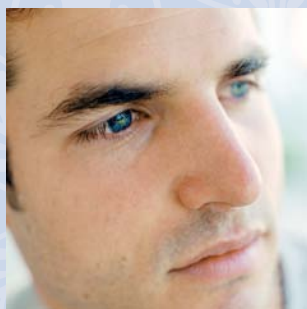
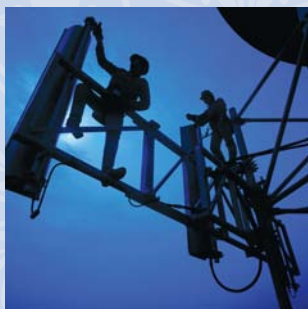
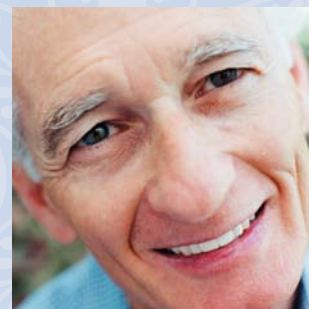


# Improving Workplace Opportunities For Limited English-Speaking Workers



AN OVERVIEW OF PRACTICE IN THE  
MANUFACTURING SECTOR



The Manufacturing Institute/Center for Workforce Success  
Jobs for the Future

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**Improving Workplace Opportunities for Limited English-Speaking Workers**

*An Overview of Practice in the Manufacturing Sector*

Prepared for the U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Vocational and Adult Education, April 2006

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## INTRODUCTION

Imagine you're invisible. When others make decisions or offer services, they don't acknowledge you. Your voice isn't heard. This invisibility confers upon you two things: an existence where those around you don't acknowledge your presence or your contributions, and an existence where you can't find help to solve your challenges and become "un-invisible."

Our society is full of people whose contributions and desires to integrate often go unnoticed and unfulfilled. These people—immigrants—play a strong and vital role in American society and the economy, but we have yet to fully understand or act on how to best help them reach their full potential as U.S. citizens and workers.

From now until 2015, half the growth in the U.S. working-age population will come from immigrants. And from 2016–2035, all of that growth will be from immigration. Thus, it behooves us to recognize both the contributions and the needs of our immigrant workers for a greater role in American society and the workplace.

In 2005-2006, The Manufacturing Institute of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and Jobs for the Future (JFF) conducted research on the good practices underway to help immigrant workers in manufacturing become more productive. Based on initial research and our finding in 2004 under a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, this current research—funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Adult and Vocational Education—focused on the techniques manufacturers used to train their immigrant workers and improve their English language skills while at work.

We found some interesting initiatives that both promoted business goals and strengthened workers' English and technical skills. These programs integrated technical skill training with English language instruction. Employers supported the programs because they had a measurable, positive impact on the bottom line. However, there aren't enough similar programs and there are real hurdles to expanding them to additional firms.

Most publicly funded English as a Second Language (ESL) providers have neither experience with nor interest in working with employers to provide training customized to their businesses. Their various reasons include federal regulations, a long-term disconnect between the mission of public literacy programs and the goals of employers, the existence of long waiting lists in many programs, and programs that believe they are doing a great job and see no need to change.

One reason we have a strong interest in promoting these employer-supported models is because we found a relationship between innovative workplace-based ESL instruction and “high road” employer practices. For example, when employers make greater efforts to provide workers with some English proficiency it’s because they understand that productivity increases when employers 1) make sure frontline workers are adequately trained; 2) employ immigrants on the frontline; and 3) treat English language instruction as a productivity-enhancing measure. In some cases, this results in, or is coincident with, profit-sharing plans that act as incentives for full participation in ESL programs offered by these firms.

But we must ask ourselves: Can we develop and encourage a cadre of ESL providers to offer more workplace-based services? Can we help community stakeholders—such as workforce intermediaries, ethnic societies, literacy providers, the public workforce system and employers—understand the benefits of collaborating to train immigrants for work? After all, immigrants come to the United States to work. Wouldn’t it be in our best interest to find ways to help them become *better* workers?

Lastly, how can our findings generate more good practice models that will benefit employers and their workers so that we can continue to support and strengthen our communities and regions—economically, socially and educationally?

We think this report is a big step toward understanding the issues involved with providing ESL training at the workplace. The next step is up to you. Help us take these findings out to your communities and begin the hard work of rethinking how we provide training to our “invisible” workforce.



Phyllis Eisen  
*Vice President,*  
The Manufacturing Institute  
National Association of Manufacturers



Marlene Seltzer  
*President*  
Jobs for the Future



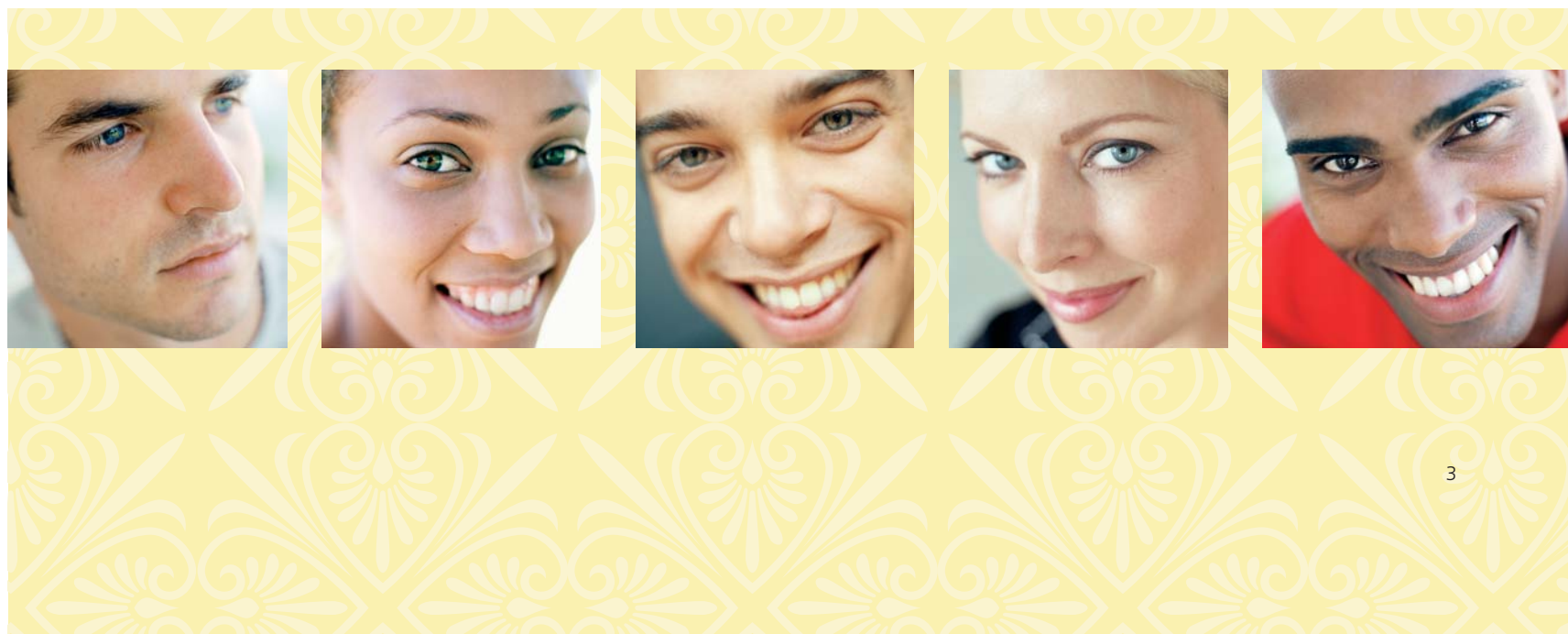
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More than 80 percent of respondents to a 2005 NAM survey indicated they were “experiencing a shortage of qualified workers overall—with 13 percent reporting severe shortages and 68 percent indicating moderate shortages.” Nine in 10 respondents indicated a moderate to severe shortage of qualified, skilled production employees, including front-line workers, such as machinists, operators, craft workers, distributors and technicians.

Employers are relying increasingly on immigrants to fill these positions. From 1990–2000, immigrants accounted for more than half of civilian workforce growth, and all labor force growth in the Northeast. Immigrants will account for half of the nation’s working-age population growth between 2006 and 2015 and for all the growth between 2016 and 2035.

