

# Connecting

## **Poverty Reduction, Workforce Development and Economic Development:**



### **A Mid-Term Report on the Workforce Development for Poverty Reduction Project**



**National League of Cities**

Local elected officials across the country agree that an educated and skilled workforce attracts business and industry and provides the foundation for a strong local economy. At the same time, municipal governments are engaged in a wide range of activities aimed at reducing or alleviating poverty.

All too often, however, the goals of poverty reduction, workforce development and economic development are pursued on separate tracks, when the fact is that connecting people to the education and skills needed for living-wage jobs is a proven strategy for building a successful local economy and making people and families more self-sufficient.

Seeking to emphasize the connection among these issues, the National League of Cities (NLC) launched its Workforce Development for Poverty Reduction Project in 1998. Administered by the National League of Cities Institute (NLCI), NLC's education and research affiliate, the project is providing technical assistance to local collaborators in five cities: Dayton, Ohio; Pasadena, California; Modesto, California; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; and Flint, Michigan. In each city, the collaborative includes a local team of 12 to 20 public and private sector leaders. The teams are developing and implementing strategic action plans intended to apply workforce development and economic development strategies to the task of lifting more low-income residents out of poverty. In addition, the project is conducting a broad outreach effort to provide local officials across the United States with information and strategies for connecting workforce development, economic development and poverty reduction.

NLCI's Workforce Development for Poverty Reduction Project has been made possible by funding from the Ford, W. K. Kellogg, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur, and Annie E. Casey Foundations.

### About This Report

This report reflects what NLC has learned, to date, about the factors that are playing a role in the five cities' efforts. The main questions that the NLC project seeks to address are the following:

- How can local communities organize and mobilize municipal government and local elected officials to consider poverty reduction as a priority in making decisions about workforce and economic development?
- What are the key foundations for action to reduce poverty through workforce development? What institutions and/or sectors must be involved?
- What prior experience and expertise are critical for undertaking a "systems change" approach to these issues—i.e., an approach based on a thorough assessment of the major issues and/or barriers affecting low-income people's access to higher-wage employment?
- What are the challenges and opportunities facing local government in addressing these issues?
- What structural barriers to systems change are likely to be present and how can they be addressed?

Each of the "lessons learned" in this report (see below) addresses one or more of these ques-

tions and provides some perspective on how local economic and workforce development initiatives can be leveraged more effectively to reduce poverty. Our observations focus less on “best practices”—i.e., specific techniques that can produce favorable results—than on the conceptual frameworks and institutional and political processes that provide the foundation for action.

Because NLC is only midway through the project (it ends in June 2001), the insights in these pages should not be considered final or com-

prehensive. In the months ahead, we will continue to work with each city’s collaborative on developing and implementing action plans to achieve poverty reduction through workforce development, and we intend to issue more information and findings as our work proceeds.

In publishing this report now, NLC hopes to draw fresh attention to this important topic for America’s cities and the nation while promoting the new thinking and the dialogue that are needed to point the way to answers.

## **Lessons Learned**

**LESSON ONE.** *Existing municipal programs provide local governments with multiple opportunities to promote poverty reduction through workforce and economic development.*

**LESSON TWO.** *Cities have specific roles to play, but they cannot do it alone. Collaborations with county government, community-based organizations, business, labor, educational institutions, and others provide the impetus for broad-based change.*

**LESSON THREE.** *Cities and their partners need to think more broadly about workforce development and economic development. They need to be seen as labor market issues that affect the economy of the entire region, and as issues that are influenced by underlying factors such as race, class and power.*

**LESSON FOUR.** *Cities will succeed in using workforce and economic development strategies for poverty reduction to the extent that they support and adopt a “systems change” approach.*

While working with the five cities, NLC has tried to identify those factors that influence the success of local efforts to use workforce development to reduce poverty. Recognizing that different cities operate workforce and economic development programs under very different conditions, we have identified the following factors that appear to impact a city's progress:

- The level of commitment among local officials and others to reducing poverty;
- The city's experience and knowledge in undertaking public-private sector partnerships that target systemic reform;
- The extent and prior outcomes of intergovernmental and regional cooperation;
- The capacity of community-based organizations (CBOs) to engage in workforce development efforts;
- The capacity of publicly funded education and training institutions to support skills training for low-income people;
- The level of expertise in workforce development policies and practices both within the city and within the local/regional workforce development system; and
- Local understanding of and experience with systems-change initiatives.

