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Career Ladders in Boston: A Summary of Recent Progress

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Boston Workforce Development Coalition
Career Ladders Initiative
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When the Boston Workforce Development Coalition launched its Career Ladders Initiative in 1998, there were no formal Boston-based career ladders projects in existence in the area, no explicit funding for career ladders programs, and career ladders was a relatively new concept, missing from discussion, even in the workforce development community. Much has changed.

For a variety of reasons, including efforts by the Career Ladders Initiative itself, the concept of career ladders, and the need to develop and promote them, have become well known in Boston, certainly within the workforce development community and also among community-based organizations, in the media, and to some extent for the public. They are a common subject of discussion and part of public discourse among funders, policymakers, employers and CBO's. Career ladder projects have started and grown, and more are in the works. Many workforce development organizations are contemplating how to integrate a career ladder focus into their current training and placement activities, if they have not already done so.

It is now time to assess progress in Greater Boston in this area:

?? How are career ladder projects different from traditional job training programs?

?? What resources have been, and should continue to be, developed to support innovation, and program design and implementation? (e.g., funding, policy tools, Boston Workforce Development Coalition and other resources)

?? How are stakeholder relationships changing?

?? What do we know about outcomes?

?? What more is needed?

Introduction

Until recently, most workforce development organizations in the Greater Boston area (as elsewhere) typically focused on pre-employment services; some post-employment supports; job and basic skills training; and welfare to work programs. Little attention was typically paid to long-term career counseling, planning, or to attaining positions beyond the entry level, for individuals entering or re-entering the workforce. In addition, little or no attention was paid to the "demand" side, either to individual employers, industries or sectors, or its development of career ladders, pathways, tracks, or ongoing opportunities for advancement. Particularly as the impact of welfare reform takes shape, training organizations, funders, and policymakers are seeing the shortcomings of viewing placement into entry-level work as a final outcome. Workforce development organizations, just starting to define themselves as a profession or field in the mid-nineties, focused primarily on getting clients directly into jobs; this has been increasingly reflected in, and to reflect, workforce development policy at the city, state and national levels. (For example, federal TANF "Work First" policies emphasize placing welfare recipients into jobs regardless of pay, conditions, or opportunities for advancement.) At the same time, the economic expansion and growing labor shortages of the late nineties led some employers, researchers and policymakers to begin to look at the possibilities for career pathways or career ladders for entry- and mid-level workers as one strategy to improve recruitment and retention of increasingly scarce qualified employees in a wide variety of sectors and industries. At the same time, a career ladders strategy could help meet the needs of the "working poor" for pathways to advancement and higher pay.

Background

Career ladders programs have long existed, formally and informally, in the manufacturing and construction sectors. Especially in the large, unionized firms, clear pathways with defined progressions in skill, pay and responsibility have taken the form of apprenticeships, and other in-house training programs that can move workers through successions of training and promotions to higher rungs on the ladder. This has most often been true in male-dominated, unionized, larger scale, and/or “old economy” industries and sectors. Occupations and positions requiring certification, licensing, or other credentials requiring formal training have also had their own clear, well-known and well-defined career ladders, including health care and teaching. Employers in a wide variety of sectors have long maintained a “pipeline” for potential management employees, but for entry- and mid-level workers these pathways or “pipelines” were scarce at best. Career ladders for entry-level workers, or to move workers from entry- to mid-level positions either within companies or within sectors, have been largely, and increasingly, lacking. Forces responsible have included:

- ?? the gradual de-industrialization of the region;
- ?? “feminization” of the workforce and exponential growth of the service sector;
- ?? the rise of the “new economy” based on high tech skills, rapid growth and employee turnover, and also the rise of contract labor,
- ?? the contingent workforce, a largely non-unionized workforce, and the erosion of the old “social contract” where employers remain loyal to and invest in their workforce over long periods of time, and
- ?? the decline in unionized industries and union membership, since lower-tier career ladders have typically been strongest and most consistent in unionized settings

For all of these reasons, industries and whole sectors have arisen and grown lacking career ladders.

