



**LIUNA**  
TRAINING & EDUCATION  
FUND

**Workforce Development  
Recommendations**

## **Introduction**

Programs for stimulating the economy and promoting job creation have met with varying degrees of success. While no single solution exists, some ideas and options are more effective than others. Workforce development through education, training, and work experience presents a means to qualify individuals for good jobs now and beyond the current economic crisis. Coupled with federally supported work programs, job training efforts can go a long way toward improving American competitiveness and individual quality of life. Such programs must target employer needs and result in career opportunities. Further, they must help build a skilled workforce that can adapt to changing business and industry trends.

As the training arm of the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) LIUNA Training and Education Fund (LIUNA Training) has created and helped implement worker training programs for 40 years. By responding to the changing needs of the construction industry and addressing trade training on national, state, and local levels, we have discovered what works, what doesn't and what constitutes effective training. Our relationships with LIUNA and signatory contractors provide insight into worker and industry needs, allowing a vantage point that others do not have.

## **Recommendations**

LIUNA Training draws upon its extensive experience and knowledge in construction trade training to offer the following suggestions for a national approach to workforce development.

### **Establish National Workforce Education and Training Standards**

- Incorporate minimum academic and job preparatory skills as standard curriculum within the public education and workforce development systems.
- Develop national standards for worker education and industry-based worker credentials.
- Establish national standards for qualifying workforce training providers.

### **Link Job Training to Employment**

- Link job training programs with available jobs or expected growth industries.
- Improve job availability by establishing publicly supported and/or partially subsidized work programs.
- Require living wages and worker benefits for all subsidized and/or publicly funded work programs.

### **Refocus Workforce Development Programs to Emphasize Career Development**

- Redesign workforce development programs to emphasize job training and placement that directly relates to career oriented employment.

- Establish linkages with educational institutions to promote and facilitate acquisition of nationally recognized industry certifications and/or higher education degrees.
- Expand the focus of workforce development efforts beyond Workforce Investment Boards (WIB) and community colleges to include other qualified training providers.
- Allow workforce development providers to select their program partners if needed, based upon their experience and demonstrated success. Substitute partnership requirements for outcome-based work plans.

The above listed workforce development suggestions outline an approach to training that is national in scope yet implemented at the local level. They utilize a competency based training approach to provide worker skills, employment and a career path. National standards lead to quality controls for workforce developers and employers. Within these recommendations, two points merit emphasis.

**First, the current workforce development system is ineffective and needs to be redesigned.** Old partnerships based upon local politics or the “familiar” require re-examination. Training programs should be operated by qualified organizations as determined by appropriate national trainer standards. Similarly, training programs should provide participants with industry or professional certifications or degrees which are based upon appropriate worker skill standards. Success should be defined by demonstrated competency in relation to these standards.

**Second, workforce training must be linked to available career employment.** It does no good if workers are trained for short-term low pay positions or careers that are not available near the worker’s home. Jobs are critical; and if not available, then they should be created through public work programs.

These two issues are intertwined within the proposed ideas and recommended changes. None of the ideas presented will work without addressing both concerns, i.e., restructuring existing workforce development programs and establishing standards-based education and job training that are linked to actual career opportunities.

### **Establish National Workforce Education and Training Standards**

All too often, we hear how the current education and training systems have failed American workers and American business. Many workers exit the educational system without the basic math, reading, and communication skills needed to obtain and retain good jobs with career potential. Those who do have the appropriate academic background are often disconnected from potential employers and have not obtained specific job skills and/or personal attributes that help individuals succeed in the work environment.

Employers comment that they can’t find qualified workers for the jobs they have available and usually need to provide more training than they anticipated to make up for education deficiencies. Entry-level workers do not have the experience that employers desire, and can’t find a way to break into career oriented employment. A critical link between jobs and qualified candidates is missing – that is, job specific training and demonstrated skills competencies. Students and entry level workers (new to the

workforce or displaced workers) need a means to obtain the skills that enable them to compete for available jobs.