These factors form the basis of four broad "lessons learned" that begin to highlight what cities and their partners need to do to achieve true progress in using workforce and economic development strategies to reduce poverty.

**LESSON ONE.** *Existing municipal programs provide local governments with multiple opportunities to promote poverty reduction through workforce and economic development.*

Municipalities participating in the NLC project are finding new opportunities to use existing city funds and programs for workforce development initiatives that promote poverty reduction. The bottom line: team members in the five cities have realized that administering federal job training monies is not the only way a city can help poor people gain access to living-wage employment.

An important step that the five cities are taking is to consider using existing program and funding authority to address these issues in new ways. For example, one city agency is exploring how to integrate a city-sponsored housing rehabilitation program that currently employs low-skilled city residents into the broader workforce development system. The goal: to add more skills training, job coaching, and other employment-related activities to the program.

Municipalities also see the importance of increasing collaboration within city government around workforce development goals. In nearly all of the five cities, there are examples of different city agencies that address workforce-related issues but that have little day-to-day contact and are unaware of each other's efforts. The problem: there are often no structures in place within city government to ensure that information is shared across agencies or that funding streams can be combined or leveraged to achieve broader goals.

Recognizing that city agencies with responsibility for community planning and economic devel-

opment, housing, and neighborhood services all are potential partners for linking low-income residents with jobs that lead to self-sufficiency, the cities participating in the NLC project are beginning to see the importance of interagency collaboration. In addition, they are beginning to understand that promoting collaboration is about more than bringing the right players to the table. It is also about re-examining and changing how those partners work with each other.

### What City Officials Can Do

- Inventory by city agency or department all existing programs and services that provide opportunities to promote workforce development. Examples might include: Community Development Block Grant programs, housing rehabilitation, brownfields clean-up and after-school programs.
- Consider creating a “development subcabinet” including the heads of city agencies engaged in employment training, housing, planning, economic and business development, transportation, and human services. Convening this type of cross-agency group on a regular basis will encourage sharing of information related to grants, new development projects and more. The group also can provide a forum for exploring how these activities can be linked to providing skills training and employment for low-income residents.

**Example:** The NLC leadership team in Pasadena is using a city program called Maintenance Assistance and Services to Homeowners (MASH) to promote interagency collaboration around the goal of using workforce development strategies to reduce poverty.

Through MASH, the city government—with funds

from the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)—provides free maintenance and housing rehabilitation services to low-income seniors and persons with disabilities. The program started about 10 years ago and is considered an integral part of the city’s neighborhood revitalization efforts.

In addition, MASH functions as a publicly funded jobs program that can promote workforce development. Through MASH, city government hires, trains, and provides up to one year of work experience and on-the-job training in housing rehabilitation and related services.

Until the NLC project started, people primarily thought of MASH as an income-support program operated by the city. But over the last year, NLC team members are exploring ways that MASH can connect with other programs and services to help upgrade the job skills of the workers. The experience in cross-agency collaboration and partnership, in turn, is setting the stage for other collaborative efforts for workforce development and poverty reduction.

**Example:** The experience of the Oklahoma City team shows the importance of doing a thorough assessment of the diverse resources available to local government for workforce development. The team is targeting two areas within the city’s Enterprise Community (EC) for its intervention and is starting an “inventory” of the public and private funds that are available to support workforce development programs and services related to housing, employment, transportation, and child care services. Team members will use the inventory to refine their strategy to expand living-wage employment opportunities for EC residents.