The U.S. Dept. of Labor, for example, has long provided funding for incumbent worker training, and is only now beginning to look seriously at funding career ladders. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, through its Workforce Training Fund, etc., has also funded short-term training programs, directed at incumbent workers among others, but until the past year had not funded career ladders programs per se. In general, career ladders projects require longer to develop, and longer-term funding, to be effectively; results typically cannot be seen for several years, either in progress by individual workers or in improved retention and productivity by employers. To date, such long-term funding has not yet been available, though private and public funders are beginning to appreciate the time it takes to develop, implement, see results, and evaluate such programs. In 2000, in fact, introduction of WIA on the Federal level and its incorporation into the way funding for workforce development is provided at the state and local level, has actually militated the other way, with training being vouchered, consistent funding on a program or organizational basis thereby eliminated, and a premium placed on short-term training and immediate job placement without regard for future advancement or earnings.

Traditional funding sources have also provided support for various training programs and incumbent worker training, but, until the mid-nineties, nearly all of this funding was for pre-employment training, sometimes with a few months of post-employment support and follow-up, not long-term career development or attention to positions beyond the entry level. It required creativity on the part of funders and potential funders to decide to provide funding for longer-term career ladder projects which would not only supply ad hoc training, but actually provide the counseling, support, long-term planning and employer buy-in that could effectively move lower-level employees up the ladder over time, to levels of great pay, skill and responsibility.

Recognized Need for Career Ladders

The need for attention to career ladders was intensified with the 1995 adoption in Massachusetts of welfare “reform,” resulting in former recipients’ cycling through various dead-end, low-paying jobs, and

by the continuing plight of the urban working poor, who often experience a “revolving” door of low-paid, entry-level positions. Coalition members’ efforts to train and place clients in employment have had limited success in assisting those clients in achieving upward mobility, hence the need to develop training and programming to support advancement on the job once clients enter the workforce. While employers commonly employ career ladders strategies for upper level, professional and managerial employees, career ladders are typically short, discontinuous, or nonexistent for entry- or even mid-level employees. Career Ladders for relatively low-income workers were conceived as a win-win strategy:

- ?? For employers to improve recruitment and retention, and the qualifications and skills of the workforce; and
- ?? For employees, to provide access to positions of higher skill, responsibility and pay

In 1997, broad publicity around the newly-published MassFESS (Family Economic Self-Sufficiency) Standard, developed by the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union as part of a national Wider Opportunities for Women project, focused attention on the real wage and salary requirements of working families, and indirectly on the need for jobs that can sustain families, not just the entry-level jobs typically located by graduates of local training programs. At the same time, with the recent implementation of Massachusetts strict welfare “reform bill,” welfare recipients were finding themselves on a revolving door of dead-end and entry-level jobs at low wages, as well. In late 1999, MassINC’s report on “New Skills for a New Economy” grabbed headlines with its conclusion that a large percentage (1/3) of Massachusetts workers do not have the skills needed by employers or for success in the current Massachusetts economy; the mismatch between education/skills/training on the one hand, and the requirements of “good” jobs, on the other, drew the attention of policymakers, funders, and the workforce development community to the need for programs that actually prepare workers over time for good jobs and support them in the development of long-term careers. All these studies, forces and realities seemed to be pointing in the same direction: the need for not only basic skills training and job placement, but the need for employers and workforce development organizations to work together to develop pathways to move the “working poor,” an untapped resource for employers and a very needy community, into family-sustaining jobs. And the growing labor shortage in 1997-98 also created a good environment in which to initiate some pilot projects and develop public and private support for some new career ladders initiatives.

Over the years, more traditional training programs have provided basic skills training, and job training, to employees and potential employees in a variety of sectors and occupations. Greater Boston training providers have been obliged to provide short-term training and focus on immediate job placement for the majority of clients, due to the exigencies of typical funding sources, especially public funding sources, and increasingly so with the recent policies of “work first” and WIA. Job counselors and CBO staff have often wished they could do more to provide long-term support and training to clients post-placement, but by and large that has not been possible. At the same time, CBO’s have been obliged to focus on the “supply side”—that is, local residents as potential employees, and their needs—while it was left to employers, and the academics, researchers and policymakers who serve them, to connect with the “demand side”—the other side of the labor market.

