



# Evaluation Identifies Promising Practices and Lessons Learned from a Collaborative in Health Care Workforce Development

Evaluation of a program to increase the skills of the health care workforce in the Bay Area of California

## SUMMARY

From 2006 to 2009, the [San Francisco Foundation](#) evaluated programs funded by the [Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative](#) (BAWFC) that prepare disadvantaged residents for jobs and career advancement in high-wage, high-demand industries—especially health care and biotechnology. Jessica Pitt, Ph.D., at the BAWFC directed the project.

The San Francisco Foundation also evaluated cross-site lessons from the BAWFC and [SkillWorks](#), a Boston-based initiative with similar goals. That evaluation focused on the efforts of the two initiatives to build capacity and use advocacy to strengthen and streamline the regional workforce development system.

## Key Findings

In *Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative: Evaluation Findings 2004–2009* (October 2010), the evaluators reported these findings, among others:

- Workforce partnerships enrolled 1,217 participants with limited incomes, low English proficiency and limited work histories in nursing, biotechnology and other health care training programs, and provided intensive support services.
- Most participants (80 percent) successfully completed the programs; 83 percent of those eligible were placed in jobs; and 68 percent of those eligible obtained certificates or licenses, such as for vocational nurse or biotech lab assistant.
- Although the BAWFC helped increase overall funding for workforce development, neither the collaborative nor its grantees played the role of intermediary essential to strengthening the regional workforce development system.

In *Cross-Site Lessons Learned from SkillWorks, the Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative and Other Healthcare Workforce Initiatives* (June 2009), the evaluator reported this lesson, among others:

- To create capacity that will lead to better outcomes for large numbers of individuals over time, collaboratives such as the BAWFC and SkillWorks need to maintain a sharp focus on systems change and avoid an overly narrow emphasis on providing services.

For example, SkillWorks funded the Workforce Solutions Group to develop a statewide advocacy agenda. Results included a state Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund, which drew \$50 million in new funding, and a Workforce Accountability Task Force with links to adult basic education and higher education.

## Funding

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) supported the two evaluations with a \$108,134 grant from December 2006 through September 2009. For organizations that also supported the evaluations, see [Other Funding](#).

## CONTEXT

Launched in the spring of 2004, the [Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative](#) (BAWFC) has been addressing a widening "skills gap" in the health care industry that has left too many jobseekers and workers in poverty while employers are unable to meet their needs for a skilled workforce. Both health care workers and employers confront a dearth of programs that offer the right mix of education, training and other support services necessary to close the skills gap.

### RWJF's Interest in the Area

RWJF was interested in funding this project because its findings could help Foundation staff design and implement future workforce programs and add timely information to its Jobs to Careers program. RWJF staff believed the lessons learned would also help inform the Human Capital team's research agenda focused on workforce development.

## THE PROJECT

From 2006 to 2009, the [San Francisco Foundation](#) evaluated programs funded by the [Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative](#) (BAWFC) that prepare disadvantaged residents for jobs and career advancement in high-wage, high-demand industries—especially health care and biotechnology.

The San Francisco Foundation also evaluated cross-site lessons from the BAWFC and [SkillWorks](#), a Boston-based initiative with similar goals. That evaluation focused on the efforts of the two initiatives to use capacity building and advocacy to transform the regional workforce development system.

To close the skills gap, the BAWFC aimed to:

- Focus job training programs on building the career skills of low-income and disadvantaged jobseekers and jobholders.
- Expand the range of support services for these jobseekers and jobholders, and streamline their delivery.
- Target workforce development programs to specific economic sectors.
- Create a culture of continuous learning and improvement among workforce development partners.
- Increase the scale and efficiency of the regional public/private workforce development system.

The BAWFC focused its grants on: (1) workforce development partnerships and (2) policy, innovation and workforce planning. The former aimed to create and strengthen links among community colleges, community-based organizations, workforce investment boards and employers. The latter focused on system-level strategies, such as tapping new sources of funds and identifying promising workforce development practices across organizations.

More than two dozen local, state and national organizations, as well as California's Employment Development Department, provided funding for the grants during the project period. See [Appendix 1](#) for a list of organizations.

## **Evaluating Two Grant Rounds**

The BAWFC awarded \$3.4 million in 11 first-round grants in 2004, and \$3.5 million in nine second-round grants in March 2007. For a list of grantees, see [Appendix 2](#).