**LESSON TWO.** *Cities have specific roles to play, but they cannot do it alone. Collaborations with county government, community-based organizations, business, labor, educational institutions, and others provide the impetus for broad-based change.*

A major goal of NLC’s Workforce Development for Poverty Reduction Project is to assist cities as they reach out to potential partners to connect poor people with jobs that lead to economic self-sufficiency. In our work with the participating cities, we have encouraged them to create broad membership in their local collaboratives by reaching out to county government, community-based organizations, business, labor, education, and others. Midway through the

project, the five cities are starting to appreciate the value, as well as the difficulties, of collaborating with others around workforce development goals.

As we might expect, those cities that have more experience with investing staff time and resources to manage, operate, and support collaborative ventures will probably more readily undertake similar efforts for workforce development. The complex process of bringing together a diverse group of people to address a major public policy issue requires certain operational skills and expertise. In addition, it takes time for partners to learn how to work together and how to develop mutual trust by setting aside turf issues, sharing decision-making duties and

### **Background: The Workforce Investment Act of 1998**

The implementation of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998—which went into effect on July 1, 2000—has heightened the importance of a city-wide commitment to reducing poverty through workforce development.

Municipal officials should ensure that they have a chance to carry out the following responsibilities under the WIA:

Appointing members of the Workforce Investment Board (WIB), which is responsible for establishing workforce investment policies for the local area;

Developing, in collaboration with the WIB, the local five-year plan that describes types of education and training services for youth and adults;

Serving as, or appointing, the grant recipient for job training funds provided under the Act, which includes the responsibility for receiving and disbursing formula grant funds;

Working with the WIB to oversee the required one-stop customer service system intended to provide coordinated education, training and related services to youth and adults; and

Negotiating with the state’s governor to determine performance levels that will apply to local education and training programs and that could result in reduced or increased funding.

other responsibilities, and collectively raising and sharing resources.

In the following section, we highlight some of the lessons learned to date about working with specific partners in the community:

**Counties.** In most of the five cities, a major challenge is improving the collaboration and working relationship between the city and the county. County governments traditionally have received and administered federal funds for job training, yet the major need for jobs and skills training are among low-income city residents. This disconnect can be considered a structural weakness in the civic infrastructure and can be a hindrance to workforce development reforms.

The NLC project hopes to close the gap between municipal and county governments by bringing cities and counties together as members of a local collaborative to address these issues. Already, the sites are reporting ways that city and county governments are working together in more productive ways:

- One county government invited an elected city official to serve as a member of the Workforce Investment Act transition planning group.
- One city is looking for better ways to engage staff from the county's one-stop career center during even the most preliminary discussions with prospective businesses seeking to relocate to the area.
- In another city, municipal and county officials on the NLC team are exploring how to com-

bine funding streams to support construction skills training for low-income, predominantly Latino residents.


- A regional economic development consortium, involving primarily county executives, recently invited and included city government in a federal grant application to address regional skills shortages.

**Community-Based Organizations.** It has long been recognized that community-based organizations (CBOs) and other nongovernmental groups are potential partners for local government in promoting workforce development for poverty reduction. Long-term systems change, in fact, requires that organizations rooted in communities with large percentages of poor and working-poor citizens play an active role in linking residents to training and education opportunities.

While CBOs may operate programs and services for low-income families, they have limited experience in traditional workforce development activities.<sup>1</sup> Across the five cities, those nonprofit organizations that traditionally have provided job-related services are more likely to be city-wide agencies (e.g., Goodwill, Urban League and the United Way) rather than CBOs rooted in specific low-income neighborhoods. CBOs represented on the five cities' project teams tend to be community development or housing organizations with limited experience in workforce development.

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<sup>1</sup> See Michael J. Rich, Michael Giles and Emily Stern, *Collaborating to Reduce Poverty: City Halls and Community Based Organizations Working Together to Revitalize Neighborhoods*. Washington, DC: National League of Cities. 1998.