A substantial proportion of these workers enter the workforce with little or no English language proficiency—a skill many consider crucial to the manufacturing sector’s long-term competitiveness and productivity. The challenge escalates for employers whose business models rely on a high-quality product because they need workers who can learn new skills or learn how to operate new machinery quickly. These employers are less able to accommodate workers who cannot speak English. Further, employers need workers who can communicate suggestions for product and process improvement to supervisors, and who can speak with coworkers of different nationalities. For many of these employers, English is the common denominator not only among the immigrants on the shop floor, but also between managers and workers.

Given the nation’s long-term and growing reliance on immigrants, the business world and those organizations and agencies that support workers and business must learn to manage and prepare immigrants as new workers. *Improving Workplace Opportunities for Limited English-Speaking Workers* focuses on exemplary practices that improve English language proficiency in the manufacturing sector.



For this report, JFF and The Manufacturing Institute identified four features characterizing exemplary ESL training practices:

- **Mutually Beneficial:** practices that would benefit employers *and* workers;
- **Sustainable:** practices that would, or are likely to, continue beyond their current offering;
- **Scalable:** practices employers could potentially expand to include a larger number of employers and workers; and
- **Replicable:** practices that other employers could duplicate without making significant changes.

The report presents case studies of four firms and their English language instruction practices. Based on these case studies, as well as secondary research and interviews conducted, the report—

- provides an overview of practice regarding ESL in manufacturing firms;
- summarizes factors that seem to support exemplary practice and inhibit exemplary practice in this field;
- makes recommendations to employers and other state and local stakeholders.

## An Overview of Practice: Workplace-based ESL in Manufacturing

The research suggests there is a wide range of practices among manufacturing employers aimed at improving the English language skills of their immigrant workers. Few employers do anything to improve the English language skills of frontline workers, while others take some action, but their attempts are sporadic, non-systematic and disconnected from their firms' business plans. Too few employers are moving toward a systematic, sustainable approach to training frontline workers and, as a result, a strategic approach to improving English language skills among immigrant workers. The business plans of these firms include ESL instruction, and skill training in general, and they measure the impact of instruction on business success.

## Factors Affecting Exemplary Practice

This research suggests that the delivery of ESL training in the workplace is only sustainable when the employer considers English language instruction essential to the firm's profitability. Testimony from a number of employers interviewed during this research strongly suggests that they consider ESL, customized to meet their needs, as a business asset. They do not have the same opinion of traditional ESL.

The research identified three factors that support exemplary workplace-based ESL:

1. *Firm practices that promote employee participation in ESL at the workplace, either voluntarily or as a requirement by the firm:* These practices include: making ESL instruction



part of the firm's business model; delivering ESL instruction on-site and on the clock; tying ESL instructional content to work and skill development; sharing ESL productivity gains with workers; and tying training to broader competitiveness strategies.

2. *Public support for an active role for intermediaries in workplace-based ESL:* There are organizations that can provide third-party assistance to the challenges of non-English-speaking workers. Called workforce intermediaries, they are community-based or business organizations that can take the lead in serving both employers' skill needs and workers' career needs. These organizations help close gaps between what public systems can provide and what workers and employers need. The roles that an intermediary can play in support of immigrant workers include: streamlining access to funding; brokering and providing training services, including customized ESL instruction; connecting firms and workers to broader community services; aggregating employer demand; and persuading firms to adopt a training-based competitiveness strategy that includes ESL instruction for workers.
3. *Union support for workplace-based ESL:* For organized labor, representing the interests of workers increasingly means negotiating contracts that include English language instruction in the workplace. A little more than one-third of the companies covered by our research are unionized; each firm has implemented programs that place it among the more successful firms regarding immigrant workforce training. These programs tend to emphasize longer-term English instruction that is integrated with technical-skills training. Some of these programs also draw on community-based organizations for support services that better enable workers to participate in training.

The research also identified a number of factors that inhibit expansion of exemplary ESL in the workplace. The primary factors are —

- insufficient public funding for ESL;
- uncertainty if ESL programs customized for employers meet federal standards;
- limited capacity in the field to develop and deliver ESL customized for employers; and
- insufficient attention in the field to developing and supporting program models that meet the needs of both employers and employees.

### **Where Do We Go from Here?**

The findings, conclusions and best practices offered in *Improving Workplace Opportunities for Limited English-Speaking Workers* lead to a number of potential next steps for researchers, funding agencies, national agencies, national business organizations and others. No one can disagree with the reality and growing nature of the problems described here. America needs immigrant workers, but America's businesses—especially manufacturers—are unprepared to accept limited English-speaking immigrants and quickly lead them to productive contributions.

JFF and The Manufacturing Institute suggest the following “next steps” in addressing the growing challenges and helping American business:

- Confirm the lack of American manufacturing preparedness by conducting research from a larger sample of employers;
- Conduct further investigations to identify additional exemplary practices, especially practices that are woven into manufacturers’ business plans;
- Identify state-level policy and practices that have been demonstrated to support the challenge of immigrant workers in leading manufacturing states;
- Create documents and toolkits for manufacturers that efficiently describe the problems and lay out potential solutions. Widely disseminate these documents through national-level events and actions;
- Further investigate the use of intermediary organizations as the most effective vehicle for assisting local manufacturers and preparing training materials and planning documents to assist them in assuming the role; and
- Test the lessons and exemplary practices gathered and presented in this project by conducting a series of local-level projects to assist local manufacturers with immigrant worker issues.



## UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUES

### We're Hiring

After shedding jobs for more than 30 years—losing more than 3 million in the last seven years alone—and trying to survive the pressures of globalization and technology infusion, American manufacturers are now looking for workers (Congressional Budget Office 2004a). And, with increasing frequency, the workers who show up to fill the positions are immigrants. Baby boomers are beginning to retire, and young replacement workers have been reluctant to take jobs in factories they wrongly believe to be dirty, dangerous and dead-end as a career choice. During the past 15 years, vacancies in the manufacturing workforce have been filled, to a large degree, by workers from Mexico, Cambodia, Honduras, Liberia, Poland, Brazil and workers from nearly every other country who see the United States as an opportunity for a better life.

The migration of immigrants into America's workforce, and specifically into manufacturing, is not a recent phenomenon, but it has attracted growing attention as more people recognize the importance of immigrants to the nation's economy. In fact, immigrants are now crucial to the maintenance and growth of the workforce, especially in manufacturing. Currently, they represent 14 percent of the U.S. workforce (20.3 million workers), and, in the last 10 years, the number of foreign-born workers increased at a faster rate than did the native workforce. Consider:

- From 1990–2000, more than half of the growth of *the entire U.S. civilian workforce*—and all of the growth of the labor force in the Northeast—was due to immigrants;
- Although the unemployment rate is higher for immigrants than for native-born workers, more than 90 percent of new immigrants who were active in the labor force are employed; and

- A recent study projects that immigrants will account for half of the working-age population growth between 2006 and 2015 and *for all the growth between 2016 and 2035* (Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees 2004).

Many of these workers, driven by the belief that a better life and economic opportunity await, arrive in the United States with little formal advanced education or a mastery of the English language. This is not an easy path. In truth, most immigrants, challenged by English proficiency, face formidable obstacles. Some even are illiterate in their own languages (Capps 2003). Yet even with the challenge of poor communication and lacking critical job skills, immigrants are—for a great many employers—the only source of new workers. As examples from across the country demonstrate, when employers cannot draw from the immigrant workforce pool, their options are not good. They are forced to reduce the number of shifts, close some production lines and even shutter factories. As a source of new workers, immigrants appear to be a permanent and significant way for American businesses to grow, compete or survive.

Nevertheless, myriad opinions swirl around issues related to immigrant workers. There is little agreement on the net effect of hiring low-skilled, low-literate, non-English-speaking immigrants. A depressing effect on wages in entry-level occupations—as much as a 7.4-percent wage reduction for native-born workers without a high school education has been demonstrated (Borjas 2004). Others note that the immigrant workforce in manufacturing may displace native-born workers, specifically high school dropouts and ex-offenders (Camarota 2005). Indeed, the negative effects on the native-born workforce will likely require attention and remedy, but recent research suggests that populations in some states would have declined without immigration (Sum 2004). Many businesses included in this research report that they would have had trouble surviving without immigrant workers.

The need for immigrants in the manufacturing workforce is illuminated in recent surveys by the NAM, which confirms the shortage of skilled workers in the country's most competitive manufacturing firms. In its *2005 Skills Gap Report*, the NAM noted that more than 80 percent of its member firms reported shortages of qualified skilled workers in the previous year. These firms also reported that these shortages make maintaining production and customer satisfaction levels increasingly difficult (*2005 Skills Gap Report—A Survey of the American Manufacturing Workforce*, the National Association of Manufacturers, The Manufacturing Institute and Deloitte Consulting, December 2005).

