

# THE WORKING POOR FAMILIES PROJECT

STATE POLICY ACCOMPLISHMENTS, ISSUE 3 OF 3 ■ NOVEMBER 2011

## 2011 STATE POLICY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

### WORKFORCE EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

In a continually competitive employment environment, lower-skilled workers are the least likely to obtain full-time jobs at decent wages. To address this problem, strong, accessible state workforce education and skills training systems must exist to help low-skill workers increase their skills and obtain employment.

A well-tuned state workforce system anticipates and responds to employer and worker needs. It identifies sectors of growth and job vacancies, aligning its limited resources with other state systems, such as postsecondary education and economic development, and targeting its resources on those with low-incomes and low-skills.

The Working Poor Families Project (WFPF), provides ongoing training, data analysis and policy expertise to its state partners that play an important role in assuring that state workforce education and skills development opportunities are accessible and germane to both low-skill workers and employers. Our partners serve on policymaking boards, helping to educate decision makers about effective workforce policies and advocating for a focus on low-skill workers.

This third-in-a-series update will highlight the state policy accomplishments that WFPF state partners have achieved in the areas of workforce education and skill development, focusing specifically on work that has led to increased funding and stronger state policies.

#### How WFPF Assists State Partners:



Since its inception, the WFPF has brought together non-profit organizations concerned about state policies affecting low-income working families. Currently, organizations in 21 states and the District of Columbia are WFPF partners.

WFPF supports state partners to develop policy expertise in specific areas that can increase the economic opportunities for low-income adults.

#### We do this by:

- Designing and sponsoring state policy academies led by national experts;
- Researching and developing issue-specific policy briefs with specific recommendations for action;
- Hosting annual learning exchanges with workshops and networking opportunities;
- Convening periodic conference calls on emerging and timely issues;
- Providing annually-updated data, policy and program information that helps shed light on the size and characteristics of low-income working families in each state.

## INCREASED INVESTMENTS



The following states have adopted policies that increase or target state investments to help enhance the education and skills of low-income adults.

**MASSACHUSETTS:** The Crittenton Women's Union supported efforts to renew \$19.9 million over two years for the Workforce Training Fund, making Unemployment Insurance funds available for businesses to create customized training opportunities. In addition, their work helped establish the Fund as a trust to prevent future raiding by the legislature to balance the budget.

**MISSISSIPPI:** The Mississippi Economic Policy Center (MEPC) was appointed to the executive board of the Delta Workforce Collaborative, a sector-based funders' collaborative, to help connect low-income residents with training aligned to quality jobs in health care and manufacturing. MEPC played a key role in facilitating the securing of \$1.2 million in public and philanthropic sources to support the Collaborative.

**OHIO:** Community Research Partners, which convenes and leads the Ohio Workforce Coalition, educated state leaders about the importance of investing in workers. In a very challenging fiscal year, programs directly connected to the needs of employers got a boost in the state's 2012 budget. Notably, Ohio's Co-Op/Internship program was resurrected with an appropriation of \$40 million over two years, after being zeroed out in the previous budget. The state also created a new incumbent worker program, the Ohio Workforce Job Training program and funded it at \$50 million over the next two years.

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**WASHINGTON:** The WFPF state partner Statewide Poverty Action Network helped establish a policy to provide additional training resources for workers on unemployment benefits, which will draw down \$98 million in federal Unemployment Insurance incentive funds.

## STRONGER POLICIES

The following states strengthened their state policies to target education and skills training for low-skill adults and promoted better credential-attainment and employment outcomes for these adults.

**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA:** DC Appleaseed helped enact legislation to create a task force that will make recommendations to the mayor on the funding and structure of a workforce intermediary. Additional legislation – which unanimously passed its first reading in early November – directs the workforce intermediary to be up and running by April 2012 and provides \$2 million in start-up funding, as well as reforms the District’s First Source hiring program. The final vote is expected in December 2011.

Both of these policies will boost the connection between low-skill job seekers and good jobs. And DC Appleaseed supported the restructuring of the Workforce Investment Council, the City’s workforce investment board, to assure it can play a policy and oversight role on workforce issues in Washington, D.C.



**ILLINOIS:** Chicago Jobs Council championed legislation to create a statewide subsidized jobs program in Illinois. The bill, which is subject to appropriations, will provide a temporary, partial wage subsidy to private sector employers, while creating incentives for new jobs for long-term unemployed job seekers. This bill prioritizes hiring of individuals who have been unemployed for over six months and who have no other source of income. It encourages coordination of workforce education and training opportunities so people can meet their basic needs while upgrading their skills and education. To ensure successful placement of workers through the program, the bill also provides supportive service resources, including child care and job search assistance.

**INDIANA:** The Indiana Institute for Working Families, in partnership with the Indiana Skills2Compete Coalition, conducted education and outreach that resulted in the state passing a resolution regarding middle-skills jobs. Specifically, the resolution called for the assessment of industry-recognized standards for middle-skills industry clusters that are essential to the state’s economy to ensure that the education and training programs in Indiana meet these standards.

In addition, the resolution urged the governing bodies of the Workforce Investment State Plan, the Adult Basic Education State Plan, and the Career and Technical Education State Plan to amend their plans to create such an assessment and to identify and close gaps in the education and training programs to assure that workers can earn these industry recognized credentials. The WIA and ABE state plans have been successfully amended to reflect these standards and assessments.

The resolution also urged the Education Roundtable to consider the importance of industry recognized standards and assessments for middle-skills industry clusters and the alignment of education and training programs with these standards and assessments. As a result, the Institute was appointed a seat on the workforce sub-committee. In addition, the resolution urged the State Workforce Innovation Council to amend its bylaws to expand the purposes of its Education Review Committee to include the development, implementation, and review of career pathways and the assessment of skill standards. This is expected to happen at their December 2011 meeting.

**MARYLAND:** For years, the Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) has been at the forefront of advocating for better outcome measurements and increased connection to employment from the state adult education system. By serving on the state adult education task force, JOTF promoted a policy that adult education providers focus on employment. This was achieved by revising the state adult education request for a proposal system to require that applicants for funding include a memorandum of understanding with one-stop centers, and that applicants set goals for workforce outcomes. The result is an adult education and skill training culture that is more focused on better employment outcomes for participants and increased systems alignment.

**OHIO:** In 2010, Community Research Partners released a policy paper, *Help Wanted: A Lead State Workforce Official*, which provided a blueprint for strengthening the workforce development system in Ohio. The paper made the case for appointing a state workforce official reporting directly to the governor to guide workforce development activities across state agencies. Recently, the governor of Ohio appointed an assistant policy director of workforce development who reports to the governor and is responsible for overseeing workforce development and funding across all state agencies. The goal is to have a more streamlined and effective workforce training and development system that will meet the needs of job seekers and employers.



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Launched in 2002 and currently supported by The Annie E. Casey, Ford, Joyce, and Mott foundations, the Working Poor Families Project is a national initiative that works to improve these economic conditions.

The project partners with state nonprofit organizations and supports their policy efforts to better prepare America's working families for a more secure economic future.

**For more information:**  
[www.workingpoorfamilies.org](http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org)