To evaluate the impact of these grants, the San Francisco Foundation subcontracted with BTW Consultants (Berkeley, Calif.) and Abt Associates (Cambridge, Mass.). The evaluators conducted telephone interviews with each grantee, area employers and other key informants such as BAWFC funders. The evaluators also obtained information on jobseekers and jobholders, the services they received and their employment outcomes from the Employment Development Department's Job Training Automation system.

When the BAWFC launched its second grant cycle later than planned owing to delays in securing a second investment from the Employment Development Department, the San Francisco Foundation asked the evaluators to report on initial outcomes from the first round.

In *The Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative: Outcomes and Early Lessons from the First Funding Cohort* (July 2007), the evaluators found that the first-round grants had:

- Created or strengthened pipelines between jobseekers and employers.
- Helped jobseekers succeed in training programs, classes and internships.
- Created "on-ramps" to employment pipelines.
- Reduced structural barriers to employment pipelines.
- Created ladders for upward job mobility.

In February 2008, the BAWFC presented these initial findings to grantees, funding partners, city officials and other workforce development policy-makers.

The BAWFC relied on the same model to award a third round of funding in 2009 that aimed to expand the capacity of community colleges to offer career pathway programs for low-income and disadvantaged adults and youth. However, the evaluation focused on the first two rounds. For overall findings from those two rounds, see [Findings](#). For more information on the challenges that delayed the second round, see [Lessons Learned](#).

### **Evaluating Cross-Site Lessons**

In 2005, RWJF awarded \$1,687,565<sup>1</sup> to the [Boston Foundation](#) to expand SkillWorks—a consortium of philanthropy, government, community organizations, unions and employers that aims to create a workforce development system that enables low-skill, low-income individuals move into family-sustaining jobs, and employers to find and retain skilled employees.

SkillWorks aims to foster sustainable improvements in the workforce development system by:

- Investing in industry- and occupation-based workforce partnerships in health care, hospitality, automotive services and building services.
- Strengthening the capacity and effectiveness of organizations that provide workforce training and educational services for disadvantaged jobseekers and workers.
- Advocating for institutionalizing mechanisms that enable low-income individuals to enter and succeed in the workforce.

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<sup>1</sup> ID# 052739

More than a dozen Boston-based and national foundations, the City of Boston and the state provided \$15 million to fund SkillWorks' first phase (2003–2008), and \$10 million to fund its second phase (2009–2014).

To evaluate cross-site lessons from the BAWFC and SkillWorks, the San Francisco Foundation subcontracted with Scott Hebert, a member of the evaluation teams for SkillWorks and the BAWFC. To produce the cross-site analysis, he interviewed funders, grantees and employers at both sites, and examined progress reports from grantees.

## Other Funding

- Other funders for the two evaluations were:
- California Endowment: \$50,000
- California Healthcare Foundation: \$50,000
- National Fund for Workforce Solutions: \$60,000
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Northwest Health Foundation—Partners Investing in Nursing's Future: \$25,000
- Walter and Elise Haas Fund: \$10,000
- William and Flora Hewlett Foundation: \$50,000

## FINDINGS

### Overall Evaluation Findings About the Grant Rounds

In *Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative: Evaluation Findings 2004–2009* (October 2010), the evaluators reported these findings, among others:

- **Workforce partnerships enrolled 1,217 participants with limited incomes, low English proficiency and limited work histories in nursing, biotechnology and other health care training programs, and provided intensive support services.**

Training programs included basic skills (English and math fundamentals), occupational skills (to enable participants to become nurses, X-ray technicians and biotechnicians) and workplace readiness and life skills. Support services included case management and job search support. Staff at grantee organizations screened and assessed participants to identify their needs and provide appropriate training and services.

- **Most participants (80 percent) successfully completed the programs; 83 percent of eligible participants were placed in jobs; and 68 percent of those eligible obtained certificates or licenses, such as for licensed vocational nurse or biotech lab assistant.**

- **Successful workforce partnerships:**
  - Brought the right partners to the table and engaged them in problem solving and decision-making.
  - Understood the specific needs of employers in each economic sector as well as those of low-income, disadvantaged jobseekers and jobholders.
- **Most workforce partnerships used the infrastructure they built—including strong ties with employers and successful job-training programs—to leverage other resources.** For example, the Unity Council, which received both first- and second-round grants, won two American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grants totaling \$4.5 million to continue training medical and dental assistants.
- **Although the BAWFC helped increase funding for workforce development, neither the collaborative nor its grantees played the role of intermediary essential to strengthening the regional workforce development system.** For example, lacking a specific, robust learning agenda, the BAWFC did not unite the efforts of workforce partnerships across organizational, geographic and sectoral boundaries.