### **Background: Training the Immigrant Workforce**

The competitiveness of an industrialized economy depends on worker productivity, which is a factor of technology investment and the efficiency and effectiveness of its workforce.

The federal government alone spends more than \$13 billion a year, through a wide range of programs, on workforce training needed to keep American industries competitive. On top of this, there also are significant state investments and employer expenditures. Increasingly, this has meant investing in improving the English language proficiency of a growing immigrant workforce.

### **The Challenge to Manufacturers**

This is particularly true in manufacturing firms, where the demand for immigrant workers is revealing new challenges and issues. It is a conundrum: On one hand, employers are eagerly hiring immigrants. On the other, few are prepared to assimilate these new workers and their skill and language obstacles. This project confirmed that few companies provide their workers with instruction in basic skills and ESL training—or even understand how to arrange and provide the needed training. A 1994 survey fielded by the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that only 3 percent of the 12,000 businesses surveyed offered training in basic skills or ESL.

The challenge escalates for employers whose business models rely on a high-quality product, not just a low price. This approach requires workers who can learn new skills or learn how to operate new machinery quickly. These employers are less able to accommodate workers who cannot speak English. Further, they need workers who can communicate suggestions for product and process improvements to supervisors, and who can speak with coworkers of different nationalities. For many of these employers, English is the common denominator not only among the immigrants on the shop floor, but also between managers and workers. Knowing the English language is key for these workers to succeed and advance.

Given the nation's long-term and growing reliance on immigrants, the business world and those organizations and agencies that support workers and business must learn to manage and prepare immigrants as new workers. This report and its supporting data focus on and identify exemplary practices that improve English language proficiency in the manufacturing sector.

### **Research Goal**

This paper presents the second phase of a multiphase project conducted by a partnership between The Manufacturing Institute, the research and education arm of the NAM, and JFF. The first phase of the research, led by The Manufacturing Institute, included both an extensive written survey circulated to the organization's membership and a literature review.

The literature review established that remarkably little research had been conducted that questioned how best to prepare and absorb immigrants into a firm's workforce (Hamm

2004). Numerous studies confirmed the increasing number of immigrants, their demographic characteristics and positive or negative effects on the labor market. However, few reports addressed practices in the workplace, particularly employers' strategies for incorporating immigrants into the workforce (Burt 2003).

The Manufacturing Institute fielded the 2004 survey to 6,365 employers, eliciting 327 responses. Manufacturing firms identified lack of English proficiency among immigrant workers and the poor communication resulting from workers' lack of English proficiency as their primary challenges to maintaining and advancing an immigrant workforce. The firms also identified this as the main arena in which they would be interested in receiving assistance with regard to raising the productivity of their immigrant employees.

The purpose of this research, then, was to —

- provide an overview of education/training practices in the manufacturing sector with a focus on provision of ESL to immigrant workers in the workplace;
- identify exemplary programs and document them;
- identify factors that support and inhibit the expansion of such exemplary programs; and
- make recommendations to key stakeholders — employers, employer associations and state and local providers of workforce and educational services — on ways to increase the provision of workplace-based ESL instruction for employees.

## Research Methodology

### Step One

JFF interviewed 15 of the small and medium-size firms that indicated in The Manufacturing Institute survey that they hire and train immigrant workers. Based on these initial interviews, JFF then developed an interview tool for identifying the most salient issues regarding training immigrant workers in the manufacturing sector.

### Step Two

Using this tool, JFF interviewed 65 employers, identified through a canvass of workforce intermediaries, six focus groups and a review of secondary sources. The interview tool addressed several issues related to hiring and training the immigrant workforce, including employer motivation, training program structures, outcomes, funding sources and main obstacles to the delivery of training to immigrant workers.

These interviews provided information on employer practices, ranging from minimal interventions to comprehensive human capital development approaches. The Manufacturing Institute, JFF and the project Advisory Group established a set of criteria for analyzing these practices. Then, The Manufacturing Institute/JFF team identified six employers whose



practices best met the criteria, and continued to narrow down the firms to the four most promising sites for visits. The Manufacturing Institute and JFF also conducted two focus groups in each of three cities: Chicago, Ill., Portland, Ore., and Providence, R.I. These focus groups included varying mixes of employers, workforce development service providers and representatives of state or local agencies responsible for funding immigrant training. The purpose was to closely examine the issues related to training the immigrant workforce, as identified by employers, training providers and public agencies. JFF conducted four site visits between October 2005 and December 2005.

### Exemplary Practices

To identify practices for recommendation, JFF and The Manufacturing Institute identified four features of exemplary practice:

- **Mutually Beneficial:** practices that would benefit employers and workers;
- **Sustainable:** practices that would, or are likely to, continue beyond their current offering;
- **Scalable:** practices employers could potentially expand to include a larger number of employers and workers; and
- **Replicable:** practices that other employers could duplicate without making significant changes.

### Structure of the Report

Case studies of the four selected firms and their practices regarding English language instruction are presented in the next section of this paper, "Case Studies of Promising Practices."

Conclusions drawn from the primary and secondary research are presented in the last section of the report. The section has three parts, and each topic includes recommendations to employers and other state and local stakeholders:

- An overview of practice regarding ESL in manufacturing firms;
- A summary of factors that seemed to support exemplary practice in this field; and
- A summary of factors that seemed to inhibit exemplary practice.



✿ The number of foreign born workers increased at a faster rate than did the native workforce in the last ten years. ✿

Elizabeth Grieco, *The Foreign Born in the U.S. Labor Force: Numbers and Trends*, 2004.

## CASE STUDIES OF PROMISING PRACTICES

### Woodfold-Marco

Woodfold-Marco Manufacturing, Inc., located in the Portland, Ore., metropolitan area, manufactures custom accordion folding doors and roll-up windows. Woodfold-Marco has more than 100 workers, about 25 percent to 30 percent of whom are Hispanic/Latino. Some are fluent in English. Key features of Woodfold-Marco's approach include lean ESL training and partnerships.

#### Lean ESL Training

Woodfold-Marco first got involved in lean ESL and lean manufacturing training through its membership in the Northwest High Performance Enterprise Consortium (HPEC), a group of manufacturers taking on high-performance or lean manufacturing. It teamed up with Portland Community College and the Oregon Manufacturing Extension Partnership (OMEP) to offer its workers both lean ESL and lean manufacturing training.

The community college provided 12 hours of lean ESL training to help prepare Woodfold-Marco's non-native English-speaking workers to take part in lean manufacturing training. The ESL training—offered on-site, on the clock—covered an introduction to lean manufacturing, lean concepts, tools and vocabulary, and value-stream mapping. It included lectures, small group discussions, classroom exercises and other activities.

The college's lean ESL model also calls for instructors to attend and support the lean manufacturing training, described on page 14, and visit non-native English-speaking workers at the plant. In addition, instructors identify bilingual workers who can serve as

#### Company Facts

**Location:** Portland, Ore.

**Products:** Custom accordion folding doors and roll-up windows.

**Workforce:** More than 100 workers, 25 to 30 percent of whom are Hispanic/Latino.

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Training includes cross-training in various occupations, providing workers with multiple advancement pathways.



champions of lean manufacturing in the plant and support non-native English-speaking workers' participation in its implementation. These champions are typically production workers who have been provided with additional supervisory training. They are distinct from the Lean Facilitator, which is a management position. There also is a component covering U.S. workplace culture.

OMEF then offers lean manufacturing training, usually within a month of the lean ESL training. The topics covered include: lean terminology, concepts, tools and implementation. It also includes simulation and hands-on exercises. (In addition to lean manufacturing training, OMEF provides companies with ongoing technical support as they go about implementing lean manufacturing.)

The lean ESL training provides Woodfold-Marco's Hispanic/Latino workers with additional support, giving them a basic understanding of lean manufacturing terms and concepts before the process training, according to Rick Alvarado, the company's lean facilitator. While lean ESL/ lean training does not automatically result in a pay increase for workers, the benefits are substantial: The training includes cross-training in various occupations, providing workers with multiple advancement pathways through the company's various divisions, and it provides added job security by increasing workers' ability to work more productively. For the employer, the benefits are increased productivity and reduced inventory, which has led to increasing year-end bonuses for each worker in this Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) firm.

In addition, lean ESL and lean manufacturing training have broken down barriers internally, according to Alvarado. Workers are more involved in the company—providing feedback, doing their jobs as experts and making improvements. Workers feel good about their jobs and included in company strategy. The training also helped change the company's culture and the way it operates.