In some areas, partnerships of CBO’s, employers, and/or unions generated a few local, regional and national intermediaries that spawned innovative projects and programs, e.g.,

- ?? Milwaukee, where COWS—the Center On Wisconsin Strategy—developed early as a major intermediary;
- ?? Oakland where the National Educational and Development Law Center, founded the National Network of Sector Practitioners, has provided information and support, and
- ?? Nationally the AFL-CIO’s Working for America Institute, provided technical assistance and support to new career ladders projects

In Boston, as elsewhere, what was required was an organization or organizations to function as an intermediary, to bring together the needs of both supply and demand sides, broker partnerships (employer/CBO, for the most part), and be able to look at the realities of the entire workforce and entire sectors, not just individual workers or employers. The Boston Workforce Development Coalition, as a consortium of CBO's and other local workforce development players, was founded in 1996 in part to meet that need. Since its inception, the Boston Workforce Development Coalition has recognized the need to develop career ladders strategies, projects, and programs in Boston because of the ongoing need to move workers up the ladder from entry-level jobs into family-sustaining employment. Coalition member organizations have recognized the lack of local programs to assist their low-income clients to access or achieve any upward mobility workforce. In 1998, CBO's in Boston, and the Coalition itself, began advocating for seed money to start a Career Ladders Initiative, and several pilot projects, to test the feasibility of a long-term strategy involving career ladders.

Early Efforts

In 1998, the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) received funding from the U.S. Dept. of Labor to fund 10 model training projects at local nursing homes, and developed a curriculum to support the training, which was designed to promote career ladders for CNA's (certified nursing assistants) in the long-term care sector. These projects were developed and implemented in conjunction with the Massachusetts Long-Term Care Federation, and are sometimes referred to as the "Benjamin 10," as to some extent they were modeled on the program and curriculum previously developed by Benjamin Healthcare, a model nursing home facility that made early strides in training and retaining entry-level workers in long term care and promoting CNA' to higher positions inside the facility. Dr. Andrew Harris, Benjamin Healthcare Vice President, became an early champion of career ladders for CNA's, and a public advocate and spokesperson for the benefits to the long-term care field of investing in incumbent workers, promoting career ladders within nursing homes, and re-investing savings from recruitment and retention into incumbent worker training. The Benjamin model, and its spokesperson and curriculum, have been very influential in drawing the attention of policymakers, employers and the general public to the potential and benefits of career ladders in long-term care, for entry-level workers, and in health care in general. This demonstrated that through collaboration, employers could address serious internal workplace issues including turnover, labor shortage and training, while training organizations were able to have an impact on the longer-term employment prospects of their clients, beyond initial placement in entry-level positions.

In the spring of 1998, the Boston Workforce Development Coalition convened a daylong planning meeting to discuss the feasibility of developing a citywide career ladders project in Boston. Initial discussions focused on using the Center On Wisconsin Strategy (COWS) as a model, and discussions were held with Commonwealth Corporation (then the Corporation for Business, Work and Learning), the Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts, and Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), and several other CBO's about the possibility of developing a citywide career ladders initiative for the first time. This conference and other career ladders work by the Coalition helped to bring the city's first major private funder to address the issue. BankBoston (now Fleet Boston) expressed interest in the new initiative, provided funding and facilities for a major career ladders conference, and assisted with the coordination of the conference, which was held in October, 1999 and was attended by over 250 participants. This conference "put career ladders on the map" in Boston, and brought many potential partners, community organizations, employers, and policymakers, on board in planning and conceptualizing the need to move entry-level incumbent workers upward towards family economic self-sufficiency.

