

The Social Innovation Fund's Economic Opportunity Grantees: Building the Bridge from Training into Employment

The Knowledge Initiative at the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) is proud to present the first in a two-part series examining the vital role SIF's Economic Opportunity grantees play in low-income communities across America. This issue brief will explore the SIF funded, evidence-based programs of Jobs for the Future/ National Fund for Workforce Solutions and REDF.

Introduction

The consensus is clear: we must fundamentally rethink the pathways to well-paying, middle-class jobs, and open those pathways to all Americans.

--Vice President Joe Biden¹

The U.S. economy is improving, but millions of Americans remain out of work. At the same time, many jobs are going unfilled as employers are unable to find workers for positions that require increasing levels of knowledge and skills.

"Many Americans seeking work could fill the millions of open jobs if given the right skills and opportunities," notes Johan Uvin, Acting Assistant Secretary for Career, Technical, and Adult Education at the US Department of Education.



To that end, recent bipartisan legislation, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and federal initiatives led by, among others, the U.S. Departments of Labor, Education, Commerce, and Health and Human Services have focused on connecting Americans who want to work with employers who want to hire them. These include identifying "what works" in job training², refocusing federal investments in workforce development and job training to be more "job-driven³," and improving the country's public workforce system⁴ to help get Americans into high-quality jobs and careers.

These strategies all feature partnerships as a key element of effective job training. Coordination and collaboration among government agencies, education and training providers, social-service providers, and employers ensures better delivery of services for job-seekers and well-prepared employees for jobs. Training and employment partnerships can be especially helpful for lower-skilled individuals and those with barriers to employment by coordinating strategies across systems and offering flexible, innovative strategies that integrate education, training, and support services.

These partnerships also benefit employers by delivering better-trained applicants and employees, supporting the upskilling of existing workforces, and building a labor supply chain to fill future staffing needs. In addition, training institutions and service providers are able to better tailor their programs to meet very specific local labor needs and better support job-seekers and workers.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF) has invested in several partnership models that connect low-income individuals to employment. A program of the Corporation for National and Community Service, the SIF is a powerful approach to transforming lives and communities that positions the federal government to be a catalyst for impact—mobilizing public and private resources to find and grow community solutions with evidence of strong results. The SIF works with and through existing grantmaking institutions to direct resources to community-based nonprofit organizations that implement evidence-based programs focused on youth development, economic opportunity, and healthy futures.

The SIF's emphasis on innovation and evidence aligns with the renewed attention to results-oriented employment programs. By investing to scale up and evaluate promising job training and workforce development programs, the SIF is helping grow the evidence base for programs that link the unemployed to jobs and career pathways. This brief will highlight approaches used by two SIF grantees to help low-income job seekers move from training to employment. It will identify considerations that accompany each approach, and offer lessons for others seeking to implement them.



Building Employer-Driven Industry Partnerships

Active employer leadership and participation is a critical component of effective job-driven education and training. It ensures training meets current and future hiring needs and is

more likely to result in employment for job seekers. Employer leadership and engagement is also essential for creating work-based learning opportunities such as job shadows, internships, and apprenticeships that are effective training paths to employment.

Employer engagement plays a central role in the work of SIF grantee Jobs for the Future/National Fund for Workforce Solutions (JFF/National Fund). The organization seeks to create job opportunities for low-skilled, low-wage workers while helping employers build or upgrade their workforces. JFF/National Fund supports regional workforce funder collaboratives, which in turn fund the formation and operation of industry workforce partnerships to support training customized to local labor needs.

“Our goal is to bridge the gap between education and training providers and businesses,” said Navjeet Singh, Deputy Director of the National Fund. “We encourage employers to work closely together so that there is good communication on what skills and competencies are required for their positions. Then they work together with training providers who can make sure that they are offering curricula that meet industry needs.”



Photo courtesy of NYACH

Student in training supported by the New York Alliance for Careers in Health Care (NYACH) of New York, NY.



Photo courtesy of Workforce Central

Instructor with students at a workforce program supported by JFF/National Fund subgrantee Workforce Central Funders Collaborative of Wisconsin Rapids, WI.

In the JFF/National Fund model, each industry partnership is structured as a regional group of employers, typically from a specific industry sector (e.g., manufacturing, construction, healthcare, etc.), and working with training providers, community colleges, and community-based organizations to identify workforce needs and develop solutions. Employer members meet regularly to discuss shared human-resources issues, exchange information about industry practices, and take specific actions to address workforce challenges.