The consequences of the CBOs' lack of expertise in this area are far-reaching. Local efforts to reduce poverty through workforce and economic development obviously will be limited in their ability to achieve results if local nonprofit organizations do not have the needed capacity to carry out training and related activities.

**Educational Institutions.** In the workforce development system of the 21st century, working adults must be connected to systems for lifelong learning in order to stay economically competitive. By providing the institutional infrastructure and training to support workforce development initiatives, public and private postsecondary educational institutions are yet another key player in the change process. The lesson from the NLC's project thus far is that these institutions must assume new roles in workforce development.

A community college in one of the five cities provides a glimpse of how colleges and universities will have to change. Nationally recognized for its innovative work in manufacturing and its outreach to nontraditional students, the college already has begun holding classes at neighborhood-based organizations in an area of the city with persistently high unemployment. The college's expertise and resources could be useful as the city's team continues to investigate strategies for increasing living-wage jobs in health care and manufacturing.

**Business.** As they begin to view businesses as "customers" of local workforce development efforts, all five cities are coming to recognize that the workforce development system needs employer input in order to produce qualified, highly skilled workers

However, employer involvement in the NLC project has been limited to date. If present at all, employer representatives on the NLC teams are primarily from trade associations, local chambers of commerce or regional economic development associations.

The lack of business participation may be due to the fact that tougher competition, tighter margins, and reductions in middle management levels have caused many businesses to cut back on their community involvement and investment, concentrating first on direct, bottom-line issues of productivity and profitability.

In one city, limited employer involvement may reflect changes in the city's business community and the impact of globalization on the local economy. Team members observe that much of the old private-sector leadership has retired or died, and the new leadership is not as involved as its predecessors were in civic affairs.

Furthermore, as more multinational and nationwide firms locate in the city, the number of business leaders who actually live in the city and who participate in civic activities is dwindling. Therefore, these business leaders are not as "invested" in the community as those of previous generations.

This difficulty in engaging employers in the NLC project may also stem from the commonly held view of workforce development as a social service that city government or another public agency provides to help poor people. Many businesses also may not yet recognize that worker skills and workforce development issues are a bottom-line concern. And while employers publicly support the goal of poverty reduction, they do not agree on the proper means for

achieving this goal. At two of the sites, city government passed “living-wage” resolutions that the local chambers of commerce vigorously opposed. Nevertheless, perceptions are beginning to change as the planning efforts for the Workforce Investment Act (see box, page X) shift the focus of local and regional workforce development to include the employer as “customer.”

An important challenge for the city teams as they seek to more effectively engage employers in the months and years ahead is to strengthen the connection between economic and workforce development. Specifically, this will involve encouraging companies that benefit from public subsidies and incentives to work with local government and its partners to provide family-supporting jobs to low-income city residents.

**Labor.** Labor involvement, like involvement by business, has so far been limited in most of the five cities. Although a representative of the building trades is part of one city’s team and a

representative from the United Auto Workers (UAW) is a team member in another city, organized labor has not yet been actively engaged in the other three cities. Unions still are viewed by some team members as adversaries that often demand higher wages and benefits that keep prospective employers away.


The reality, however, is that unions have an interest in and the necessary resources for supporting workforce development in these cities. Unions like the UAW, for example, have been operating joint labor-management worker training programs for nearly 20 years.

The city where labor involvement is most extensive provides an indication of what it takes to build union support. The systems change effort in this city is focusing on getting more low-income Latinos into the skilled trades, and the “buy-in” and support of the central labor council is key. To accomplish its goals, the city is using CDBG funds to support a construction trades training program targeted to low-income Hispanics.

Rather than developing a stand-alone program that simply prepares a group of participants for work in the construction industry, the project is designed to build a partnership with key local workforce development institutions, training providers, and the local trade unions to create career pathways to well paying jobs. In addition, the project seeks to increase the amount of work in the area that is available to union contractors that employ graduates of the training effort. The goal is to get local public entities (e.g., city, county and local school districts) to give bidding priority to firms that employ participants as either apprentices or workers.

