

# The Milwaukee Jobs Initiative

*Five years of better jobs in the Milwaukee metropolitan area*

**T**he Milwaukee Jobs Initiative (MJl) is an eight-year project funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and supported by local and state matching funds. MJl brings together business (through the Greater Milwaukee Committee), labor (through the Milwaukee County Labor Council, the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO, and union locals), and the community (through local human services providers and community-based organizations) to connect qualified central-city residents to family-sustaining jobs.

MJl has helped Milwaukee-area employers and unions to create "sectoral" partnerships in manufacturing, hospitality, printing, health care, construction, utilities, and telecommunications. Together, these sectors represent an overwhelming share of the regional labor market. And through its local partner, the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership (WRTP), MJl hopes to extend its reach into at least three new industry sectors in the next two years.

The sectoral partnerships are unique because they operate on both sides of the labor market — aiding employers that need qualified workers, and providing support for workers, or would-be workers, who need jobs. Employers learn how to better train workers, reduce costly turnover, and increase productivity. Workers develop the skills they need to do the job, keep the job, and move up in the job.

These partnerships are also important because they allow employers to pool information, address industry-wide problems, and develop new programs for recruiting and training workers — all on a scale that one-to-one "job brokering" relationships cannot match. Too often, industry leadership is what's missing in workforce development projects — and yet it is the critical link in making connections to long-lasting, family-sustaining jobs.

At the same time, MJl has established close ties with community and volunteer organizations that share our vision: enabling whole families to thrive in work and life. These organizations assist with recruitment and referral of job seekers, career counseling, adult basic education, pre-employment work-readiness preparation, post-employment retention, and supports to enhance family stability and economic achievement.

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## **The Center on Wisconsin Strategy**

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MJI's approach has been a proven success. Since 1997, its programs have provided training, placement, and consulting services to nearly 200 Milwaukee-area firms. These services have helped employers to recruit and retain workers and to upgrade employees' skills. By enabling firms to replace temporary jobs with full-time, permanent positions, MJI has helped employers to reduce the costs associated with using for-profit temp agencies. At the same time, for each worker trained by MJI, firms have matched the public/MJI investment with an equivalent in-kind investment in on-the-job training.

Many area workers have benefited too. So far, MJI has placed more than 1,500 community residents in full-time jobs, at an average starting wage of \$10.65 per hour. All MJI jobs offer access to family health benefits; only 35 percent of participants had received health benefits at their previous jobs. Of all MJI placements, nearly three quarters were still working after a year, nearly half of them in the same or a better job. The overwhelming majority of placed participants were people of color.

In addition, through the WRTP and the YMCA of Greater Milwaukee, we have helped to create a full-service Workforce Training Center, which provides on-site training, career assessment, links to job openings, and supportive services to workers and firms.

By changing the very ground rules that govern Milwaukee's workforce development system, MJI has produced positive labor-market outcomes for employers and employees. As the MJI model shows, it is possible to create a system in which all players — business, labor, community — can succeed. With a long-term investment from the public and private sectors, we can extend this model — not only in Milwaukee but in other struggling communities as well.