnover. When these services are in place, the odds are improved that low-income workers will be retained and advanced in their jobs.

## Workforce Issues Are a High Priority for Employers, But Workforce Development Intermediaries Must Be Responsive to Employer Needs

Employer surveys consistently illustrate that workforce issues are at the forefront of employer concerns. To build effective partnerships with employers, workforce development providers and intermediaries must meet employer needs by performing functions such as recruitment, screening, and training in a manner that businesses view as effective.

## Employers Hire from Minority and Non-Traditional Groups in Tight Labor Markets

When labor markets are tight, many employers are forced to hire from minority and non-traditional groups such as former welfare recipients, immigrants and ex-offenders. However, employers still demonstrate hiring preferences among those typically shut out of normal hiring practices, with former welfare recipients with prior work experience being among the first hired while ex-offenders and African-American men are among the last. With pre-screening, job readiness training, hard skills training and support services, workforce development intermediaries can reduce employer risks when hiring from these groups. It remains uncertain if employers will continue to hire more minority and non-traditional employees in slower economic times.

## Understanding the Jobs Initiative in the Context of Local Workforce Politics

**Moderator:** **Annie E. Casey Foundation**, Robert Giloth  
**Panelists:** **University of Maryland, College Park**, Clarence Stone  
**St. Louis University**, Scott Cummings  
**University of Colorado, Boulder**, Susan Clarke

## Fragmentation of Interest Groups, Funding and Political Jurisdictions Creates Obstacles

In most localities, workforce development institutions and resources are highly fragmented, creating a major obstacle to achieving a unified vision for workforce development objectives, strategies and programs. However, broad coalitions across a wide array of stakeholders must be created in order to address the larger issues of political and economic fragmentation.

## Building Durable Coalitions and Civic Capacity for Workforce Development Is Challenging

Workforce development coalitions are often built on new relationships, institutional linkages and innovative uses of funding. While such coalitions can be established, they are difficult to sustain over time given shifts in politics, institutions, funding and local priorities.

## Workforce Development Intermediaries Must Address How to Serve Those Hardest to Reach

Some populations have been economically marginalized for so long that they have low expectations of public programs, often resulting in low or no participation in such programs. To reach those with little or no work experience, workforce intermediaries must develop effective strategies to serve this population.

## What's Next: Approaches to Continuing Research and Policy Development

**Presenters:** **Abt Associates**, Scott Hebert  
**Center for Law and Social Policy**, Mark Greenberg

### Cross-Study Analysis to Identify Best Practices

The field would benefit from an analysis of several leading workforce development research efforts to resolve differences in performance measures, determine comparable performance standards, and identify most promising practices in terms of retention, advancement and case management.

### Further Research Opportunities from the Jobs Initiative

Since 1995 the Jobs Initiative has generated a wealth of data from an expansive participant MIS database, ethnographic research, follow up surveys with participants as well as other data collection methods. This provides unique opportunities to remain at the forefront of workforce development research by examining such issues as the effects of race and culture, comparative analyses of placed and non-placed participants, career pathways for lower wage participants, and patterns of asset and debt accumulation.

### Emphasize Learnings in Workforce Development Field in Last Two Decades

Advocacy efforts should focus on what we have learned in workforce development over the last two decades with an emphasis on how recent workforce programs are different and more effective than their predecessors from the 1980's.

### Highlight Strongest Experiences from Local Level

Policymakers are greatly influenced by programs that are working from their local jurisdictions. The best opportunities for influencing policy rely on highlighting the most effective workforce development programs in discussions with congressional representatives, and state and local officials.

### Present Key Findings in a Concise Policy Message

Workforce development advocates must define their top policy recommendations and encapsulate them in a concise policy statement that will resonate with like-minded policymakers as well as influence those with differing policy positions.

Conference inquiries and requests for additional information should be sent to [laura\\_duenes@abtassoc.com](mailto:laura_duenes@abtassoc.com).