### **What City Officials Can Do**

- Explore how the city contracting and subcontracting process for grant programs such as CDBG can involve community-based and faith-based nonprofit organizations.
- Work with municipal unions that represent city workers to promote interagency staff training. For example, consider training field staff from the city’s planning or economic development department to know more about customized training that a local community college might be able to offer a prospective employer.



As this example shows, the challenge for municipal government in working with labor on these issues is to look beyond the collective bargaining aspect of the relationship with unions and to see them as a resource for skills training and access to better paying jobs.

**Example:** Thanks to the NLC team’s work in Dayton, City Hall and county government are working together to build public-private partnerships that can help unemployed and underemployed city residents access living-wage jobs in manufacturing and health care. Central to the team’s strategy is the use of community-based organizations (CBOs) as intermediaries and partners in the workforce development system.

Already, several CBOs in Dayton’s low-income African American and Appalachian communities have secured surplus welfare funds from the county to recruit and train local residents as “job coaches.” These coaches are going door-to-door to let residents know about training and employment opportunities available through the county Job Center. The coaches also will function as case managers and be available to help troubleshoot problems at the job site—an important factor in job retention.

The CBOs also hope to obtain support to operate a store-front center with a computer link to the countywide job bank and extensive support services for families. In addition, one of the NLC team members, Sinclair Community College, is reaching out and holding classes at community centers in the targeted neighborhoods as a first step in letting residents know about the college’s own education and skills training opportunities.

**LESSON THREE.** *Cities and their partners need to think more broadly about workforce development and economic development. They need to be seen as labor market issues that affect the economy of the entire region, and as issues that are influenced by underlying factors such as race, class and power.*

Across the five cities, team members and city officials tend to view workforce development as the day-to-day administration and delivery of federally funded job training programs for poor people. But by focusing on workforce development as an anti-poverty program rather than a strategic tool to drive local economic development, local leaders may miss opportunities to expand living-wage employment for low-income residents.

Through technical assistance, the NLC project team is encouraging the cities to promote all aspects of workforce development as part of a broader economic development strategy. This may include skills training, work experience, school-to-work, and other initiatives designed to serve and attract employers and create economic opportunities for low-income city residents.

As the teams develop and implement their action plans, they are realizing that labor markets are regional, rather than local, in nature. Just as there is often a disconnect between economic and workforce development (see box), cities throughout the country are finding that there is also a disconnect between residents who need jobs that promote self-sufficiency and the location of those jobs. As a result, many cities now are exploring regional

approaches such as reverse-commute programs that help connect job seekers with available employment.

Two trends that may accelerate the pace of regional collaboration on these issues are continued economic growth and tighter labor markets. A case in point: in one site, the local community college hosted a regional skills summit that brought together city and county elected officials and education and business leaders to talk about how best to meet the growing skills

shortage in the region. Later in the year, the college took the lead in applying for a federal regional skills consortia grant and solicited support from the NLC leadership team in crafting its application.

While skills shortages may provide an added impetus for regional efforts, the presence of regional divides along racial and income lines impedes collaboration. As a result of plant closings, sprawl, and “white flight,” many central cities have become home to displaced workers and their families, many of them African Americans and Latinos who are unable to access the new, higher-paying jobs in the suburbs. This inequity is exacerbated by the fact that many of the new suburban jobs were generated through lucrative tax incentives and other subsidies offered by county governments.

In one of the project cities, a local automotive company has contracted its hiring out to a non-local company that requires jobseekers to interview at a hotel that is outside the city limits and not easily accessible by public transportation. As the NLC project proceeds, the project teams will be working to identify the extent to which practices such as this—whether motivated by racial bias or plain ignorance—stand as obstacles to workforce development for poverty reduction, and how these obstacles can be overcome.

There is hardly a city or town in America that is not affected by the dynamics of race, class and power. The lesson emerging from the NLC project is that these dynamics operate in complex ways and must be addressed in the specific historical and cultural context of each community.