Alvarado, who attended lean ESL training, saw that workers were very uncomfortable at first. They were afraid to show lack of skills or knowledge. However, once comfortable, they engaged in discussions about a wide range of issues, including supervisory, managerial and communication issues.

As Woodfold-Marco has moved forward with implementing lean manufacturing, bilingual workers help with translation and interpretation. Alvarado characterizes his experiences with his three partners as positive. “There’s an amazing amount of help out there in terms of lean,” he said.

Portland Community College, the Northwest HPEC and the OMEP receive state and federal funding—including H-1B, MEP grants and grants from the state’s discretionary Workforce Investment Act (WIA)—to provide manufacturers with lean ESL training, lean manufacturing training and ongoing technical support. It is seen as one way to keep the manufacturing sector in the Portland metropolitan area competitive.

## **Partnerships**

### *Portland Community College*

Portland Community College (PCC) has identified lean manufacturing and lean ESL as a statewide priority, recognizing that Oregon’s economic competitiveness depends on workers’ skill development on the shop floor. “It’s change or die in manufacturing,” noted one PCC manager. PCC’s Center for Business and Industry has positioned itself as an entrepreneurial division—within the college but with a fair degree of autonomy—that can approach area firms to meet their training needs. When PCC recognized the need for an ESL component to the lean manufacturing grant obtained by the Northwest HPEC, managers in the college’s Center for Business and Industry worked with college faculty to develop a 12-hour curriculum in lean terminology and concepts that could be translated into any language required by employers. The center then approached the OMEP with a proposal to partner with it to provide the lean ESL component in conjunction with employer-provided lean training.

This initial partnership provided lean ESL/lean training to several manufacturing firms in the Portland area. As word of initial success with the partnership spread, the college and the partnership started discussing how to expand their model to employers throughout the state. PCC worked through the Oregon’s Business and Industry Training System, a network of community college-based training departments throughout the state, to provide orientations and a practicum on lean ESL to interested colleges. Since 2003, the number of manufacturing employers served by the PCC/OMEP partnership has grown from 30 to 60. As a result, PCC reports that employers are measuring significant increases in productivity and savings.

### *Northwest High Performance Enterprise Consortium*

The Northwest HPEC provides its more than 60 employer members with technical assistance in adopting high-performance or lean manufacturing practices, including forums,

peer learning opportunities and, in partnership with OMEP and PCC, training. The consortium began encouraging its members to adopt lean manufacturing when one of its members, a local apparel company, asked for productivity assistance. Northwest HPEC received a U.S. Department of Labor grant to provide lean training to its member firms. Northwest HPEC then contracted with OMEP to provide the training.

In 2004, Northwest HPEC hosted a grant “kick-off” event to introduce its members to the training available through the grant. The event covered topics such as OMEP’s role, how training could be accessed and the benefits of hosting on-site training. In partnership with OMEP, the Northwest HPEC visited seven initial firms to assess not only the commitment of the firms’ senior management to the training, but also the firm’s capacity to host the training and its ability to track and report grant metrics.

### *Oregon Manufacturing Extension Partnership*

OMEP provides lean manufacturing training and ongoing technical support as companies implement lean manufacturing through its training consultants. The eight-hour, on-the-clock course is provided over two days and covers concepts such as lean enterprise diagnostics, lean overview, value stream mapping, cellular manufacturing and lean team leadership.



## Admiral Tool & Manufacturing Company

Chicago-based Admiral Tool & Manufacturing Company, a metalworking manufacturer, employs 150 people, including 110 production workers, 85 percent of whom are Spanish speaking. Some of the older skilled production workers come from Eastern Europe; their English levels are reasonably high. Admiral Tool, a union shop that's been in business since 1945, does much of its hiring through informal networks and word of mouth.

Admiral Tool's customer base includes Ford Motor Company, General Motors Corporation and DaimlerChrysler. Because of global competition and the need to increase productivity, it has introduced new equipment and processes in the plant and is moving away from labor-intensive production and toward lean manufacturing. This has required increased attention to worker training and a different hiring approach, according to Laura Frost, human resources manager of Admiral Tool. Admiral Tool is in the process of moving away from informal hiring to a more credential-based system, and it seeks to establish a hiring mechanism to meet its emerging workforce needs.

Production jobs are organized into three levels:

Level 1: Die setters, press operators and assembly workers.

There also are level-one maintenance jobs, but that job is changing into a higher skilled "trouble shooting" job.

Level 2: Some die setters with experience.

Level 3: Quality inspectors.

The pay for unskilled workers ranges from \$14-\$16 an hour. For skilled workers, the pay ranges from \$26-\$30 an hour.

Attrition has been low. The same workforce has been in place for more than 20 years.

### Company Facts

**Location:** Chicago, Ill.

**Products:** Metalworking manufacturer.

**Workforce:** 150 people, including 110 production workers, 85 percent of whom are Spanish speaking.

**Contacts:**

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**Key features of Admiral Tool's approach include skill standards and certification.**



Key features of Admiral Tool's approach include: skill assessment; job skills training; skill standards and certification; lean manufacturing training; and partnerships.

### **Skill Assessment**

Admiral Tool worked with Truman College, one of the City Colleges of Chicago, to develop skill assessments for its workers. One assessment focused on language skills (English and Spanish). It had five levels, with Level 1 being for those illiterate in English or Spanish and Level 5 being literate in English. Admiral's workforce was distributed among the levels; most of the workers were Level 3 or 4.

A technical skills assessment targets operators and die setters. Admiral Tool and Truman College assessed four skill areas: basic math, shop math, measurement and blueprint reading. The initial assessment found that most workers needed a review to bring their skills up-to-date and up-to-par.

### **Job Skills Training**

Job skills training addresses gaps identified through the skill assessments. Truman College developed the training based on the Precision Metalworking Association training curriculum, modified to reflect Admiral Tool's workplace and National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS) standards. An outside training consultant provided the training.

Training focuses on four technical skill areas—basic math, shop math, measurement and blueprint reading—with courses modularized and sequenced so they build on one another. Each module lasts 16 hours, for a total of 64 hours of training.

Classes are conducted in English and Spanish, with bilingual materials. There is increasing interest in providing training in Spanish with a curriculum translated into Spanish.

Training is done on the clock.

Admiral Tool started by providing training to workers at Levels 3, 4 and 5; between 30 and 35 workers have completed training so far. Overall, workers did 60 percent better on the post-test than they did on the pre-test.

Another round of this training started in the fall of 2005. Also in 2005, a separate round of training began to address intermediate and advanced skills, such as trouble shooting, waste reduction and quality assurance.

A grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity partially funded the assessments and skills training. Admiral Tool pays workers' wages while in training and picks up half the cost of training, with the grant funding the other half.

Workers who complete the training receive a bonus, but skill or language improvement does not necessarily translate into a wage raise.

### Skill Standards and Certification

Admiral Tool is piloting NIMS standards. After completing job skills training, workers can sit for NIMS testing and certification.

Funding for the NIMS testing comes from the U.S. Department of Labor.

### Lean Manufacturing Training

Admiral Tool is providing its workers with lean manufacturing training through the Chicago Manufacturing Center, a provider of high-end manufacturing training. Training targets workers with higher-level English skills who can work with those with limited English proficiency. Workers are trained in multidisciplinary groups within the same salary range.

The lean manufacturing training, along with the implementation of lean manufacturing, has resulted in increased productivity, according to Frost, the company's human resource manager.

Funding for lean training comes from a grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

Next up for Admiral Tool: training for assembly workers, providing them the skills they need to move into higher-wage, higher-skill operator jobs.

Frost has noticed a change in workers' attitudes as a result of the training. Previously, workers were not challenged and were under-utilized. Now, they are motivated and starting to work together as a team.

Admiral Tool plans to continue a two-pronged approach to building its workforce. Older, incumbent workers will receive bilingual training to upgrade skills, but new hires have to have some credentials (which Admiral Tool is working to establish). It hopes to strike a balance between English instruction and bilin-



Previously, workers were not challenged...  
Now, they are motivated.



gual instruction, but the onus will be on workers to increase their English skills down the line.

## **Partnerships**

A key partner is Truman College and its Business and Industry Services, which helped analyze Admiral Tool's skill and training needs, develop training, find funding and provide connections to training consultants and other resources.