First Funded Career Ladders Projects in Boston

Following the Boston Workforce Development Coalition/FleetBoston Career Ladders conference in the fall of 1999, BankBoston helped to launch the first real pilot projects in Boston to develop, implement and test several career ladder models in several sectors. Four new projects each received three years of funding (2000-2003): three in various sub-sectors of health care, and one in financial services. These projects, currently beginning their third year, have explored creative and innovative models; developed career pathways for entry-level workers; and learned valuable lessons about how to develop career ladders in particular industries and sectors: barriers, methods, tools, curricula, materials, ways to make things work for employers and employees. Each involves a partnership between employers, CBO's, and sometimes a union and/or community college (see attached table). These projects were partnerships of:

- ?? Crittenton Hastings House and Citizens Bank (financial services);
- ?? Bunker Hill Community College, WorkSource Staffing Partnership and Partners Health Care/Brigham and Women's Hospital (health care);
- ?? the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation, Fenway Community Development Corporation, Children's Hospital, Harvard Medical School, and Beth Israel/Deaconess Hospital (health care); and
- ?? the Worker Education Program (SEIU 285), the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, Benjamin Health Care (long-term care and home health care)

BankBoston also funded extensive evaluation studies of these new career ladders projects through Mt. Auburn Associates and Workforce Learning Strategies, in order to maximize and disseminate learning and to promote development and replication of innovative career ladders models. BankBoston also provided initial funding to the Boston Workforce Development Coalition for its Career Ladders Initiative.

A Career Ladders Committee structure was established, and a Committee consensus process developed for selection of industries to be targeted. An initial list of eight sectors was gradually reduced to three sectors: telecommunications, long-term care, and financial services as key strategic industries where there were likely to be significant employment opportunities, good jobs, and opportunities for development and expansion of career ladders for entry- and mid-level workers, Boston residents. The Center for Community Economic Development at U. Mass. Boston/Gaston Institute conducted labor market research for the Coalition's Career Ladders Initiative in 1998-99 on the three industries to be targeted, which was published as three separate brief reports on the telecommunications, health care, and financial services sectors. These reports informed the initial work of the Career Ladders Initiative, and its decisions about sectors to target. These reports have also been widely disseminated among the Coalition's membership and the public.

Two Broad New Career Ladders Initiatives

The year 2000 also saw passage of a new \$5 million state budget item funding the Extended Care Career Ladders Initiative (ECCLI), the first in the US to fund career ladders on such a broad scale, with public dollars. ECCLI, conceived by PHI (the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute) and funded through the Commonwealth Corporation, is an intervention to help recruit, retain, support and advance Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA's), who constitute the overwhelming majority of the nursing home workforce. ECCLI provided \$5 million to nursing home employers across the state to initiate and implement new career ladders programs for CNA's in their facilities, in collaboration with community-based organizations, Workforce Investment Boards, community colleges, and/or workforce development organizations, and training providers. During its first year, ECCLI has involved over 50 nursing homes, over 10% of those in the state. The ECCLI project has been a true sectoral intervention with the potential to affect the entire long-term care sector and workforce. Employers, policymakers, unions and community organizations have been watching closely to learn from the progress of this project, and find ways to emulate it elsewhere. In July, 2002, the Commonwealth Massachusetts has included \$4.1 million in additional/continuation funding for the ECCLI project in its FY'03 budget, despite drastic funding cuts

in virtually every other area of human services and virtually across the board and throughout the state. ECCLI stands as a model for the potential for publicly funded career ladders programs in other sectors, other states, and other levels of the health care workforce. For example, the Commonwealth Corporation has received funding from the U.S. Department of Labor under H1B for a new effort to recruit and train registered nurses to alleviate a several and worsening staffing shortage in that occupation. If ways are found to train and upgrade current long-term care and health care workers from lower level occupations, such a project could develop broad career pathways upwards to LPN and RN positions across the state.

Following the initiation of ECCLI and its initial promise, Massachusetts also decided to initiate other career ladders initiatives roughly along the ECCLI model, and funded through the Commonwealth Corporation, entitled the BEST (Building Essential Skills Through Training) Initiative. In winter of 2001, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts funded five career ladder projects through the “BEST” Initiative. They include three with a presence in Greater Boston:

- ?? the Boston Health Care and Research Industry Training Institute
- ?? the Biomanufacturing Training Consortium
- ?? the Metro Boston Financial Services Regional Industry Team

In early 2002, the BEST initiative funded its first round of projects, several of the partners of which were also Fleet grantees. With BEST, career ladders projects in at least two sectors have begun to move “to scale.” In financial services, a CBO partnership with one bank (Crittenton Hastings House with Citizens Bank) has grown to include multiple CBO partners and six banks—a significant fraction of Boston’s financial services institutions. The Boston Health Care and Research Industry Training Institute also builds on the work of the Bridges project and other Boston-based health care partnerships, to assemble a nine-institution employer consortium, a local union and three CBO’s (the two Bridges project CBO partners plus WorkSource Staffing Partnership, who also partnered in other health care projects as well.) These two BEST projects do not include community college involvement, but are pure CBO/employer partnerships. The third BEST project located in Greater Boston, the biotechnology consortium, is a partnership among four Workforce Investment Boards, four biotech employers, the biotech trade association, and the two Boston-based community colleges.