**Example:** In Flint, NLC team members are show-

### **What City Officials Can Do**

- Increase collaboration with county government and nearby cities to improve public transportation systems and child care services so low-income residents can access good-paying jobs in surrounding communities and at nonstandard times—such as weekends and evenings.
- Ensure that Workforce Development Investment Board has and uses broad authority for strategic planning and convening – not just oversight of WIA.
- Support local efforts that encourage employers to train managers and front-line supervisors to work more effectively with workers from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Promote community and neighborhood economic development. Find ways to encourage developers receiving public subsidies such as tax breaks and low-interest loans to hire unemployed and low-wage workers—especially from communities where new development is targeted.
- Review hiring at publicly funded local agencies that engage in workforce development and related services to ensure staff reflects the diversity of the customer base.

## Linking Workforce Development and Economic Development

Most local governments continue to view workforce and economic development as separate functions to be administered by different agencies. As a result, they miss opportunities to help achieve the goals of both functions.

Some cities, recognizing the adverse impact of the lack of coordination, are seeking to create new linkages between economic and workforce development. Teams in two of the NLC project cities, for example, are investigating how city staff who administer business development and housing programs can become more familiar with services available for skills-training and related workforce development activities—whether through the city, county, or some other entity (e.g., a community college).

In all likelihood, other cities soon will join these two in setting out to link workforce and economic development, thanks to the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). WIA requires that Workforce Investment Boards include public and private sector economic development agencies as partners. While participation itself does not lead to coordination, the legislative mandate could encourage and promote partnerships. Thus, for example, WIA may prompt cities and counties to collaborate on the collection and sharing of information about new jobs created through economic development—specifically data on job quality (e.g., wages, benefits, retention).

New technologies also can be instrumental in promoting the sharing of economic development and labor market data, as well as data about workforce development, job training, and employment opportunities. All cities can benefit from linking into labor market and occupational information systems such as O\*NET, ACI Net, America’s Job Bank, and other free resources.

ing that cities do not have to choose between sending city residents to the suburbs for jobs or creating new jobs in the city. Drawing on the experience of cities such as Washington, DC, Flint is developing a Community Business Partnership (CBP) to stimulate employment at the neighborhood level.

Last fall, representatives of Flint’s team visited Washington to learn more about how to facilitate partnerships between large corporations in the region and neighborhood businesses in Flint’s Enterprise Community (EC) and HUBZone.

The plan in Flint is for selected regional firms to work with small businesses located in the Flint EC to help them grow by developing new markets; strengthening business operations; identifying investments and financing prospects; and expanding employment.

***LESSON FOUR.*** *Cities will succeed in using workforce and economic development strategies for poverty reduction to the extent that they support and adopt a “systems change” approach.*

At the start of the NLC project, we asked the five

cities to select one or two specific structural or policy-level strategies to promote poverty reduction that they would implement as a part of the project. The long-term goal is to use the initiative as a vehicle to test new ways of doing business and to use the results of these tests to promote longer-term systems change. Thus, the project is not an end in itself, but a means to change the system through structural or policy-level transformations.

A “systems change” approach to workforce development focuses on identifying the major issues and/or barriers affecting low-income people’s access to higher-wage employment. For example, in one of the cities, efforts to develop neighborhood-based job coaching programs with CBOs are providing a platform for identifying new ways that CBOs can play an integral role in the local workforce development system. In another city, neighborhood-based construction skills training, if successful, could be a model for setting up other types of skilled training programs.

In all five cities, local elected officials and others are recognizing that these types of systems change initiatives are complex endeavors that require significant attention. Cities must be willing to allocate staff and money to develop and manage a collaborative, while offering seed resources to support actions that the collaborative proposes.


By committing resources to these efforts, City Hall signals that a project is a priority, thereby encouraging the participation of other public partners, private sector employers, and low-income groups. The sites have begun to see the benefits of allocating adequate resources and

employing dedicated and qualified staff to implement and manage initiatives. One of the cities has assigned a full-time professional to staff the project, another recently hired a part-time consultant, and a third city assigned a senior professional with experience managing a local collaborative focused on systems change.