As one example, JFF/National Fund-supported Baltimore Workforce Funders Collaborative sponsors the Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (BACH). The Alliance creates opportunities for low-income Baltimore residents to pursue

healthcare careers while meeting the urgent employment needs of local healthcare institutions. Twenty-eight BACH partners – including leading hospitals and healthcare organizations, government agencies, educational institutions, and community organizations – work together to identify ways to meet healthcare employment needs and create new

workforce pathways. BACH activities include coaching hospital employees to help them take steps that can lead to higher-paying jobs and improve their job performance and retention. BACH also connects employers to local nonprofit and faith-based training organizations to help low-income job seekers prepare for healthcare jobs.

JFF/National Fund has identified best practices for employer engagement⁵ and fostering high-performing industry partnerships⁶. First among these is developing and maintaining employer leadership, with employer representatives chairing partnerships and setting priorities for them. Additional best practices include:

- Achieving a variety of measurable outcomes for both individuals (e.g., credentials awarded, job placements, wage gains) and employers (e.g. higher productivity, lower turnover, higher customer satisfaction);
- Promoting **industry-recognized credentials**; and
- Communicating current and relevant **industry intelligence and desired skills and competencies** to all stakeholders in a timely fashion.

“Leading employers are more strategic about how they recruit,” notes JFF/National Fund’s Singh. “They don’t want to rely on word-of-mouth. They want to invest not just for the here and now but to make themselves attractive to a larger set of workers in the future. They are building their talent pipelines.”

SIF funding enabled JFF/National Fund to deepen the impact of existing workforce partnerships and create new ones in Southern states. It also funded a quasi-experimental evaluation of selected SIF-funded industry partnership training programs⁷. The evaluation, by Impaq International, found that the programs:

- Had statistically significant **positive effects on the employment rates** of participants;
- Were **highly effective** in improving employment, retention, and earnings for participants in a **healthcare-focused program**; and
- Were **moderately effective** in improving outcomes for participants in an **advanced manufacturing** program.

Pairing Employment and Services through Social Enterprise

A second SIF grantee, California-based REDF, chose to focus on populations with especially high barriers to employment. These include individuals who have experienced homelessness or incarceration, young people who have left school but have not found employment, and people with mental illnesses.



REDF is funding nonprofits to create or expand social enterprises in California to serve as employment vehicles for these populations. Social enterprises are mission-driven businesses focused on hiring and assisting people who face barriers to work. Employees of the enterprises receive training and support, earn wages, and pay taxes. The nonprofits employing them earn income selling goods and services such as landscaping, facilities management, and front-desk services.



Photo courtesy of REDF

Street maintenance worker employed through a social enterprise program at REDF’s SIF subgrantee Chrysalis of Santa Monica, CA.

REDF’s SIF subgrantee, Community Housing Partnership (CHP) of San Francisco, CA, for example, helps people experiencing homelessness find supportive housing and stable jobs. Its social enterprise, Solutions SF, offers outsourced lobby staffing for housing providers. The majority of Solutions SF’s employees are formerly homeless. The enterprise trains and evaluates them, and provides them with ongoing support as they transition back into the workplace.

The combination of a nonprofit service provider and a social enterprise creates a platform for coordinating the support services hard-to-employ individuals benefit from. It also creates a built-in employer base that could otherwise be challenging to assemble.

“It is hard to integrate an outside employer into a job training program, especially one for people with a lot of barriers,” said Nicole Simoneaux, SIF Portfolio Director at REDF. “Our model is a ‘partnership’ between a social enterprise and an organization providing the services.”

The SIF funded REDF to scale up and evaluate its social enterprise model in multiple California communities. The recently published evaluation report from Mathematica Policy Research⁸ found that **67 percent of participants were still working** six months after starting a social enterprise job, and that the share of individuals with stable housing **increased from 15 percent to 53 percent**.

The Mathematica study also showed that social enterprise can yield a net benefit to taxpayers and society as a whole:

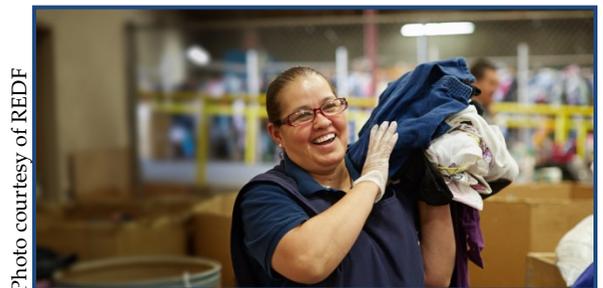
- Employees at social enterprises relied less on government benefits; in one year, the share of individuals’ income from government benefits **decreased from 71 percent to only 24 percent**;
- Every \$1 spent by social enterprises **produced societal benefits worth \$2.23**; and
- Every dollar invested in social enterprise **generated 97 cents in business revenue**, making it a nearly break-even proposition.

