

**Baltimore Workforce Funders:  
Focusing Resources to Meet Employer Needs**

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The National Fund for Workforce Solutions has been shaped by the successes of five pilot projects underway around the country. Each has brought together a diverse group of supporters and participants who have crafted a workforce partnership that is meeting the local needs of workers, employers and the community.

Among those projects is a group of workforce funders that has helped underwrite key projects in the Baltimore region. These funding partners have for the first time brought together state and local workforce investment boards, prominent area employers, leading foundations, educational institutions and other nonprofit groups to improve workforce development in Baltimore.

Together, they are creating pipelines for qualified workers to fill critical shortages in Baltimore-area healthcare facilities, the area's booming construction industry, the biotechnology field and the hospitality sector.

Several of these partners developed the Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare. Career coaches funded through the alliance work in area hospitals, and the alliance supports a healthcare training program focused on basic academic and workplace skills. Hundreds of workers have received training or career coaching assistance. Nine hospitals, two community colleges, six foundations, and three public service agencies are part of the 70-member coalition, and more than \$1 million has been committed to the alliance.

In the construction sector, several funding partners launched a pre-apprentice training program called JumpStart. The initiative is coordinated by the Job Opportunities Task Force, a local workforce organization, and the instruction is led by the leading association of Baltimore contracting firms. Participants receive basic academic instruction as well as an introduction to construction skills. After two training sessions, 70 percent of participants were placed in jobs, most in the construction sector. Overall, participants have seen their average hourly wage increase by 30 percent.

The funding partners have also supported BioStart, a three-month initiative teaching math, reading and laboratory skills, which prepares trainees for a laboratory associates training program. The training includes case management and professional development assistance, and targets unemployed or underemployed East Baltimore residents.

## **Building Skills and Meeting Employers' Needs**

Among those who have benefited from the workforce partnership in Baltimore is 26-year-old Joy Levi. In a series of jobs she never earned more than the \$5.15 per hour minimum wage or received benefits, and she struggled to support herself and her daughter.

In 2004, Ms. Levi enrolled in a lab associate's training program at the BioTechnical Institute of Maryland. The three-month program, which has received support from the funding collaborative, transformed her life. Ms. Levi now works as a lab associate in a Johns Hopkins cancer research lab, preserving cells and serum. She earns over twice the minimum wage and receives full benefits, including health insurance.

"Having that stability is a load off my mind. I really wanted a career, not just a job," says Levi, who hopes to attend college to study molecular biology. "This job has really helped my self-confidence. I enjoy what I do, and there's always room for growth."

Employers have been pleased to work with the collaborative to develop workforce programs that meet pressing needs and provide the right kinds of skills training.

"Construction companies have not always been great about developing the workforce," says Mike Henderson, president of Associated Builders and Contractors' Baltimore chapter, which developed the instruction for the pre-apprentice training program. "Here, we're providing workers with skill training and safety training. We're doing all we can to help them succeed and meet the industry's hiring needs."

One large Baltimore firm, Miles Electric, hired two graduates from the first training class and will be looking for more. "These two men have been very enthusiastic about these jobs and having the chance to start a career," says Mike Burt, service manager for the firm. "The program prepared them well for the job and we're pleased with their performance."