



Workforce Development

THE ASSET BUILDING APPROACH

The Asset Building and Community Development Program of the Ford Foundation makes grants in four fields that provide a focus for comparative and collective work to reduce poverty and injustice in diverse political, economic, social, and cultural contexts worldwide. The four fields are: Community Development; Development Finance and Economic Security; Environment and Development; and Workforce Development. The Assets Program also supports the field of Sexuality and Reproductive Health in collaboration with the Foundation's other two programs, Peace and Social Justice and Knowledge, Creativity and Freedom.

The fields within the Assets Program operate on the understanding that the poor are most likely to make durable improvements in their lives and communities through the cultivation of assets – financial, human, social, and natural resources – that enable them to exert more control over their lives and participate in society in meaningful ways. A healthy field includes a critical mass of people and organizations working in a variety of ways on a common problem. Emphasis is placed on strategic collaboration that encourages information exchange about best practices and lessons learned across differing contexts around the world.

OUR FOCUS

THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FIELD supports mechanisms that enable poor and disadvantaged people to obtain marketable skills and access to resources necessary to get and keep good jobs. Ever-changing economies require the development of skills that are transportable and provide people with the capacity to endure change. These skills better prepare low-income people to obtain good jobs that pay sustainable wages and offer career advancements, allowing workers to accumulate financial assets, develop self-sufficiency, and protect against economic setbacks.

The Foundation supports two primary workforce development strategies: transforming labor market dynamics, and encouraging public policies and employer practices that improve the quality of jobs for low-wage working families. Market-oriented strategies recognize the importance of both the demand and supply sides of the labor market equation and include training, education, and other resources for workers, as well as collaborations with employers to modify and enhance worker recruitment, training, and promotion. In addition, the Foundation seeks improvements in policies and systems that support the development of skills among unemployed and underemployed people and affect the manner in which workers earn a livelihood and support their families. To secure these changes, grantees of the Foundation undertake research, promote public discourse, and mobilize for advocacy a wide range of stakeholders.

THE CONTEXT

Changes in the global economy and labor markets have dramatically challenged the employment opportunities for disadvantaged people in the United States and around the world. Forces having a direct impact on poor workers include: technological shifts that have changed the ways that capital is deployed, firms operate, and work is performed; the diminishing role of government as an employer and regulator of labor practices; the export of production from developed countries to underdeveloped economies; and the enduring effects of race and sex discrimination. In addition, in developed economies, the experience of life-long company employment is disappearing, replaced by skill-based economic security for workers. In developing economies, increased workforce demands are complicated by lack of worker education, government regulation, and employer involvement.

Furthermore, workforce development activities involving nonprofits, research entities, educators, employers, labor organizations, and government vary in coordination and approach. Fragmented policy environments often do not engage employers, and result in underfunding.