Many of the grant requirements of the BEST Initiative show institutional learning and change in the field. The provision of funding has helped move the field and industry. The Commonwealth, through the Commonwealth Corporation that was the pass-through for BEST funding, consolidated several state funding streams into what became the new BEST Initiative. BEST required multi-partner collaborations, mandated inclusion of CBO or other training provider partners, required sign-off and involvement from the local Workforce Investment Board, and a commitment to full-scale evaluation and participation in mutual learning. These requirements reflect the growing experience in Massachusetts with career ladders programming, and in particular reflect learning from the first year of the new ECCLI project, which became a model for BEST in a single sector. BEST represents a serious new effort by the state to build the capacity of the state’s workforce development system (formal and informal) to launch and support career ladders programming, and also to begin to “go to scale” in additional sectors and areas of the state.

The above-mentioned funded projects (ECCLI, Fleet-funded and BEST Initiative projects), taken together, demonstrate both the breadth and diversity of partnerships and models brought to bear in different career ladders partnerships to date. One can also see the development and evolution of more complex, sophisticated projects built on models and relationships developed in previous smaller projects. In both health care and financial services, one can see the beginning of new career ladders programs that impact entire sectors, or large parts of sectors, in the Boston area. To date, several promising models have been developed under private funding and are now receiving additional funding to continue and expand. These include two of the BEST partnerships, which include partners who were originally funded by Fleet in career ladders projects of smaller scope and scale; and at least one of the large ECCLI-funded

consortia, which also received prior funding from the Massachusetts Workforce Training Fund and private funders. This is a field that is maturing, as employers and their CBO partners learn to pilot, develop models, and broaden partnerships to bring projects “to scale” and begin to impact broad sectors. Funders have begun to follow suit with more sophisticated funding opportunities, mechanisms, and requirements. It is hoped that this trend will continue.

Impacting a Sector with Career Ladders

The development of additional public and private funding sources has allowed for career ladder demonstration projects, piloted under one funding source, to continue and expand to additional employers within a sector, under new public and/or private funding sources. Some have begun to “go to scale” for the first time. The projects are based on multi-organization, complex partnerships involving multiple CBO’s, in most cases a community college. Multiple employers in a sector have been involved in both the Fleet-funded projects and the ECCLI projects. They demonstrate clearly the strengths and capacity of collaborations between CBO’s and community colleges to provide a continuum of training, support and programming to employers and employer consortia, particularly health care. Significant lessons remain to be drawn from these collaborations and their potential for other employers, and other sectors.

Some career ladder projects have been initiated by CBO’s, and have then pulled in representatives of employers in a particular sector. Another model, including ECCLI, has originated in the sector itself (through the efforts of PHI and the Mass. Extended Care Federation), then developed partnerships with workforce development organizations, leveraged funding, and gone on to pilot significant demonstration projects in a large segment of the sector. Both organizational models have proved effective to date.

Several recent trends in career ladders programs have emerged:

- ?? Development of complex, large multi-employer career ladders partnerships
- ?? Involvement of multiple CBO’s in provide appropriate services to these projects
- ?? Collaboration and cooperation among large groups of employers and CBO’s previously in competitive relationships
- ?? Utilization of private funding to pilot and develop new career ladders models, then turning to public funding with larger consortia to expand and replicate these models and “bring them to scale”
- ?? Broad and diverse involvement of local CBO’s in career ladders programs, and ongoing collaborations of CBO’s through several projects; roles and skills have been defined and working relationships established.
- ?? Beginning to have an impact on major employment sectors as a whole
- ?? Additional employers feeling the need to develop career ladders in sectors where previous demonstration projects have been launched by their competitors
- ?? Extensive learning from earlier models being funneled into development of later, more complex

The Career Ladders Initiative has been able to provide technical assistance in many forms to new and ongoing career ladder projects, and in some cases to facilitate formation of new or expanded partnerships.