#### **A. Provide a Minimum Level of Academic and Life Skills for all Students and Workers**

Many skills are standard across nearly all jobs. These “employability skills” need to be clearly identified and integrated into the secondary education system. **Competency in reading, mathematics, writing, and computer skills must be required of all high school students and entry level workers**, if they failed to obtain them while in school. Beyond these basic academic skills, **all high school students and entry level workers need to understand the characteristics of a good worker and be able to behave appropriately in the work environment**. Such skills as timeliness, personal responsibility, team work, communication, etc. must be as much a part of education as academic capabilities. **Finally, all students and workers need to know how to take care of basic adult responsibilities** so that the task of living enhances rather than interferes with retaining employment. High schools need to teach basic personal finance (banking accounts, loans, taxes, household budgeting); job seeking and application processes and techniques; maintaining a healthy life style; and basic household management; etc. In the past, young adults learned these skills at home, but this can no longer be assumed. If these skills are not taught at school, then young adults will not have the background needed to help them manage their lives, let alone succeed at work.

Employers should not need to provide any of the training listed above. That should occur within the educational system. If it doesn't, then the Workforce Investment Act system should play this role. Providing workers with these basic skills is an appropriate role for the WIA system and can be standardized across the nation. Training should meet a minimum standard that is established by educators, employers, and social service professionals. With basic academic and life skills, most new workers will be prepared to start work at an entry level, participate in job training, or attend higher education.

#### **B. Develop National Standards for Industry-Based Worker Credentials**

Many professions have some type of credential or license that provides some assurance that the newly credentialed worker has the knowledge and skills to perform his or her job competently. By no means is credentialing or licensing required for all industries and professions, nor is it standardized across the nation within most professions.

**Credentialing, when based upon accepted and clearly defined industry standards, can help prepare workers for jobs, assures employers that workers have necessary skills, and establishes employment criteria that allow transferability to the same job in different locations.**

Most industries and professions would benefit from developing skill standards for both entry level workers and for specialized tasks or jobs within the profession. Attainment of accepted industry skills may be a condition of employment and provides clear direction for job training programs that lead to credentialing or licensure. Some benefits of developing, implementing, and maintaining industry skill standards include:

- establishes skill sets based upon industry and professional criteria;
- identifies skills that workers need for specific industry employment;
- sets a standard from which competency assessment can be developed;
- provides a basis from which job specific training programs can be developed;
- provides an objective basis for credentialing workers;

- sets a baseline from which professional recertification and update training can be developed;
- provides a framework for career development, based upon attainment of progressively advanced skills and competencies;
- allows for uniformity of training and job transferability.

Establishment of national industry skill standards can guide education and training and will help prospective workers decide if they are interested in the type of work that standards describe. Further, skill standards can help workers plan for training and assess personal performance and growth. They help individuals, trainers, and employers set measurable goals and monitor achievement toward industry credentials.

**Credentialing or licensing workers is directly tied to skill standards.** When based upon skill standards, credentialing establishes a minimum level of competency that one expects the credentialed worker to have achieved. Development and implementation of industry credentialing requires the following:

- development of industry skill standards;
- development of measurable competencies and methods for assessing competencies;
- creation of a system for tracking credentialed workers; and
- establishment of processes to periodically review and update skills standards, competencies, credentialing and renewal requirements.

### **C. Establish National Standards for Qualifying Workforce Training Providers**

If it is important to establish skill standards and credentialing for workers, then it is critical to require the same of those who teach job skills to those workers. **Trainers must not only achieve proficiency in the same skills required of the worker, but they must also attain skills related to teaching and adult education.** As with worker certification described above, instructor credentialing should be based upon skill standards developed for and by their profession.

Additionally, organizations and institutions that provide workforce training should be licensed or accredited by independent accrediting bodies. Again, standards for workforce training organizations should be established and accrediting organizations should follow recognized practices in reviewing and evaluating training or education institutions. Such standards already exist and several accrediting bodies conduct independent review of training and education programs and institutions.