In the end, whether or not these cities commit to true systems change will hinge on the extent to which local government publicly supports policies that help create paths out of poverty for low-income residents in their cities. When they first started meeting, the teams spent time determining more precisely what low-income job seekers need to become more economically self-sufficient—including child care, transportation, health care, skills training and other support services.

### **What City Officials Can Do**

- Review the process for awarding city contracts and public subsidies such as tax breaks, tax increment financing (TIFs), and low-interest loans. How can employers that benefit from these public dollars be encouraged to promote workforce development for low-income city residents?
- Consider municipal living-wage ordinances, on-the-job-training, first-source hiring agreements, and similar provisions as a condition of receiving public subsidies for development.



For systems change to take hold in these cities, local officials and others will have to go the next step. They will need to talk more strategically about how to use community funds and federal and state welfare dollars to support skills training and post-placement services for the working poor and those leaving welfare. Will mayors in these cities play an active role in setting up the Workforce Investment Boards created under the Workforce Investment Act? And how will all stakeholders ensure that monies made available through the Act are coordinated with other resources for the benefit of both city job seekers and employers?

These types of changes will require municipal and county governments to work with each other and with other sectors in new ways. An important goal of the NLC project is to document and draw lessons from the participating cities' experiences as they work to make systems change a reality.

EXAMPLE: As part of the NLC team's work in Modesto, local government is supporting collaboration between organized labor, employers and

community-based organizations (CBOs) to expand employment for low-income workers in the city and county. The Modesto Workforce Development Neighborhood Construction Project aims to boost job skills, as well as wages and benefits, for low-income Hispanic youth and welfare recipients, along with others facing multiple barriers to employment.

The long-term goal of the Modesto project is not only to increase employment but also to impact local government policies to promote workforce development for poverty reduction. Team members hope to secure public support for ongoing construction training, hiring, funding and contracting policies in the City of Modesto and Stanislaus County.

A key to reaching the project's "systems change" objectives is keeping local officials informed about the team's progress. Team members make regular briefings and presentations to City Council about the project's progress. Team members also have formed a public policy task force that is exploring policy options to support the project.



As the five cities in the NLC project proceed to implement their systems change strategies in the months ahead, perhaps the most important lesson still to be learned is how best to mobilize support and buy-in from diverse leadership groups. Among the questions still to be answered:

How can the five teams more effectively engage employers and organized labor—not only as stakeholders in the political process but also as experts who can offer unique insights that will help frame effective solutions?

How can cities build new relationships with county government aimed at improving the broader regional labor market and economy while benefiting low-income city residents?

How can cities partner more effectively with community-based organizations to link poor and working-poor citizens to training and education opportunities?

Helping the five cities tap into the resources and commitment of these partners will be an important priority for the NLC's Workforce Development for Poverty Reduction Project in the months ahead. In a related effort, NLC will be working with each of the teams to identify resources and institutional support that can help continue the collaboration beyond the spring of 2001, when the current NLC involvement in these

local efforts is scheduled to end. It is hoped that the cities can find ways to connect the work begun under the NLC project with the strategic planning of the local Workforce Investment Boards for Workforce Investment Act implementation, as well as other local, state, and federal funding sources.

In the months ahead, NLC will be working to refine and extend the lessons learned that are presented here and to conduct a broad national outreach effort aimed at disseminating and promoting these lessons. Because our focus is on the conceptual frameworks and institutional and political processes that provide the foundation for action, we recognize that other perspectives are needed to get a full picture of "what works" to connect poverty reduction and workforce development. The combination of our lessons learned and best-practices information from other sources should provide cities and their partners with a solid foundation of information and perspectives on which to build successful programs.

NLC looks forward to continuing its work with the five cities, and we welcome comments and suggestions about how best to link workforce development and poverty reduction as the focus of a unified agenda for America's cities and the nation.





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