

# THE WORKING IN KING COUNTY TASK FORCE

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### BACKGROUND

The Port of Seattle and the community-based agencies which comprise the Committee for Economic Opportunity (CEO) began working together in 1990 to develop a strategy to assure the availability of skilled workers for port-related businesses and to create new opportunities for those who have been left out of the economic mainstream. This effort began in the context of dramatic changes in our nation's workforce. Numerous studies have predicted that:

- The American population and workforce will grow more slowly between now and the turn of the century than at any time since the 1930's;
- The average age of the population and the workforce will rise and the pool of young workers entering the labor market will shrink;
- Women and persons of color will comprise a much larger share of new entrants into the labor force; and
- Immigrants will represent the largest share of the increase in population and workforce since the First World War.<sup>1</sup>

These trends suggest that the workforce of the nation in the year 2000 will be dramatically different than it is today, that there may well be shortages of skilled workers in many sectors, and that we must change the ways we recruit, train, and support our workforce if we are to enter the next century prepared to compete in the global economy.

To meet this challenge, the Port and CEO organized "The Working in King County Task Force" to bring together educators, business leaders, human service providers, organized labor, and local government officials to find new and more effective ways to provide those who need employment with the skills and opportunity to participate in the port-related economy. The Task Force began its work with studies of the specific conditions here in King County which showed that the changes already taking place in the local workforce closely parallel the trends predicted in national studies. For example, while the total population of the County *increased* by 16%

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<sup>1</sup>Workforce 2000 Report

during the decade, the population between 15-29 who are now or soon will be entering the workplace actually *declined*.

Furthermore, the ethnic make-up of our region is undergoing a profound transformation. By 1989:

- Washington ranked tenth among the states in the number of new immigrants from foreign countries;
- third in the number of refugees; and,
- first in the rate of increase of immigration.<sup>2</sup>

Not only are large numbers of immigrants coming to the area, but King County's indigenous Asian-American, Hispanic, African-American, and Native American populations are growing as a percentage of the population, particularly among the young.

## **ISSUES FACING THE REGION**

These trends are already having a major impact on the problems faced by both employers and prospective employees in our region:

- The "new" workforce from which employers must recruit future employees, is increasingly comprised of populations which have borne a disproportionate share of our region's poverty and unemployment and face economic, cultural, linguistic and physical barriers to employment.
- The economic disadvantages facing these populations make it more difficult to secure training opportunities.
- Many prospective workers are members of population groups which do not have established lines of communication with employers.
- Surveys of employers revealed a high level of concern about the difficulty of finding workers with the basic skills needed to fill the positions they have available, but few of

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<sup>2</sup>Weber, Susan, 1988. USA By Numbers, published by Zero Population Growth, Washington, D..

the employers had established solid working relationships with training institutions or community-based organizations involved in training prospective workers.

- Although the Seattle area prides itself on a "participatory tradition" there are few forums in which employers, labor, training institutions, community-based organizations and government agencies can work together on workforce development.
- Most of the new entry level jobs in the Port-related economy are in the service sector and hold less promise of sustaining a family than jobs in the manufacturing sector, which is not expected to economically grow in the near future. This suggests that new strategies must be found to provide upward mobility within the port economy as a whole while preparing a workforce to support businesses developing value added manufacturing and other products/services. Greater access to jobs and support services is an initial step in the strategy.
- Small enterprises, which are creating many of the new job opportunities in the Port economy, individually do not have the resources to provide specialized training and support services such as child care. This problem affects both the productivity of these enterprises and the prospects of their workers.

## **A STRATEGY**

To overcome these problems, the Task Force envisions a system of partnerships among employers, labor unions, training institutions, community based organizations and government agencies built on the principle that each partner will contribute skills and resources in return for the assistance of the other partners in meeting mutually beneficial objectives. In general, the roles of the partners would be as follows:

- Community-based organizations will identify potential workers, provide basic skills training and support services;
- Training institutions and labor unions will provide job skills training;
- Employers will provide jobs, agree to hire those referred by their community partner(s), and to participate in providing economic resources for support services, initial training and continuing educational opportunities; and
- Government agencies will assist in trend analysis, project planning and funding.

## **SUMMARY OF MODEL PROJECTS**

With this framework in mind, the Task Force has created ten model projects to link disadvantaged workers with specific employers through the auspices of community-based organizations:

**The Airport Hotel Project** is intended to bring together the Sea-Tac Red Lion Hotel, Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union Local 8, and community-based organizations in an effort to recruit, train and place up to 100 employees at the Red Lion. In addition, the potential to provide support services such as transportation, ESL training and child care will be explored.