Another key partner is the Instituto Del Progreso Latino (IDPL), which contracts with area employers to run a bilingual manufacturing bridge program for Spanish- and Polish-speaking workers. The program, designed to help workers gain the English and job skills necessary to move into a higher-level training program in advanced manufacturing, is about 440 hours and is funded largely through state grants from Illinois' state-funded Employer Training Investment Pool and from Trade Adjustment Assistance grants from the U.S. Department of Labor. IDPL trains approximately 150 workers a year in ESL and VESL for a wide range of area employers, including Admiral Tool.

IDPL places approximately 75 percent of its participants with contracted employers, who pay an average of \$10.15 an hour. Average 180-day retention rates are 80 percent. IDPL is currently working with a tool manufacturing association to develop a program in which participation in the bridge program will count as a first-year apprenticeship with employers represented by the association. Employers in the association will be encouraged to hire program graduates and place them in their companies' second-year apprenticeship programs. IDPL is seeking on-the-job training funds to assist the tool manufacturing association in placing graduates, and is attempting to procure state ETIP funds to assist employers with training the graduates in their second-year apprenticeships.

Funding for training comes primarily from the Illinois Department of Economic Development through its Prairie State Program. The program typically requires a 50/50 employer match.

## Behlen Manufacturing Company

Behlen Manufacturing Company in Columbus, Neb., manufactures agricultural equipment such as livestock equipment, grain storage, drying and handling systems, and building systems. The company is locally owned and has an Employee Stock Ownership Plan. It has 710 workers, about 15 percent of whom are Hispanic/Latino, coming from Mexico and Central and South America.

In 1984, Behlen reversed a year-long slide toward bankruptcy with a strategy that largely focused on improving the skills of its workforce. It implemented a combination of internal human resource policies—from requiring basic math and reading skills of all full-time workers, to eliminating the time clock and installing an on-site learning lab and gym. These policy changes have made Behlen not only highly competitive but also highly attractive to workers. One such policy was the introduction of an on-site ESL program. Behlen needs a workforce with, at a minimum, basic reading and math skills. Entry-level workers begin as part time and can only advance to full-time status when they have passed exams in these fields. English language proficiency is required to pass the reading portion of the exam.

Many of Behlen's non-native English-speaking workers come out of the meatpacking industry, according to Duane Matson, Behlen's training coordinator. They are looking for better jobs and often find them in manufacturing.

Key features of Behlen Manufacturing's approach include: on-site ESL training, basic skills training, bilingual team leaders and trainers, job skills training, partnerships and productivity incentives.

### On-site ESL training

Behlen's English Language Program is provided on-site, with instruction assistance from Central Community College and the

### Company Facts

**Location:** Columbus, Neb.

**Products:** Livestock equipment, grain storage, drying and handling systems, and building systems.

**Workforce:** 710 workers, about 15 percent of whom are Hispanic/Latino.

**Contacts:**

Duane Matson, Behlen Manufacturing Company, (402) 563-7417; duane.matson@behlenmfg.com

Training is geared to help workers—both native and non-native English speaking—pass tests required of all new workers.







Instruction is individualized and self-paced, with the literacy association providing tutoring.



Platte Valley Literacy Association. ESL training focuses on basic vocabulary, using texts and computer programs. Of the company's approximately 120 non-English speakers, 90 have participated in some form of training. Trainers assessed the non-English-speaking workers using the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). Then, they encouraged workers to take advantage of the ESL course offerings available through Behlen's on-site learning lab. Funding for ESL training comes out of Behlen's HR budget.

### Basic Skills Training

Behlen is one of the largest employers in central Nebraska, and one of the few that does not require job applicants to show proof of a high school diploma. Instead, Behlen offers its workers basic skills training, including on-site math and ESL training and GED preparation. Behlen provides a learning lab, equipped with computers, pays for an instructor from the Platte Valley Literacy Association and provides training materials. Training is done on the workers' own time, before and after shifts. The company offers training two days a week for two hours. Instruction is individualized and self-paced, with the literacy association providing tutoring each Monday through Thursday for several hours.

Math training is geared to help new workers pass a required math test before they can be hired as full-time employees. Jobs at Behlen require basic math skills, such as addition, subtraction, measurement, fractions and decimals. The math training—developed by Behlen, with help from the literacy association—provides these skills. Virtually all workers who go through math training pass the test and gain full-time status.

GED preparation allows workers to practice on various areas for the GED test, which is offered at Central College of Columbus. With a GED, workers can go on to the college for further education and training, which Behlen and Central College of Columbus both encourage. Behlen has a tuition-reimbursement program and covers the cost of books for those workers who pursue additional education and training. Behlen does not have information on the percentage of workers who participate in additional education and training at the college. Funding for basic skills instruction comes out of Behlen's HR budget.



## **Bilingual Team Leaders and Trainers**

Behlen takes a participative management approach, with teams as a central feature. Some of its team leaders are bilingual and interpret for those with limited English proficiency. The company provides team leaders with in-house training on a regular basis.

The team concept is new to many workers, both native and non-native English speaking, according to Matson. The team leader is there to encourage others, not just give orders. However, some workers, including those from some Hispanic/Latino cultures, see the team leader as “the leader,” bringing with it a tendency to defer instead of encouraging communication between leaders and line workers. Behlen has addressed this issue by providing team and team-leader training and holding company meetings.

Bilingual trainers provide job skills training, either on the job or in classes. Company materials are also translated into Spanish and Behlen is exploring the possibility of offering Spanish language training to its supervisors.

## **Job Skills Training**

Behlen provides hands-on welder training, either on the job or in classes, using in-house trainers, including some who are bilingual.

About 200 of Behlen’s workers are welders. Classes are held on-site if a number of workers need basic welder training at the same time. If not, training is one-on-one, on the job. Bilingual trainers provide the training as needed. Specific job skill training is done on-site and on company time. Classes are conducted at Central College when space is tight at the plant.

## **Partnerships**

Key partners are:

- *The Platte Valley Literacy Association* helped Behlen develop the math training and provides basic skills instruction and ESL and GED tutoring.
- *Central College of Columbus* provides some trainers and the use of its facilities. “Central College is great to work with,” according to Matson. “A lot of times, colleges say, ‘This is what we offer’; Central College asks what we need.”
- *The Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce* sponsors periodic cultural competency training for area employers. Cultural barriers to worker advancement have been gradually minimized at Behlen, largely due to the practice of promoting bilingual workers into team-leadership positions. In addition, Behlen encourages managers to attend cultural competency trainings, sponsored periodically by the local community colleges and the Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce. The frequency of these trainings, approximately twice a year, is indicative of the degree to which employers are hiring non-English speakers.

## **Productivity Incentives**

Gainsharing—or incentive pay based on team performance—is a concept that has required some explanation (as have profit-sharing and ESOP). Behlen has divided its workforce into multiple teams with specific responsibilities for a portion of the production process. Hispanic, bilingual team leaders are in charge of several of these teams. The company awards monthly gainsharing bonuses, of about \$1 an hour, to teams that meet productivity goals. The calculation of bonuses reflects the quality of the output, with defects subtracted from the total. Behlen also provides annual profit-sharing bonuses. Each November, Behlen divides 20 percent of its profits among the firm's workers. The profit-sharing plan is not capped, and Matson notes that the gainsharing incentives have increased firm productivity such that profit-sharing has equaled an average of 82 hours of pay a year in recent years.

The incentive pay package and ESL instruction are mutually reinforcing. In order to remain competitive, Behlen needs a workforce that can quickly learn new production processes and communicate ideas for improving production. Behlen's ESL and other educational opportunities create a competitive workforce, which is reflected in higher productivity and larger bonuses. The incentive pay package has encouraged workers to pursue additional education and training.

Matson cites growing profits as proof that its training and other workforce development efforts are working, especially given that Behlen shares its profits. Behlen continues to grow and compete in a global environment; without training, it could not. Matson says that Behlen's high-road human resources strategy engenders loyalty. He notes that the company decided to get rid of its time clocks years ago. "People want to work here because they know that the company is working for them."

## ITW TACC

ITW TACC has manufactured commercial adhesives and sealants since 1969. Its manufacturing facility in Rockland, Mass., produces solvent and waterborne products under the trade names *TACC*, *Miracle*, *KingCo*, *Sta-Put* and *Conbond*. Acquired by Illinois Tool Works in 1998, ITW TACC maintains its primary focus on the research and development of innovative, environmentally safe and applicator-friendly products that exceed industry standards for performance and quality. ITW TACC has 32 full-time workers, half of whom are non-native English speakers from Cape Verde and Cambodia.