Simoneaux identified several program components and services that enhance results for social enterprise employees:

- **Flexible and individualized approaches to training** that meet the distinct needs of participants at different stages—seeking a job, starting a job, and keeping a job;
- **Incentives** for participating in training and meeting employment milestones, whether offered as cash, gift cards, recognition, or merit awards;
- **Training that builds resiliency**, i.e., how to problem-solve, how to navigate resources independently, and how to brush off and move on from personal and workplace setbacks; and
- **Helping participants’ foster personal and professional relationships** to give them connections and roots that promote resiliency and accountability.

REDF is now working with grantees to identify pathways and partners that will help participants move from entry-level jobs to those that are more highly skilled and compensated.

“Once we get people on the lowest rung of employment with an entry-level job,” said REDF’s Simoneaux, “we don’t want them to stay in that spot. We want them to get access to upward mobility. As a funder, we’re looking at what we can do to help programs find partnerships with different employers and industries and certification bodies.”



Thrift-shop employee at REDF’s SIF subgrantee Goodwill of Silicon Valley.

Initial ideas and projects include connecting with community colleges for industry certifications (e.g., forklift operator) and remedial education and creating a management career path for front-desk workers at housing providers. In addition, REDF subgrantee Goodwill of Silicon Valley has created a “retail academy” for thrift-shop workers supported by businesses that include major home supply and home goods/fashion retailers.

Best Practices and Lessons Learned

The experience of JFF/National Fund, REDF, and other SIF-funded organizations reinforce “what works” in job-driven training and demonstrates the value of partnerships in linking job training to employment, especially for lower-skilled and harder-to-employ workers and job-seekers. They also yield the following general recommendations for others seeking to establish similar partnerships:

- **Allow adequate time for partnership-building.** “You have to be patient and find the right partners,” said JFF/National Fund’s Singh. “Just because you call people to a meeting does not mean you’re getting a partnership. It’s a lot of work to find [partners], find what their needs are, and find how to address their needs.”
- **Demonstrate and communicate the value of the partnership for employers as well as job-seekers.** Collect and share outcomes data, business intelligence, and other information to show job-seekers, employers, and other partners the value of participating in the partnership.
- **Ensure adequate support is in place to start and nurture the partnership.** JFF/National Fund works with its subgrantees to help them identify options and funding for hiring a local staff person to engage employers and support the work of an industry partnership. REDF’s subgrantees appreciate the work REDF is doing to investigate training and employment partnerships they often don’t have time to pursue themselves.
- **Utilize local workforce and employment data to inform training design and delivery.** Such data are typically available from state and local employment departments and workforce investment boards and partnerships. Upfront research will help identify the best partner candidates and ensure education and training is focused on meeting specific, pressing employment needs.

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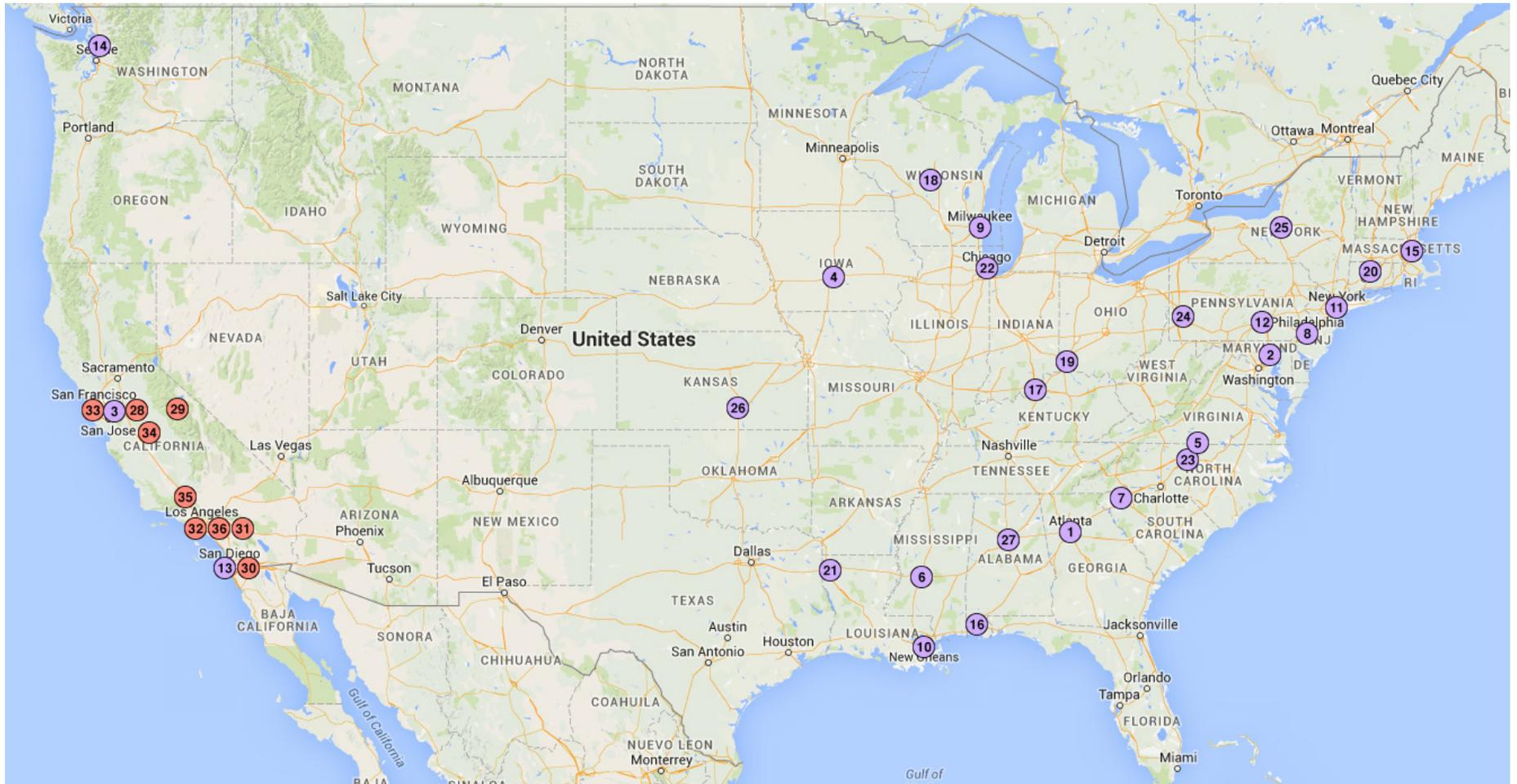
Appendix: JFF/NFWS and REDF Subgrantees and Locations