Other Career Ladder Programs

At the same time, other career ladders projects and efforts have begun to spring up, or to arise within well-established programs, including:

- ?? Boston’s child care community has developed creative and innovative career ladders programs to move entry-level child care workers into positions as lead teachers, directors and other administrators as a partial solution to a chronic and severe labor shortage, and lack of diversity at the higher levels.
- ?? The Children’s Trust Fund has developed career ladders programs for family outreach workers (home visitors) in child welfare, that show promise.
- ?? The Boston PIC has played a role in many ways to trying to develop new career ladders efforts, including involvement in the “Benjamin 10” long-term care efforts under DOL funding;

- ?? The Financial Services Academy has tried to develop career ladders programs through its training programs for tellers, but most efforts have focused on recruitment into the field rather than career ladders for incumbent workers
- ?? The Federal Department of Labor has begun looking more at career ladders programs in addition to the incumbent worker training programs that they currently fund; and
- ?? The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, through the FY'03 state budget, is debating funding for ongoing and new career ladders projects through the Commonwealth Corporation.

Other current features of the landscape include:

- ?? The Boston Foundation recently initiated a major funders' consortium to fund workforce development activities and build capacity of workforce development organizations in the Greater Boston area (and statewide)
- ?? The Rockefeller Foundation also chose Boston as a site for its capacity-building efforts to strengthen a small, diverse group (5) of CBO's involved in workforce development;
- ?? The Federal Department of Labor has begun looking more at career ladders programs in addition to the incumbent worker training programs that they currently fund, and recently focused a regional incumbent worker grantees' meeting on career ladders; and

All of these initiatives, and others, have the potential to lend support and momentum to current and new career ladders efforts in the Greater Boston area.

Growing Role of CBO and Multi-CBO Partnerships

What is new in the Boston area over the past few years has been the extensive involvement and partnering of local community-based organizations with employers, and their addition to more traditional, in-house employer-based career ladders programs. The traditional programs typically reached fewer "non-traditional" employees such as entry-level workers, immigrants, those with fewer English skills, workers of color, and/or those with lower literacy or numeracy skills--in other words, the "working poor," and the largest and fastest-growing parts of the workforce in Boston. These workers, and potential workers, are the daily clientele of Boston's CBO's, and the clientele with whom they have skill, trust, relationships, and experience in serving. Recent employer/CBO partnerships, sometimes embracing the skills and strengths of multiple CBO's, have begun to build the capacity of local employers and sectoral initiatives to make real progress in career ladders, and to reach a wider spectrum of the workforce.

"Going To Scale" with Career Ladders

In a few sectors, employers have been actively engaged either on an individual basis or a sector-wide basis. Health care as a prime Boston-area employer has become a sector in which most major facilities are involved in some career ladder programs, if only a pilot program; other hospitals and facilities will probably follow suit if they are to remain competitive, several multi-facility collaborations are underway, and new projects are currently in the works. In some cases, career ladders efforts have begun to move "to scale," particularly in the health care sector, where the majority of Boston's teaching hospitals are now involved in some career ladders efforts, and the others are ripe for involvement as well. Health care, as a relatively stable and growing industry remains an area with great potential for development and growth of career ladder opportunities, and for sector-wide partnerships and programming to evolve.

At present in Boston, several of the larger CBO's in workforce development are involved in major career ladders projects, including Crittenton Hastings House, ABCD, Jewish Vocational Services, and WorkSource Staffing Partnership, and two of the Community Development Corporations (JP and Fenway). Many smaller and community-specific CBO's would like to start career ladders projects, or are discussing them, including VietAid, HOPE, CitySkills, and Brookview House. In addition, employers in several particular sectors have initiated discussion about starting career ladder projects that could result in employer/CBO partnerships down the road, especially in human services sub-sectors,

including child care, but also in a few others sectors. A significant barrier remains the lack of funding, particularly long-term funding, to develop career ladder programs, continue them beyond the seed money, development and piloting stage, and evaluate and learn from this work in a significant way.

