

Skills Training to Meet Regional Workforce Needs

ABOUT AIWP

The Association of Iowa Workforce Partners (AIWP) is an assembly of direct workforce service providers. AIWP strives to enrich Iowa's economic development through the delivery of innovative workforce services.

AIWP works to provide the link between people, communities and industry.

AIWP was established in 2000 and currently has 17 member organizations. Current members include Workforce Investment Act providers, Iowa Workforce Development, and agencies serving special populations.

IOWA'S WORKFORCE AND ECONOMY

The impacts of the national recession have hit Iowa, its communities, and families hard. While the state is experiencing recovery, there is much to be done to ensure economic stability and job growth. Iowa's statewide unemployment rate for October 2010 was 6.7 percentⁱ, but rates continue to reach upwards of 9 percent in especially hard hit counties.

Newly released 2009 U.S. Census data also reveal troubling statistics illustrating increases in poverty. Nearly 13 percent of working age adults, ages 18-64, are experiencing poverty, which equates to the highest number recorded since the 1960sⁱⁱ. A staggering 1 in 7 Americans are living in poverty.

Iowa's middle class workers are also struggling as high paying jobs are lost in industries such as manufacturing. When jobs are lost, individuals rely on their education and skills to find new employment. But, of Iowa's 1.8 million working age adults, approximately 1.2 million have not completed college (associate's degree or higher) and more than 165,000 have not completed high school or a GED programⁱⁱⁱ. These individuals need access to skills training to effectively match them with in-demand and growing jobs.

IOWA'S SKILLS TRAINING NEEDS GO UNMET

Despite a high number of unemployed individuals, Iowa's workforce centers still have jobs they can't fill. This occurs because job seekers' skills may not match those needed for growing or high-demand occupations. Many high-demand occupations in the state, such as

welding, semi-truck driving, and computer technology, require short-term, non-credit, industry-recognized training. Workforce resources are stretched thin to support access to such training despite a high rate of return on investment, for example:

	Training Cost *	Average Iowa Salary*
Nurse Aide	\$695	\$23,917
Welding	\$1,297	\$32,998
Logistics	\$875	\$61,538
Truck Driving	\$2,762	\$37,187

(* Estimates from Workforce Region 9)

Workers can be trained quickly to fill these positions, but tuition assistance is not usually available, and the training is unaffordable for many potential workers. For instance, Pell Grants and other traditional sources of student financial aid do not allow use of funding toward non-credit programs. Many programs that enable workers to find fulfilling, well-paying jobs, such as welding and work in logistics, are typically offered as non-credit programs. A funding source is needed for these programs to fill the gap for people who are unable to access other education or training assistance. **Resources for accelerated skills training would not only allow unemployed workers to return to work, but also those living in poverty to improve their skills and earning capacity.**





FUTURE STEPS

To ensure that workers have the training necessary to meet regional identified needs, AIWP recommends the following:

- Workforce needs are regionally determined, so it is critical to develop a mechanism and funding source to identify regional needs, develop the necessary training and curriculum, and connect individuals to training that will lead them to successful employment. Regional Workforce Investment Boards, composed of local elected officials and business representatives, are best positioned to provide leadership and convene sector partnerships. Sector partnerships organize stakeholders connected to an industry to develop plans for growing or maintaining that industry, with a focus on building workforce pipelines where skilled worker shortages exist. This concept achieved bipartisan passage through the federal Sectors Act in 2010.
- Allocate resources for accelerated skills training so that workers can access training and educational opportunities to increase their skill level and income. Resources should be targeted for use by individuals interested in high demand occupations and programs and that are not otherwise funded by federal and other tuition assistance programs, and would leverage current resources through workforce partners and community colleges.
- Federal funding for GED and Adult Basic Education programs in Iowa is critically low and state-level funding for GED and ABE programs does not exist. Many GED and ABE programs across Iowa are financially unable to provide instructors in a classroom

environment, negatively impacting program access and quality. The most successful GED and ABE programs integrate adult education, English as a Second Language (ESL), and workforce training. Students obtain literacy and workplace skills, college credit, and vocational certificates all at the same time. One of these innovative programs, developed in the state of Washington, known as Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST), offers students dual credit, greater skills gains, and clear pathways from entry-level jobs to higher-skilled and better-paying careers in high-demand fields. Students in I-BEST programs earned five times more college credits and were 15 times more likely to complete a workforce education program than other ESL students with the same goals^{iv}. GED and ABE programs in Iowa should be modeled after these successful integrated pilots.

ⁱ Iowa Workforce Development (2010). Retrieved December 6, 2010 from <http://www.iowaworkforce.org/>.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Census Bureau. (2009) *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance in the United States*. Retrieved December 6, 2010 from <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/incpovhlth/2009/index.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (2008). *Iowa Profile of Adult Learners*. Retrieved December 6, 2010 from www.cael.org/adultlearninginfocus.htm.

^{iv} Washington Community and Technical Colleges (Sept. 28, 2007). *Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST)* p. 1-2.