Subgrantee	Location	Intermediary	*Map Marker
Atlanta CareerRise	Atlanta, GA	JFF/National Fund	1
Baltimore Workforce Funders Collaborative	Baltimore, MD	JFF/National Fund	2
Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative	San Francisco, CA	JFF/National Fund	3
Central Iowa Works Funding Collaborative	Des Moines, IA	JFF/National Fund	4
Dan River Region Collaborative	Danville, VA	JFF/National Fund	5
Delta Workforce Funding Collaborative	Jackson, MS	JFF/National Fund	6
Greenville Regional Funder Collaborative	Greenville, SC	JFF/National Fund	7
Job Opportunity Investment Network (JOIN)	Philadelphia, PA	JFF/National Fund	8
Milwaukee Area Workforce Funding Alliance	Milwaukee, WI	JFF/National Fund	9
New Orleans Works (NOW)	New Orleans, LA	JFF/National Fund	10
New York City Workforce Innovation Fund	New York, NY	JFF/National Fund	11
Pennsylvania Fund for Workforce Solutions	Harrisburg, PA	JFF/National Fund	12
San Diego Workforce Funders Collaborative	San Diego, CA	JFF/National Fund	13
SkillUp Washington	Everett, WA	JFF/National Fund	14
SkillWorks: Partners for a Productive Workforce	Boston, MA	JFF/National Fund	15
Southwest Alabama Workforce Development Council	Mobile, AL	JFF/National Fund	16
Working Partners of Greater Louisville	Louisville, KY	JFF/National Fund	17
Workforce Central Funders Collaborative	Wisconsin Rapids, WI	JFF/National Fund	18
Partners for a Competitive Workforce	Cincinnati, OH	JFF/National Fund	19
Workforce Solutions Collaborative of Metro Hartford	Hartford, CT	JFF/National Fund	20
Workforce Innovations for Northwest Louisiana	Shreveport, LA	JFF/National Fund	21
Chicagoland Workforce Funder	Chicago, IL	JFF/National Fund	22
Triad Workforce Solutions Collaborative	Greensboro, NC	JFF/National Fund	23
Pittsburgh Works	Pittsburgh, PA	JFF/National Fund	24
Work Train	Syracuse, NY	JFF/National Fund	25
Preparation for Advanced Career Employment System	Wichita, KS	JFF/National Fund	26
Central Six Development Council	Birmingham, AL	JFF/National Fund	27
Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)	Oakland, CA	REDF	28
Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)	San Bernardino, CA	REDF	29

Subgrantee	Location	Intermediary	*Map Marker
Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)	San Diego, CA	REDF	30
Chrysalis	Los Angeles, CA	REDF	31
Coalition for Responsible Community Development (CRCDD)	Los Angeles, CA	REDF	32
Community Housing Partnership	San Francisco, CA	REDF	33
Goodwill Silicon Valley	San Jose, CA	REDF	34
Taller San Jose	Santa Anna, CA	REDF	35
Weingart Center Association	Los Angeles, CA	REDF	36

*Map on following page

Map of JFF/National Fund and REDF Subgrantees



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