Instructor certification and accreditation of training organizations provides quality standards for training programs and helps protect the worker who participates in the programs. If government funds support training programs, then certification and accreditation offers minimum standards for all training and criteria for program assessment and quality control.

### **Link Job Training to Employment**

In the current economy, it is difficult to identify what type of job will be available at any given time, but several actions can improve the current job placement record of workforce development programs. Each requires cooperation between employers and training providers, and most will also benefit from workforce development agencies and organizations who can direct participants to training and employment. Effective training

and job placement also depends upon providing workers with the skills needed for the available work.

#### **A. Link Job Training Programs with Available Jobs or Expected Growth Industries**

Workforce development and training programs must link job training with actual jobs. Too many individuals invest time and money into education or job training programs and then are still unable to find employment after they complete the program. When the government funds workforce training and no jobs result, then both individual and public resources are wasted and the employment problem remains.

**Industry, business, workforce development organizations, educators, and training providers need to work together to identify available and upcoming jobs and match those to appropriate and qualified workforce training programs.** Employers should also provide insight into the direction that industry is expected to go with regard to growth, changes, workforce needs, etc. during both the short and long term. By identifying employment opportunities with a high potential availability, training programs are more likely to place program graduates.

Simply identifying potential jobs is not enough. Training programs need commitments from employers to participate in worker training and to hire program graduates. Individuals need opportunities to use what they learn in a practical manner, so that they are prepared to enter the workforce and obtain the job experience that employers often require. **Employers can provide on-the-job training (OJT), mentoring and jobs for apprentices, internships or other employment-specific training opportunities.**

By providing work experiences, employers benefit from lower cost labor and have the opportunity to observe potential employees. Employer incentives to hire newly trained workers might include partially subsidized wages or benefits for hiring employees “in training,” federal contract preferences or non-competing awards, preferences in specific markets, tax breaks, and public recognition through advertising, seals of approval, etc.

#### **B. Improve Job Availability through Government Supported Work Programs**

What happens if employment opportunities dry up or were never really available? Government funded programs can help alleviate high unemployment in these situations by subsidizing employment, helping small businesses, investing in growth industries, or by providing public work programs. The last option can be particularly effective when government funded work addresses real public needs or problems.

For example, US infrastructure suffers from over use, poor maintenance, age and general disrepair. The need to repair or replace roads, bridges, dams, and other public structures is well documented. By fully or significantly subsidizing large public construction jobs, the federal government can generate thousands of construction and construction related jobs. Training programs for construction already exist and many construction jobs already have skill standards and recommended competencies. Most have apprentice programs that emphasize training for careers in the construction industry.

**The federal government should consider creating workforce development programs in industries, like construction, that can support new jobs, provide a direct public benefit, have an existing training/employment structure, and cannot**

**be shipped abroad. Such programs must include training that is targeted to specific jobs, subsidized work that creates jobs, requirements to hire graduates of training programs, and opportunities for career advancement.**

Attempts at creating employment through partially funding new jobs in new and emerging Green industries are a good investment in the future, but they cannot be expected to create enough work to have a significant impact on unemployment. Sustainable work in industries that will survive after the economy recovers must take priority. Identification of other candidate industries should be tasked to committees comprised of industry, labor, and economic development professionals. Possible candidates for job development include utilities, advanced technology manufacturing and installation, public transportation, and health care.

### **C. Provide Living Wages and Benefits for Government Supported Work Programs**

Policy makers must realize that the nation cannot continually support efforts that provide low wage/no-benefit jobs, if we expect to raise individuals out of poverty and improve skill levels. Jobs must pay a living wage and offer growth opportunities. To reinvigorate the economy and build up the American middle class, workers need incomes that support families and provide not just basic necessities, but also some extras like recreation or entertainment. Benefits like health insurance and retirement plans ease the financial burden on workers and reduce stress.

While living wages and work benefits could increase the cost of workforce development programs, the benefits outweigh the expense. Good wages encourage workers to stay in the jobs for which they were trained, increase company loyalty, reduce absenteeism, and may improve worker health by reducing job-related stress. As a whole, the nation benefits from economic growth stimulated by increased individual buying power and less reliance on welfare and other government support.