## Cross-Site Findings

In *Cross-Site Lessons Learned from SkillWorks, the Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative and Other Healthcare Workforce Initiatives* (June 2009), the evaluator reported these lessons, among others:

- **To create capacity that will lead to better outcomes for large numbers of individuals over time, maintain a sharp focus on systems change and avoid an overly narrow emphasis on providing services.** After concluding that many of its first-round grantees lacked the skills and commitment to focus on systems change, BAWFC awarded a second-round grant to the Workforce Alliance, which offered technical support to the California EDGE campaign, a workforce advocacy coalition. Similarly, SkillWorks contracted with the Workforce Solutions Group to develop a statewide advocacy agenda. Results included a state Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund that drew \$50 million in new funding, and a state Workforce Accountability Task Force with links to adult basic education and higher education.
- **To promote focus, accountability and efficiency, strengthen the capacity of workforce development institutions to collect data and hold them accountable for performance.** However, despite its desire to hold its grantees accountable, SkillWorks found that developing interim measures for workforce development efforts—even within a single industry such as health care—was challenging because of varied occupational pathways and starting points of program participants.

- **Use demonstration projects to develop a comprehensive model of effective workforce development practices.** The partnerships funded by the BAWFC and SkillWorks converged on key factors that help individuals move into health care jobs and incumbents build skills for career advancement. These factors—the basic elements of an employment pipeline—included:

- ***Effective outreach mechanisms:*** Community-based organizations helped recruit candidates for entry-level positions in health care, while unions recruited incumbent jobholders for career advancement programs.
- ***Appropriate assessment tools:*** These helped program staff identify the most appropriate candidates for training and services, and the specific supports they needed.
- ***Case management and career coaching:*** These services proved essential in helping individuals define their career goals and the steps they must take to pursue them. Case managers and coaches also helped participants balance work, life and education; helped them stay motivated and take corrective action when they ran into difficulties; and mobilized support services.
- ***Bridge programs:*** These helped individuals bolster their basic skills so they were more likely to be successful when they enrolled in more advanced training programs.
- ***Contextualized curricula:*** The curricula for both basic skills and advanced training need to reflect industry standards, and the best way to ensure that is to have employers help design the curricula.
- ***Internships:*** These enabled participants to develop a more realistic sense of what a health care occupation entails, develop career-related networks and demonstrate their abilities to prospective employers.

### ***The Nursing Career Ladder Initiative: Wide-Ranging Support for Jobseekers***

*Led by Jewish Vocational Services (JVS)—a first- and second-round BAWFC grantee—the Nursing Career Ladder Initiative (NCLI) provides comprehensive, caring support to participants working to obtain nursing jobs. The NCLI partnership includes health care employers and City College of San Francisco.*

*The initiative is composed of several components. First, the Registered Nurse Education Program provides general education and specialized nursing coursework to low-income and other participants who face training and employment barriers, such as limited English proficiency and low math and reading skills. Participants attend classes for two years while receiving case management and other services, such as training in vocational English and computer proficiency, tutoring and referrals.*

*Second, partners such as San Francisco General Hospital and Laguna Honda Hospital supply clinical training sites, mentor participants and help prepare them for employment as nurses. And third, JVS helps participants who receive an associate's degree in nursing prepare for the state licensing exam, which may take six months or more.*

*JVS also offers job placement services, including workshops on job search strategies and résumé writing, and mock interviews and career advising. Finally, after participants obtain a job, JVS works closely with them and their employers to help them succeed in their positions.*

- ***On-site training and flexible course schedules, including distance learning and paid release time:*** These proved critical in lowering barriers that confronted individuals trying to upgrade their skills while holding down jobs.

## LESSONS LEARNED

In a report to RWJF, the San Francisco Foundation cited the following lessons from its evaluation:

1. **Develop a clear theory of change—including objectives and key indicators of success—at the start of a project, to help project staff pursue those goals, and to guide the evaluation.** Although the BAWFC initially identified core funding strategies, for example, the collaborative was not explicit regarding outcomes, how to achieve them and who would play various roles. That slowed progress in strengthening the region's overall workforce development system. (BAWFC Director/Pitt)
2. **Have an evaluation design in place before project activities start.** California's Employment Development Department catalyzed the BAWFC with a \$2 million investment. BAWFC had to deploy the funds within several months, putting the first-round grant process on a tight timeline—one that occurred before the collaborative had developed an evaluation plan.