Several local CBO's have been extensively involved in many of the cutting-edge career ladder projects, and ongoing relationships between several of the partners in these collaborations have been particularly fruitful, including Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation, American Red Cross, WorkSource Staffing Partnership, Bunker Hill Community College, and the Worker Education Program of SEIU Local 285. They demonstrate the potential of meeting multiple needs of entry-level workers in career ladder programs through sophisticated collaborations and creative use of funding, and have been willing to model, mentor and share their expertise and learning from these projects with other CBO's, employers and potential career ladder programs.

Role of the Boston Workforce Development Coalition

The Boston Workforce Development Coalition played a role in helping build the capacity of local CBO's and others to develop and implement career ladders programs to date. The Boston Workforce Development also recently published five new career ladder reports researched and written by the Center for Community Economic Development (CCED) at U. Mass. Boston. Over 400 copies have been distributed to date, and they have already gone into a second printing. The Coalition is currently developing a new publication, a Career Ladders "How-to" Manual, which will distill the lessons learned from various local (and other) career ladder projects, into a user-friendly manual for those interested in starting new career ladder projects, incorporating best practices into current practices, and utilizing career ladder ideas and experience in other workforce development efforts as well.

The Career Ladders Initiative held a second series of five training sessions on career ladders topics, open to the public, in 2001-2, which has just finished. Each session brought together panels of practitioners from current Boston-area career ladders projects to share learning and experience in an informal, interactive format. Topics included:

- ?? Securing Employer Buy-in Into Career Ladders Programs
- ?? Supporting Workers in Career Ladders Programs
- ?? Mentoring Workers in Career Ladders Programs
- ?? Collaborating on Career Ladders Programs
- ?? Documenting Progress in Career Ladders Programs.

A total of 220 people have attended these forums. The Initiative is currently assessing the success of these programs, and planning future sessions or mini-conferences to follow up.

Both the career ladders training series, which have been well attended, and the career ladders reports, which have disseminated about 500 copies to date, have put career ladders "on the map" in public discussion, understanding by CBO's of what is required to develop career ladder programs, The Coalition's Career Ladders Committee, a standing committee of about 20 members, has greatly increased public discussion and understanding of career ladders, and the Initiative and its publications have significantly raised the level of education and expertise around career ladders in the Greater Boston area.

Emerging Sectors

In a few sectors, employers have been actively engaged either individually or sector-wide. In some cases, career ladders efforts have begun to move "to scale," particularly in the health care sector, where the majority of Boston's teaching hospitals are now involved in some career ladders efforts, and the others are ripe for involvement as well. Health care, as a prime Boston-area employer, has become a sector in which most major local facilities are involved in some career ladder programs, if only a pilot program. Other Boston hospitals and facilities will probably follow suit if they are to remain competitive, several multi-facility collaborations are underway, and new projects are currently in the works. Health

care, as a relatively stable and growing industry remains an area with great potential for development and growth of career ladder opportunities, and for sector-wide partnerships and programming to evolve. Despite funding difficulties and some instability due to mergers and closures, this is a sector that will not leave town or disappear. It has been more difficult to engage the telecommunications sector in career ladders efforts, formerly a focus of both BWDC and other local efforts, particularly once the economic downturn deepened following September 11. While the Coalition had assumed that effective implementation of career ladders strategies and sectoral interventions did not particularly depend on a labor shortage or economic upswing, it has in fact become increasingly difficult to engage employers once the economic downturn has impacted hiring, and interest in career ladders, always difficult, has somewhat fallen off.

The economic downturn has also affected state funding, first for the BEST Initiative which was cut by approximately 90% from the original proposed funding, and the ECCLI Initiative, which just sustained a 20% cut next fiscal year, though this is actually remarkable in the context of a new state budget which includes significant cuts nearly across the board. Interest by private funders in career ladders has, however, not significantly declined, and to some extent grown. However, as foundation revenues continue to decline because of the economic downturn, philanthropic support for career ladders efforts may also decline. It is important at this time to generate and nurture more significant employer support, both political and financial, for career ladders efforts during a prolonged economic downturn, in order to build on recent successes and sustain current programs long enough to enable real learning and evaluation to take place. Investment in career ladders by private and public funding sources are cost-effective, and cost-benefit analysis over time needs to be expanded and publicized. Local efforts universally demonstrate that investing in career ladders for incumbent workers are effective investments, both for employers, the workforce and the communities that include them.