**All publicly supported workforce development programs should result in living wage jobs. Employers that hire individuals from these programs, or that obtain government subsidized jobs or contracts, must be required to pay living wages and provide benefits.** If programs eliminate this requirement, then they lose their ability to actually help under and unemployed workers.

### **Reinvent Workforce Development to Emphasize Careers over Jobs**

The current Workforce Development system needs to open itself to new ideas and new partners to increase its effectiveness. Too often Workforce Investment Boards and their associated One-Stop Centers and approved training providers act as closed systems. Special interests, politics, and familiar or influential industries or organizations sit on boards and decide which organizations or training providers may provide training and workforce development services. This leaves out many qualified and innovative organizations and limits options for workers who seek employment and career opportunities. **To improve effectiveness, WIBS should represent a true partnership of trainers, labor, employers, education, and social service providers. These organizations need to work together to identify a wide range of options for worker training, employment, and career development.** The system must address all three components to ensure that workers truly receive the skills and opportunities needed to begin lifetime careers.

LIUNA Training recommends several actions that will strengthen the current workforce development system and other options that supplement existing programs. Regardless of the path taken, programs should consider the following:

- Include a diverse set of options for training and employment that incorporates employer-sponsored programs such as apprenticeship, work study, OJT, internships, and industry recognized certifications.
- Create career pathways by linking training, jobs, and education with industry certification, professional licensure, high school diplomas, and degree programs.
- Promote new and innovative programs that offer successful models for workforce development. Do not force all programs to follow the same format or require a specific set of partners.
- Hold workforce development providers to outcome based objectives to evaluate success and determine future involvement.

#### **A. Emphasize Career Oriented Job Training and Placement**

Employment agencies and workforce development programs often place individuals in any job for which they are qualified. While this gets the worker hired, it does not necessarily offer steady work or a future with growth opportunities. It may not even provide an income that supports the worker, let alone his or her family.

**Employment agencies, One Stop Centers, and Workforce Investment Act programs should look first to career development.** Then they can offer appropriate training, industry-sponsored worker development, education, and placement plans that link services with progress toward the career choice. This does not mean that every individual should pursue degrees leading to professional careers. However, workers should obtain the skills and/or contacts necessary to enter a field of work that offers continuing employment and growth potential. Whether the individual elects to pursue opportunities for advancement depends on need, desire, and capabilities; but the options should be available and clearly articulated.

This may mean developing career paths for a variety of jobs, each with entry level beginnings and options to obtain new skills that lead to higher level employment. With creativity and support from business and industry, most jobs will fit into a solid career path. The key is helping the individual stay on the path. For example, food service or hospitality careers may start with fast food employment, but they don't need to stay there. A logical progression may be part time employment with part time training at a culinary institute or education in hotel and restaurant management. Jobs may progress to wait staff or cook and on to events manager or chef.

**Many career development programs can adopt and build upon the apprenticeship model.** Like the example above, apprenticeship combines training and work experience. Apprentices attend training and apply that knowledge to actual job tasks for which they receive payment (at a lower wage scale than fully trained journey workers). Achievement of specified training, work hours, and/or demonstration of competencies advances the apprentice until he or she attains the journey worker level. More apprenticeship

programs are moving toward competency-based models that allow for progress through skills and knowledge testing and provide certificates after achieving a set of requirements and/or competencies. This approach utilizes industry skill standards as described earlier in this paper.

**Workforce development programs should actively pursue employer sponsored training programs and offer support for implementing the programs.** Where approved apprentice programs, accredited training, and other quality workforce development programs exist, workers should be informed of these options, whether they are included under the current WIB system or not. A note of caution is appropriate when promoting new programs. Each should demonstrate success in implementing their programs, provide skilled and certified trainers, and meet quality criteria as defined by independent accreditation organizations.