Key features of ITW TACC's approach include: use of workers from a temp agency during a 2-3 month trial employment period; six-month, on-site, on-the-clock, contextualized ESL program funded through the state Workforce Training Fund; lean production training; incumbent worker training; bilingual team leaders; and partnerships.

ITW TACC offers a starting wage of \$10-\$11 an hour, extensive benefits and on-the-job training. Despite competitive starting wages and benefits, the firm has had some difficulty attracting native English speakers to fill its positions. Instead, the firm has attracted growing numbers of immigrants, with varying levels of English proficiency but also a strong work ethic and a desire to learn and grow with the company, according to ITW TACC's HR Manager.

Safety is the primary concern for management and workers at ITW TACC, given the highly hazardous nature of the work. To produce the various adhesives, workers use highly volatile chemical compounds that require certifications for their handling. Accidents, though rare, are potentially deadly. For these reasons, ITW TACC requires entry-level workers to have basic English and math skills. Safety instruction and guidelines for handling hazardous materials are provided in English.

## Company Facts

**Location:** Rockland, Mass.

**Products:** Commercial adhesives, sealants, solvent and waterborne products (*TACC*, *Miracle*, *KingCo*, *Sta-Put* and *Conbond*).

**Workforce:** 32 full-time workers, half of whom are non-native English speakers from Cape Verde and Cambodia.

**Contacts:**

Christine Nickerson, HR director,  
(781) 681-0421

Competitive concerns have led ITW TACC to adopt an extensive ESL program.



ITW TACC uses a temp agency for recruitment and screening. During the two to three months in which the prospective worker works for the temp agency, he is required to attend a basic safety orientation course and is screened for basic skills. Workers stay at ITW TACC for an average of eight years. Annual turnover is less than 20 percent.

### **Competitive Pressures, ESL and Lean Production**

ITW TACC is a publicly traded firm. As such, investor concerns for competitiveness and profitability are paramount in the minds of management and production supervisors, who have set annual goals to increase sales by 16 percent and receive a 35-percent return on investments in training.

Competitive concerns have led ITW TACC management to adopt an extensive ESL program that is designed to increase English language proficiency from no English ability to a basic grasp of conversational English. ITW TACC recognized that, if offered off-the-clock, participation in the ESL program would be hindered by other demands on workers' time. Therefore, classes are provided on company time, for two hours on both Mondays and Fridays. Each course lasts three months, and participants are encouraged to participate in both courses.

A grant from the state's Workforce Training Fund provides the ESL training. The fund is a flexible, demand-driven source of training funds for Massachusetts employers, with 70 percent of funded training being for entry-level workers. ITW TACC has used this fund to pay for its first offering of the ESL course, training nine of its 16 non-English-speaking full-time workers. Of these, the company has promoted four to team leader positions. ITW TACC is applying for a second grant from the fund to train additional workers.

In addition to ESL instruction, ITW TACC trains its workforce in lean production techniques. ESL instruction has become instrumental in the successful adoption of lean production—even though it was developed independently and prior to instruction in lean. Half of ESL instruction is contextualized, with much of the instruction including lean production terminology and concepts.

Participation in ESL instruction has permitted ITW TACC's workforce to more fully participate in the benefits that accrue as a result of the firm's switch to lean. According to the plant manager, lean has made the job easier to do, benefited the firm economically and instilled a sense of better job security within the company. Advancement opportunities and morale have improved for ESL participants.

### **Entrepreneurial Training Provider**

ITW TACC has contracted with Coiné Corporate Training, a Massachusetts-based language school, to design and provide its on-site ESL program. Coiné uses a proprietary assessment

tool to determine workers' level of English language ability, then develops a curriculum designed to advance ITW TACC's workers to a basic, conversational English proficiency. The language school also serves as an intermediary. It alerted ITW TACC about the Workforce Training Fund and assisted the firm with the application and other paperwork. In addition, Coiné monitors changes to the fund that would benefit ITW TACC and keeps the firm informed of these changes. The school is assisting ITW TACC in applying for a second grant from the fund.

While Coiné focuses on meeting the business needs of its clients (by contextualizing up to half of its English instruction, for example), its objective is to provide students with more than simply the level of English needed to succeed on the job. Graduates of the six-month program gain a firm basis for continuing their conversational English instruction.



Participation in ESL instruction has permitted the workforce to more fully participate in the benefits that accrue to the firm.







## A SUMMARY OF PRACTICE IN THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR: WORKPLACE-BASED ESL

The research suggests that there is a wide range of practices among manufacturing employers for improving the English language skills of their immigrant workers. The great majority of employers do little or nothing to improve the English language skills of front-line workers. Some employers do more, but their attempts are sporadic, non-systematic and disconnected from their firm's business plan. A few employers are evolving a more systematic and sustainable approach to training frontline workers in general and, as a result, a strategic approach to improving English language skills among immigrant workers. This includes ESL instruction—and skill training in general—in the firm's business plan and measuring the impact of instruction on business success.

By focusing on these more systematic and strategic firms, the research identified an array of promising practices. These include providing ESL training during work hours so that more workers can participate and sharing productivity gains with other workers.

There also were some unexpected findings, such as the apparently growing tendency for firms to conduct training in the language spoken by the workforce and many employers' general lack of understanding about the public resources available to them for providing ESL training and related services.

### Findings: An Overview of Practices

**Finding: Most manufacturing employers do little to improve their employees' proficiency in English.**

Research has documented that employers typically invest little in their entry-level workforce—this is particularly true for non-English-speaking entry-level workers. A number of employers



in The Manufacturing Institute/JFF focus groups said they had not offered English language instruction and were not planning to. When asked how they handle basic communication issues that arise when instructing workers in tasks, these employers said they had found “workarounds” to English-based instructions. Their solutions included color- or number-coding work tasks and posting illustrations portraying the content and sequence of tasks. While admitting that such approaches are not ideal, these employers believe that workarounds are quick, inexpensive and effective enough to preclude the need for formal English instruction.

Some of these firms have taken steps to encourage their workers to seek out English language instruction on their own. Some employers in the focus groups indicated that they are aware that ESL courses are available locally. They have encouraged their employees to find and attend such courses or, in some cases, even identified a particular local provider and gave this information to their employees.

But a larger number of the employers in our research said they were unaware of the public resources available to provide their immigrant workers with English language instruction. Most of these employers had had no contact with their local career centers, and they could name only a few, if any, community-based organizations that might be able to help. Some believed that local community colleges had ESL programs, but only a few actually had contacted them.

Several employers, particularly those in the Chicago and Providence focus groups, were aware of the most commonly available public resources, such as WIA Title II, but thought they were of little use to them. Most employers’ complaints revolved around the programs’ inflexibility and lack of business content.

**Finding: Some employers support provision of ESL delivered in their workplaces by local providers.**

A small number of employers did make a commitment to providing ESL for their workers. Some sense of the size of this group comes from The Manufacturing Institute survey of firms, 36 of the responding firms indicated that they provide ESL on a regular basis. A number of respondents to the survey described why they made this investment:

“Immigrant workers tend to be very thankful for their jobs and, in general, hard working. Improving language skills is key, along with technical and computer skills because many worked primarily in service industries before.”

“We have many long-term immigrant employees who have successfully acquired on-the-job skills and formal training; new skills, including basic skills from originally unskilled new hires over time. These long-term immigrant employees have advanced in the company to the mutual satisfaction of the employee and the company.”

Many employers have offered ESL on an occasional basis. Given our research methodology, it was not possible to ascertain how widely distributed the practice of sponsoring ESL classes is, but there was no sense that it is frequent. However, we can make some inferences based on The Manufacturing Institute survey and our focus groups. Some employers in the focus groups brought in (or were sponsoring) a local ESL provider to offer a class on-site but after work hours. Some employers felt positively about their experiences but made clear that their commitment was limited. One, for example, said, “We feel we’ve done our part by providing this class; after this, it’s up to our employees.”

But many employers’ experiences were not positive. In general, their complaints centered on the poor attendance of employees at the classes; many concluded from low attendance rates that workers weren’t really interested. A number of firms said they offered ESL to workers but discontinued the program because of poor attendance. Here is a sampling of comments from The Manufacturing Institute survey:

“We tried language learning classes away from the plants, but employees would not attend. Most see no reason to spend their own time learning English, as their thinking is that they will eventually return home to Mexico anyway.”

“We previously used the community college to provide training in English but found that the workers did not take advantage of the programs offered and they were discontinued.”