However, such conclusions take some time to draw, and cost savings are not realized overnight, or even in a year, as funders typically desire. Career Ladders projects take a long time to develop and implement, and several years for significant outcomes to be observed, at both the individual and the firm level. Individuals must undergo extensive training, counseling, and promotion over years before real progress can be seen and measured. Turnover does not automatically change overnight, and career ladders cannot be built in a day. Companies and organizations may take many months to develop partnerships with training providers and others, and years to develop, implement, and see the results of effective programs in terms of cost savings on recruitment and retention. Working relationships of trust and effectiveness, especially between employers and training providers, may take months or even years to develop and solidify, yet the strength of these relationships is often crucial to the effectiveness and sustainability of career ladders programs in a workplace. The career ladders piloted in one or two companies alone may take years to be emulated or replicated across a sector. Future efforts must involve convincing funders, public and private, to provide funding periods that are long enough for effective programs to demonstrate their outcomes, and for career ladders to take hold. It is worth it.

Boston has been a leader in recent years in efforts to incubate and learn from effective career ladder models. With particularly striking initial successes in health care, the hope is that models can be adapted or replicated to additional sectors, and across the state and other geographic areas. Key has been the existence and development of an intermediary organization (the Boston Workforce Development Coalition) to centralize and disseminate learning from new projects, and to incubate, assist and support additional projects. An activist Workforce Development Board in Boston (the Boston Private Industry Council, or PIC), a responsive state Legislature and quasi-public workforce development agency (CommCorp) and a particularly strong and diverse network of workforce development organizations at the community level, have also been important factors. Other key factors have included:

?? A progressive local union structure and leadership that have promoted the development of a Training and Education Department at the state Federation level;

- ?? A mayor with a keen interest in workforce development, particular for low-income workers;
- ?? Sector-based trade associations (e.g., the Mass. Extended Care Federation and the Mass. Telecommunications Council) and policy advocates (Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute, Coalition to Reform Elder Care, Child Care Careers Institute) who have facilitated generating employer backing and public funding for career ladders locally and statewide; and
- ?? A progressive philanthropic community with the foresight to fund and incubate new career ladders projects and an infrastructure to support them (especially Fleet Boston Foundation, The Boston Foundation, and the Hyams Foundation)

Future Directions

Current Boston-area career ladders efforts have been strongest in the following sectors:

- ?? Health care
- ?? Long-term care
- ?? Financial services

They have impacted significant sectors of the low-income workforce:

- ?? Women
- ?? Immigrants
- ?? Those leaving welfare
- ?? Workers of color
- ?? Unionized workers
- ?? The care-giving workforce (elder care, health care, child care)
- ?? Manufacturing workforce
- ?? Unskilled and entry-level workers

There has also been interest in developing sectoral interventions in new sectors that have not yet been explored. Sectors mentioned have included:

- ?? Information Technology
- ?? Child Care
- ?? Human Services
- ?? Workforce Development Organization staff, and
- ?? a career ladders efforts in information technology positions not in the IT sector but in other growth sectors such as financial services, health care, and/or hospitality.

The Career Ladders Initiative is currently conducting a comprehensive survey of Coalition members and current career ladder project partners, to learn what services, technical assistance, and programs would be most useful in the future. On the basis of the results of that survey, new programs, benefits and services will be developed.

Conclusion

Over the past four years, the Career Ladders Initiative has brought career ladders to public attention, and succeeded in keeping it in the public eye. Workforce development organizations are now actively discussing developing career ladder programs fairly widely, and/or incorporating career ladders programs into their work in general. Many organizations that have not in the past focused primarily on workforce development, e.g., multi-service organizations, community action programs, community development corporations, and CBO's serving particular cultural and linguistic groups, are now engaged in or considering engaging in career ladder programs.