**The Airport Maintenance Project** will involve American Building Maintenance, Service Employees International Union Local 6, and community-based organizations in a similar effort to recruit, place and provide support services for maintenance workers at the airport. The partners will also seek to provide on-site educational programs in basic literacy, English as a Second Language and other subjects, with the goal of assisting the participants' upward mobility.

**The Fish Processing Project** will link the Icicle Seafood Company with prospective workers through new relationships with community-based organizations and the Seattle Worker's Centers innovative "Community Voice Mail" system. This linkage is expected to create new opportunities for many very disadvantaged people who have been left out of the local economy because they are homeless and/or without the means to communicate with a prospective employer. The project is also expected to reduce the need to recruit workers from outside the region to fill the company's needs.

**The Port Construction Project** is in many ways the most complex, but also holds great promise for moving disadvantaged individuals into "family wage" jobs. The project is designed to use community-based organizations to recruit and place workers in pre-apprenticeship training programs leading to apprenticeships in four Building Trades Unions. The Unions have agreed to provide journey-level mentors for the participants. The Port is being asked to require an appropriate number of apprentices to be employed on each of its construction programs as a condition of its contracts.

**The Airline Ticketing Project** is proposing to recruit and train persons with disabilities to work as ticket agents and customer service representatives in the airline industry through the Resource Center for the Handicapped. In addition to creating new employment opportunities, this project has the potential to make Sea-Tac a highly visible model.

**The Freight Forwarding Project** has already been initiated by North Seattle Community College and a consortium of small companies to train workers through a joint program funded by the Washington Jobs Skills Program. The project will demonstrate the potential for using the Port as a catalyst to form partnerships among small port-related businesses and training institutions.

**The Shoreline Access Project** is intended to use the Seattle Conservation Corps and South East Effective Development's Youth Employment Program to fulfill the Port's longstanding commitment to develop eight shoreline access parks along the Duwamish River in return for street vacations. This project has the potential to improve the appearance and livability of the Duwamish community while assisting disadvantaged youth and homeless individuals enter the economic mainstream.

**The Project to Support Small Vendors** is intended to provide small port-related companies with access to training, technical support, and other services they simply could not afford on their own. This could be done through forming consortia to meet common needs or by including small businesses in training already being offered by the Port and/or its major customers.

**The Re-employment Center** is designed to shorten periods of unemployment and reduce the impact of job loss on workers in the port-related economy who lose their livelihood due to business failures, shop closures, or lay-offs. The center would provide an important safety valve to assure that the skills of these workers are not lost to our local economy.

**The Airport A.A. Degree Program** is a concept advanced by Seattle Central Community College to improve the prospects of upward mobility for entry level workers at and near the Sea-Tac airport by providing on-site instruction leading to an AA degree. In light of the budget limits now facing the community college system, this project is heavily dependent on finding employers willing to grant tuition reimbursements and/or securing other sources of funding. Yet this concept holds extraordinary promise for overcoming many of the logistical barriers that keep many low-wage workers locked out of better opportunities.

## **OFFICE OF PORTWORKS**

These projects involve many sectors of the Port-related economy and hold great promise, but they cannot be fully implemented without an impartial broker among the parties and a continuing forum in which all sectors can continue to work together. To meet these needs the Task Force envisions the creation of an Office of "Portworks" modeled on a mechanism currently in place in the Port of New York/New Jersey. The office would employ a small group of skilled,

knowledgeable, and enthusiastic "diplomats" to broker effective compacts among the various sectors of the port-related economy. Among their specific tasks would be:

- to identify opportunities for new projects, with special emphasis on those which fill gaps in the port-related economy and have the prospect of becoming self-supporting;
- to provide assistance in the development of memoranda of understanding delineating the roles, responsibilities and expectations of the partners in the specific projects;
- to act as an impartial broker in developing agreements among the parties and resolve differences that may arise during the implementation of projects;
- to identify potential sources of additional public or private funding to assist the partners in providing training and support services to project participants;
- to identify, evaluate and recommend innovative training programs and support services which should be considered for funding from the Port; and
- to participate in the evaluation of specific projects and the dissemination of findings that could be used to strengthen other projects.

With the creation of The Office of "Portworks" the Task Force believes that the "office" will provide sufficient support to enable some model projects to proceed without additional funding. There will be instances, however, in which there are critical gaps in existing support services or training opportunities which the partners do not have the resources to fill. There may also be cases in which a particularly promising idea needs seed money in order to be tested. For these reasons, we recommend that the Port establish a substantial "human capital investment fund" to be used for these purposes.