## **B. Link Training and Work Experience to Certification and Higher Education**

To promote career advancement, reward effort, and improve worker skills, **industry, business, and educational institutions should link industry credentials to higher education.** Industry certification that is based upon skill standards and competency assessment requires rigorous training, knowledge, and skills that often equal college level course work. Recognition of this achievement through college credit can lead workers to degree programs and provide expanded career options. Furthermore, articulation agreements between industry and education provide incentives for workers and employers to invest in personnel training and facilitate internal professional advancement.

Workers, employers, and educational institutions all benefit from linking industry certification with college degree programs. Some benefits include:

- Career advancement and higher wages for the worker.
- Employee retention, returns on training investment, and cost savings from internal hiring for employers.
- Addition of new students, tuition, program growth and development for colleges.

## **C. Diversify Workforce Development Approaches and Service Providers**

Considering the extent of unemployment, the need for job training, and the pervasiveness of the economic downturn, the nation cannot afford to limit options and opportunities to provide assistance. Yet the current framework for providing assistance under the Workforce Investment Act has allowed just that. Many WIB have become politicized and closed to change. Consequently, they limit participation, discourage innovation, and favor established or politically acceptable training providers and colleges. Certainly, this is not true for all WIB and One-Stop Centers, but sadly many have evolved into a favored set of insiders who continue forward in an established manner. Programs that may have been effective when they were conceived may not necessarily meet today's complex needs.

**It is time that WIA broadens its reach and includes programs beyond the established local WIB and associated training providers.** Many industry supported training and credentialing programs, trade apprenticeship, and innovative education institutions could reinvigorate workforce development. Partnerships that include education, economic development, and employment opportunities can benefit local neighborhoods, employers, and workers. Federal funds can be leveraged by building upon existing programs while new support can provide the missing links that tie training to careers. Even individual organizations have effective training programs that

Beginning new initiatives will require effort and a willingness to examine the merits of established and proposed workforce development programs. Stakeholders should identify priorities, set standards, establish objectives, and select appropriate options. Change and progress demand input from a diverse group of organizations and institutions - individuals who promote inclusiveness over exclusivity. But it also needs a foundation of experience and the knowledge of experts. **Cooperation and collaboration between current WIB members and new players will be critical to successful change.**

## **D. Allow Workforce Development Providers to Select Appropriate Program Partners**

While partnerships can add different skills and dimensions to programs and facilitate diverse involvement, mandating specific types of partnerships does not always enhance workforce development and job training programs. In fact involvement of too many partners or incompatible partners can slow program implementation, affect decision-making, and lead to power struggles or confusion regarding each organization's role.

Workforce development service providers generally have experience with their programs and know whether or not partnerships will enhance their efforts. **Where programs are well defined and can demonstrate success, their directors should be able to decide if partnerships are needed and which partners will add the greatest benefits to their programs.**

Rather than establish partnership requirements and force programs to create roles for diverse organizations, workforce development program administrators and awarding agencies should require the following:

- Demonstrated experience and success with developing and implementing workforce development or training programs;
- Development of a well thought out plan that links training, education, and employment;
- Clearly defined and measurable program objectives that align with the overall goals of the local, state, or national workforce development plans;
- Programs that provide recognized job skills, certificates, or other qualifications and which lead to employment with career opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

Many of the components of an effective national workforce development program already exist, but they have been implemented in a piecemeal fashion. No national approach or industry wide standards guide the process. What is lacking is connectivity among the parts; collaboration and cooperation among diverse interests; a commitment to quality based upon accepted standards; and dedication to the end goal, i.e. providing living wage employment with growth potential for under and un-employed workers.

As a representative of the construction trades, LIUNA Training's programs assist millions of workers throughout the United States. The construction trades include a wide variety of specialty areas and new fields and job tasks continually emerge. Examples of anticipated growth and emerging construction specialties include decorative concrete, deconstruction and retrofit, green construction and sustainable remediation. In such a complex industry, LIUNA Training and its affiliated training providers have a major stake in workforce development. To support workforce development initiatives, LIUNA Training offers to be a part of the solution by sharing ideas and lessons learned, developing industry standards and credentials, designing and implementing programs; and participating in other efforts where our involvement will benefit the process.