It is important to note that federal funds for ESL are limited, like most state funds. Furthermore, state and local priorities vary. Some states and regions prioritize the provision of ESL classes in the workplace. Oregon is an example. Its commitment to adult literacy is high; it is one of only six states where the state (and other non-federal sources) represents 80 percent or more of the overall expenditure on literacy.<sup>1</sup> According to the State Director of Adult Basic Skills, “Oregon Title II grantees are ... encouraged to and do provide workplace literacy instruction. This is often ESL instruction.”<sup>2</sup> In most states, however, the financial commitment is much lower; 30 states contribute half or less than the small federal contribution.<sup>3</sup>

It seems that most of these employer-sponsored classes were the regular ESL classes funded by their state. Their purpose was to increase the learner’s English proficiency. Customization for the needs of the employer was rare. Few of these employers perceived that offering ESL classes had any positive impact on productivity or profits. Concomitantly, few employers had any intention of repeating or expanding these offerings.

**Finding: A small number of firms provide ESL instruction as part of a larger, purposeful business strategy focused on maintaining and improving competitiveness.**

These firms believe that competitiveness requires upgraded skills for frontline workers, and that skill training requires some proficiency in English. While such investments are

designed to improve the company's bottom line, these employers also bring a broader vision to their investment in human capital. It is a vision that includes a commitment to improving the skills and well-being of workers in addition to the goal of increasing the firm's competitiveness. The primary benefit to workers is enhanced job security resulting from increased productivity. In some of the firms covered by our research, these workers also received—or were slated to receive—higher income linked to increased productivity.

In some cases, the need for complex improvements to production methods, such as a change to lean manufacturing processes, has led firms to adopt “high-road” practices regarding the immigrant workforce. These practices require all frontline workers to understand the production process and communicate suggestions for continuous improvement. This has placed a premium on establishing at least a minimum level of English proficiency.

In general, the more sophisticated firms covered in our research understand the demographic trends affecting manufacturing and believe that the immigrant workforce is the workforce of the future. They also understand that, because of competition, they have to invest in frontline workers, providing them with English language skills, job skills and the ability to communicate suggestions for improving production methods.

These employers have applied to their immigrant workforce many of the successful practices written about in the literature (Appelbaum, Bernhardt and Murnane 2003, Luria, Rogers and Dziczek 2003). There is a focus on cross-training frontline workers and empowering them to make decisions in a team setting, often independently of management. Because training is part of the business strategy, funds are earmarked for it in the budget. As a rule, firms with such a competitiveness strategy scrutinize budget outlays on a regular basis to determine if they provide a return on the firm's investment. Consequently, there must be evidence that the content and outcomes of the training are benefiting the firm.

### **Exemplary Practices**

This research suggests that delivery of ESL training in the workplace is only sustainable over time when the sponsoring employer considers English language instruction essential to profitable operation of the firm. Testimony from a number of employers interviewed during this research strongly suggests they consider ESL customized to meet their firms' needs as a business asset, but do not have the same opinion of traditional ESL. The term, “traditional ESL” is used to refer to the program content and delivery standards in compliance with the state's plan for WIA Title II, and is not adapted for the workplace. Employers viewed “traditional ESL” as a benefit for employees, not firms, and most are not willing to expand their employee benefits package to include workplace-based ESL.

The following discussion of factors that promote and inhibit exemplary ESL practices concentrates primarily on this concept of sustainable, employer-customized ESL. Three factors were identified through the research that support exemplary workplace-based ESL:

- Firm practices that promote employee participation in ESL at the workplace, either voluntarily or as a requirement by the firm;
- Public support for an active role for intermediaries in workplace-based ESL; and
- Union support for workplace-based ESL.

**Factor: Firm practices that promote employee participation in ESL at the workplace, either voluntarily or as a requirement by the firm.**

**Practice: ESL instruction is part of the firm's business model.**

Firms that believe that a certain level of English proficiency is essential to the profitable operation of their business calculate the cost of ESL instruction into planning operating expenditures. As such, ESL is less vulnerable to cost-cutting pressures.

Behlen Manufacturing Company in Columbus, Neb., offers its workers on-site basic skills training, including math, ESL and GED preparation. Behlen supports an on-site learning lab, equipped with computers, pays for an ESL instructor from the Platte Valley Literacy Association and provides training materials customized to its business needs. Training is offered two days a week for two hours. Instruction is individualized and self-paced. The Platte Valley Literacy Association provides tutoring for several hours each Monday through Thursday.

The math instruction is designed to help workers—both native and non-native English speaking—pass a math test required of all new workers before they can be hired full time. Virtually all of the native-born and immigrant workers who go through math training pass the test and gain full-time status. Behlen also has a tuition reimbursement program and covers the cost of books for those workers who pursue a GED or post-secondary education and training offered by Central College of Columbus.<sup>i</sup>

**Practice: ESL instruction is delivered on-site and on the clock.**

When employers support the on-site ESL training, they are investing their own resources through the donation of space. When they also enable employees to attend during working hours they are investing their own resources to a significant degree, either because they are paying other workers to replace the trainees or by losing production. A few of the employers covered by our research said that they came to realize that the return on their investment in ESL rose when they provided the training in a place and at a time that encouraged workers to participate.

Woodfold-Marco, a manufacturer of custom-made accordion doors and windows near Portland, Ore., provides non-English-speaking workers with 12 hours of “lean ESL” training, delivered in conjunction with Oregon Manufacturing Extension Partnership and Portland Community College. Designed to help prepare them to take part in lean manufacturing

training, it is offered on-site, on the clock—covers an introduction to lean manufacturing; lean concepts, tools and vocabulary; and value-stream mapping. Lean ESL instruction includes lectures, small group discussions, classroom exercises and other activities. The lean ESL model also calls for lean ESL instructors to attend and provide bilingual support for the subsequent eight-hour lean manufacturing training provided to its entire workforce.

**Practice: ESL instructional content is tied to work and skill development.**

For most employers with successful ESL programs, including those employers interviewed in our site visits, the ability to provide English language instruction in an occupational context is seen to be critical to the program's success. These employers have found that contextualized instruction provides non-English-speaking workers with work-related, real-life lessons that can be applied immediately.

ITW TACC in Rockland, Mass., a manufacturer of commercial adhesives, has partnered with the Coiné Language School to provide English language instruction to its frontline workforce, which predominantly has limited English proficiency. The school has a proprietary ESL curriculum that enables each client firm to customize up to half of the content so that instruction is tied to skills required on the job. ITW TACC includes its specialized terminology and procedures for setting and tracking production and quality goals into the introductory ESL curriculum. Coiné instructors encourage their employer clients to work with them to contextualize the English instruction; their experience has demonstrated that this type of instruction produces superior outcomes.

**Practice: Some firms share ESL productivity gains with their workers.**

Several of the employers interviewed have participated in an ESOP. The existence of an ESOP, according to these employers, has facilitated the success of initiatives in restructuring how they operate, which includes significant investment in ESL training. In particular, employers who have adopted lean manufacturing and lean ESL say that worker participation in what can be a difficult transition is significantly improved by the potential for greater stock earnings that accrue to higher efficiency. Both Woodfold-Marco and Behlen Manufacturing are ESOPs whose profits have increased even as their workforces have benefited.

As one employer noted, the ESOP “has given our workers a stake in the success of the company, especially for our immigrant workers who now see that the time they spend learning English will pay off in improved productivity and bigger year-end bonuses.”

**Practice: Training is tied to broader competitiveness strategies.**

Many firms have found that competitiveness-related technical training is only available in English and concluded that English instruction must precede (and sometimes continue

alongside) technical training. Also, employers have made English the common language for work-related communication in the many firms where multiple languages are spoken.

Behlen adopted ESL training out of a desire to remain competitive. During the early 1980s, Behlen reversed a year-long slide toward bankruptcy with a strategy that largely focused on improving the skills of its workforce. It implemented a series of new human resource policies—from requiring all full-time workers to have basic math and reading skills, to eliminating the time clock, to installing an on-site gym and learning lab. These changes have made Behlen not only highly competitive but also a highly attractive place to work. Part of this transformation was Behlen’s decision to provide ESL training to its immigrant workforce. Entry-level workers begin as part-time and can only advance to full-time status by demonstrating a benchmark level of English proficiency on the Basic English Skills Test.<sup>ii</sup>

### **Conclusions for Long-term Improvements:**

- Disseminate information so that more manufacturers are aware that resources are available to provide ESL training to frontline workers.
- Increase the capacity of employer associations to inform manufacturers of the important role of immigrants in the frontline workforce, and of the vehicles available to assist in the assimilation of immigrants.