Although the investments we propose constitute a new direction for the Port, the Task Force believes the investment is well justified and directly supports an objective of the Port to support and enhance economic development in our region. The availability of a skilled workforce is a fundamental resource needed by current and future customers of the Port and necessary for their economic success and competitiveness of the global economy in which we are a part.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force respectfully recommends that the Seattle Port Commission take the following actions:

1. Reaffirm the Port's commitment to serve as a catalyst for building effective partnerships among employers, labor unions, educational institutions, government agencies, and community-based organizations to create new job opportunities and provide a highly skilled workforce for the port-related economy;
2. Provide the necessary interim funding to continue staff support for the Task Force in implementing the ten model projects outlined in this report during the remainder of 1992;
3. Provide the resources necessary to establish an "Office of Portworks" to provide ongoing staff support to the project partnerships and to generate new projects which reflect the Task Force's goals (approximately \$150,000 - \$175,000 in 1993).
4. Establish a "Human Capital Investment Fund" to support innovative projects and to fill critical gaps in the system of training and support services needed to sustain the Port-related economy. The amount committed to the Fund should be determined in the context of the 1993 budget process and linked to specific model projects.
5. Provide the necessary funding for an independent evaluation of the progress of the "Office of Portworks" prior to consideration of the 1994 budget.
6. Work with the City of Seattle, King County, the suburban cities and the State and Federal Governments to coordinate efforts to strengthen the local workforce and create new opportunities for disadvantaged populations<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>The term "disadvantaged" is intended to describe members of our community who have historically faced barriers to employment and training opportunities. These include women and persons of color, persons with disabilities, immigrants, refugees, those with limited English-speaking ability and dislocated workers.



## WORKING IN KING COUNTY PROJECT CHRONOLOGY

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- 1990 ● Community-based organizations form "the Committee for Economic Opportunity" (CEO).
- The CEO urges the Port Commission to assume a leadership role in creating economic opportunity for disadvantaged populations.
- Port Commission includes CEO concepts in Port Mission Statement and Goals; provides funds for a study of potential roles under the auspices of the Working in King County Task Force.
  
- 1991 ● Task Force convenes; membership comprised of Port-related employers and representatives of vocational training programs, community colleges, organized labor, community-based organizations, government agencies and the Port.
- Task Force studies confirm major demographic trends in King County reflect the shifts in the work force predicted by Workforce 2000.
- The Task Force commissions the "Chesser Report" which explores the role of other Port Authorities in community economic development.
- Port Commission authorizes continued funding for Task Force activities in 1992.
  
- 1992 ● National economic recession hits the Puget Sound economy; Task Force shifts strategy to focus on specific "growth opportunities".
- Task Force develops the concept of a "system of partnerships" among employers, labor, training programs and community-based organizations to meet the needs of specific employers for skilled workers.
- Sea-Tac Red Lion Hotel and Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Local 8 propose the first "model project"; others quickly follow.
- Task Force submits Report to the Port Commission proposing:
  - ▲ Office of "Portworks"
  - ▲ Human Capital Investment Fund
  - ▲ Ten model projects

- (Aug) ● Port Commission unanimously adopts resolution to implement the Task Force Report with funding levels to be determined in 1993 budget process.
- Project prioritizes three model projects for rapid implementation.
- Port and organized labor convene meetings on Port Construction Project to substantially increase apprenticeship opportunities on Port construction; discussions begin with City, County, School District, and Metro to extend the project to all public construction.
- Mayor Rice announces 1993 budget including City financial contributions to Working in King County Project.
- Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for Port Construction Project approved in principle.
- El Centro de la Raza identified as lead community organization for Airport Hotel Project; City makes EDA funds available; participants begin drafting MOA.
- Participants in Fish Processing Project begin drafting MOA; first referrals of job-seekers made on a trial basis.
- WIKC Project staff begin exploring potential use of federal JOBS funds to match Human Capital Investment Fund expenditures for eligible participants in WIKC projects.
- (Nov) ● Port Commission adopts 1993 budget which includes \$200,000 to establish the Office of Portworks and the Human Capital Investment Fund. In addition, the Commission authorizes a 10% set-aside of all hours of labor on Port construction projects for participants in State-approved apprenticeship programs and commits 20 cents per hour of labor to the Human Capital Investment Fund for pre-apprenticeship training.
- The Seattle City Council provides \$150,000 for the Portworks project in the 1993 City budget and instructs the Water, Engineering and City Light Departments to explore the potential of implementing the Port's apprenticeship strategy.
- The King County Council allocates \$100,000 for Portworks in 1993.
- (Dec) ● A permanent Board of Directors is formed representing business, labor, government, educational institutions and community-based organizations.
- Northwest Area Foundation invites Portworks Steering Committee to submit a proposal for additional funding for project activities.