Planning the evaluation then took six months, and data collection did not begin for almost a year. Finalizing a data-sharing agreement with the Employment Development Department took another year. "Although these factors were beyond our control, we would strongly recommend having an evaluation plan in place before project activities get under way," said the BAWFC Director Jessica Pitt.

3. **Partnerships with the public sector are valuable but can be challenging.** Staff encountered bureaucratic delays as they tried to develop the data-sharing agreement with the state. That required extra time from both evaluators and the BAWFC staff, and drained resources from the evaluation budget. The delay in the second grant cycle stemming from delays in state funding set the evaluation back by close to a year, adding to the cost.

Organizers founded the BAWFC as a public/private partnership, and its staff remains committed to collaborating with the public sector. However, a project that entails working with a public partner needs to build in flexibility. (BAWFC Director/Pitt)

4. **Anticipate delays and cost overruns, as they are common.** Although project staff raised the funds they needed to complete the evaluation from BAWFC members, "we should have anticipated escalating costs and developed a budget with a significant cushion to absorb them," Pitt observed.

## AFTERWARD

The BAWFC distributed the report on cross-site findings through the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, a national network of workforce collaboratives, and plans to post it on the fund's website.

The BAWFC also plans to evaluate the impact of its third round of grants designed to expand the capacity of community colleges to train low-income participants for nursing and other health care jobs.

The BAWFC is holding a convening on February 3, 2011, to present the final evaluation report. Funders, grantees and other interested workforce development providers are invited to attend.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Members of the Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative, First Two Grant Rounds

*(Current as the date of this report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF.)*

- Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, Md.
- California Community Colleges System, Sacramento, Calif.
- California Employment Development Department, Sacramento, Calif.
- California Endowment, Los Angeles, Calif.
- California HealthCare Foundation, Oakland, Calif.
- California Wellness Foundation, Woodland Hills, Calif.
- Catholic Healthcare West, San Francisco, Calif.
- David B. Gold Foundation, San Francisco, Calif.
- East Bay Community Foundation, Oakland, Calif.
- Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, San Francisco, Calif.
- Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, San Francisco, Calif.
- Grove Foundation, Los Altos, Calif.
- Hearst Foundations, New York, N.Y., and San Francisco, Calif.
- Kaiser Permanente Northern California, Oakland, Calif.
- Koret Foundation, San Francisco, Calif.
- Levi Strauss Foundation, San Francisco, Calif.
- National Fund for Workforce Solutions, Boston, Mass.
- Partners Investing in Nursing's Future, a collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (Princeton, N.J.) and the Northwest Health Foundation (Portland, Ore.)
- Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, San Francisco, Calif.
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Princeton, N.J.
- The San Francisco Foundation, San Francisco, Calif.
- Silicon Valley Community Foundation, Mountain View, Calif.

- Thomson Family Foundation, San Francisco, Calif.
- Walter and Elise Haas Fund, San Francisco, Calif.
- Walter S. Johnson Foundation, San Francisco, Calif.
- William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Menlo Park, Calif.
- William Randolph Hearst Foundation, New York, NY
- Women's Foundation of California, San Francisco, Calif.
- Y & H Soda Foundation, Moraga, Calif.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **BAWCF Grantees**

*(Current as the date of this report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF.)*

#### **First Round, 2004**

- California Workforce Association
- Community Clinic Consortium of Contra Costa County
- Jewish Vocational Services
- Nova Workforce Investment Board
- Rubicon Programs, Inc.
- San Francisco Private Industry Council, Shirley Ware Education Center and Kaiser Permanente
- San Francisco Works and San Francisco Private Industry Council
- San Mateo Human Services Agency
- Santa Cruz County Workforce Investment Board
- Shirley Ware Education Center
- Unity Council

#### **Second Round, 2007**

- Alameda County Health Care Foundation
- California EDGE Campaign
- City College of San Francisco

- Consumer Directed Services Network
- Insight Center
- Jewish Vocational Services
- Peralta Community College District
- San Mateo County Human Services
- Unity Council

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