Our research identified a number of employers, including some with exemplary practices, who were unaware that high immigrant participation in the manufacturing workforce was a national phenomenon. Considering their own situation unique, it didn’t occur to them that they could benefit from the experience of other employers. “If it hadn’t been for this focus group, I’d have never known that this was a common problem,” one employer said.

Employer associations are uniquely situated to disseminate information about changing trends in the workforce and promising practices to meet new challenges. Employers trust employer associations. Many associations already have a special competence in HR and training issues and would likely welcome a new role and supporting information regarding immigrant workers (Jobs for the Future 2001).

- Conduct market research among employers who do not invest in training to learn why such companies fail to invest.

This research focused on exemplary programs and employers. But the great majority of employers offer little or nothing in the way of English language instruction. Market research on employers who do little in this area could isolate inhibiting factors, identify factors that would motivate them to change and pinpoint messages and strategies to which they are likely to respond.



- Identify, collect and disseminate data from exemplary employers regarding the business impact of ESL to motivate non-users to start offering training.

Every employer who cited competitiveness reasons as the motivation for implementing an ESL program could point to returns on their investments. Few employers who did not specify competitiveness as the primary motivation could name any benefits from the program—but they could all identify costs and reasons for discontinuing it. As one HR director noted, “If I can’t sell this to the CFO, then this is a one off.”

Employers will likely share their data about benefits. A simple publication presenting employer stories and data could constitute a powerful appeal to other employers, and the data are likely to be presented in terms that their peers will understand.

- Support dissemination to employers of information about effective ESL practices.

### **Useful Effective Practices**

Based on our research among exemplary employers, we identified a number of effective practices that employers are unaware of, but could adopt:

- ESL instruction that is part of the firm’s business model;
- Employers who demonstrate a commitment to workforce development by providing ESL training on-site and on the clock;
- ESL instruction that is tied to work and skill development;
- Firms that share ESL productivity gains with their workers;
- Training tied to broader competitiveness strategies;
- Training that taps flexible funding; and
- Unions that play a vital role.

The practices identified above require further research into their core elements, the costs of replicating and implementing them, and the returns—to employers and employees—of investments in workplace-based ESL training.

Invest in a demonstration project that tests the value of implementing exemplary practices.

### **Factor: Public support for an active role for intermediaries in workplace-based ESL.**

Organizations exist that can provide third-party assistance to the challenges of non-English-speaking workers. Called workforce intermediaries, they are community-based or business organizations that can take the lead in serving both the skill needs of employers and the career needs of workers. These organizations help close gaps between what public systems can provide and what workers and employers need.<sup>iii</sup> Examples from this research include the Northwest High Performance Enterprise Partnership, the Greater

Boston Manufacturing Partnership and Instituto del Progreso Latino in Chicago. These and other organizations played an important role in most of the programs we researched.

These roles that an intermediary can play in support of immigrant workers include —

- streamlining access to funding;
- brokering and providing training services, including customized ESL instruction;
- connecting firms and workers to broader community services;
- aggregating employer demand; and
- persuading firms to adopt a training-based competitiveness strategy that includes ESL for workers.

### **Intermediary Role: Streamline Access to Funding**

One of the most important roles that an intermediary can play is helping employers access public funding. Access to public funding is important in most of the firms we studied because they are not willing to pay the entire cost of providing ESL instruction. Most of these firms would pay part of the costs, frequently by paying all or part of the cost of the workers' time spent in training, plus the cost of facilities. But most firms balk at paying the cost of an instructor's salary and instructional materials.

The difficulty of locating and accessing public funding inhibited many firms, even committed ones, from proceeding with ESL instruction. For example, during our site visit to TACC, we met with a senior operations manager, the human resources manager and the provider of ESL instruction, the Coiné Language School. The goal was to hear about ESL instruction that had been provided. During the meeting, the Coiné representative mentioned to the TACC managers that Massachusetts had announced a new round of funding from state's Workforce Training Fund. Immediately, the TACC managers said, "Sign us up!" The official replied that he would have the paperwork completed within a day. It was clear that without his intervention and assistance, TACC would not have offered another round of ESL instruction.

We heard similar stories from Chicago employers and ESL providers. These providers also play an important intermediary role for local manufacturers, generally referred to as "dealing with the red tape." Employers acknowledged that far fewer manufacturers would sponsor ESL if they had had to deal with the red tape themselves.

### **Intermediary Role: Brokering and Providing Training**

If access to funding sources is important to employers, so is access to information about effective and reliable providers of training services. TACC provides an example. Its corporate parent, ITW, has a strong commitment to, and funding for, skill development of frontline

workers. Still, local managers at TACC needed to identify training providers and content that met their needs. The Greater Boston Manufacturing Partnership provided extensive help to the firm in the technical training areas. It also introduced TACC to Commonwealth Corporation (CommCorp), which oversees Massachusetts' Workforce Training Fund. CommCorp, in turn, connected TACC to the Coiné Language School, which customizes ESL to meet the needs of each corporate client.

The Oregon Manufacturing Extension Partnership, which developed and implemented lean manufacturing training for the Northwest High Performance Enterprise Partnership, is an example of a single intermediary that provides a broad range of services. It developed and delivers the technical component of the lean manufacturing training, partners with Portland Community College for the delivery of "lean ESL" and manages the implementation of training in each participating firm.

Another example of intermediary brokering is the Truman College Business and Industry Services department, which has provided significant assistance to Admiral Tool in Chicago (along with many other firms). It helped analyze Admiral Tool's skill and training needs, developed training, identified funding and provided connections to training consultants and other resources.

### **Intermediary Role: Connecting to Broader Community Services**

Also important is a mechanism to connect employers to community services that could help workers persist in ESL instruction and, more generally, stay on the job. Many of the employers we talked with recognized that their workers were subject to difficulties that stemmed from low incomes and isolation from public services. Yet few employers seemed aware of the public and private support services available in their communities to meet these needs. They also didn't know how to help their workers connect to such services. Equally, most of the community-based service and ESL providers we spoke with lacked both the capacity and the mission to support immigrant workers and workplace training for them. Few had experience working with employers and workplace-based programs. Few of the funding groups, both public and philanthropic, support activities that might be misconstrued as "corporate welfare."

Not surprisingly, this research identified few programs with broad community connections. One exception was the Candy Institute/Food Chicago, an intermediary that helps immigrant workers improve workplace skills and become better members of the community. The Candy Institute seems to reflect a broader concern in Chicago to involve public, private, non-profit workforce development providers in helping immigrants as workers and as community residents. For example, a number of community-based organizations that provide ESL training have adapted their missions and their curricula to benefit both employers and workers, and public-sector funding groups strongly support them.

As an intermediary, the Candy Institute assisted Kellogg, a firm that now has an impressive ESL program. The institute is a consortium of Chicago employers and community-based organizations committed to economic and community development. It helped Kellogg develop and implement a comprehensive lean manufacturing program with a major ESL component, and worked on larger community issues with the firm. For example, the institute holds quarterly meetings with its employer members and focuses on how firms can help immigrant workers in the community. It has brought in financial institutions to inform employers about financial services that are available for their workers, many of whom do not use mainstream banks. This concern for a dual focus on competitiveness and community needs carries over into the classroom, where Kellogg's manufacturing-focused ESL class evolved into a class in which workers learn about and discuss issues of common concern, such as dealing with medical institutions and banks. The instructor brings in newspapers and participants discuss articles in English, increasing awareness of social and other issues around them. Kellogg's manager supports this approach and wants to tap into the resources of the institute's CBO members. For example, he hopes that they will provide constructive activities for his workers' children; these parents are concerned with gang influence in the neighborhood.

### **Intermediary Role: Aggregating Employer Demand**

An important factor inhibiting the expansion of employer-sponsored training for front-line workers is the high cost of developing training for each individual business firm—a cost that could be lowered by bringing together a number of employers with similar training needs and spreading the costs of development and delivery across all the firms. We found several examples of intermediaries that take this approach and aggregate employer demand.

One example comes from Woodfold-Marco and the Northwest High Performance Enterprise Consortium. The consortium brings together a number of regional employers with a shared interest in lean manufacturing. The fact that it has aggregated a number of business firms gives the consortium clout, standing to apply for grant funding, and the ability to decrease the per-firm cost of training. Woodfold and the other consortium members have benefited significantly by lowering the cost of ESL instruction and technical training.

### **More Useful Practices**

Increase intermediaries' capacity to recruit and support employers' engagement in workplace ESL programs.

The incidence of workforce intermediaries around the country is low, and many of the existing ones lack capacity in the specifics of supporting workplace ESL tied to broad competitiveness strategies (Giloith 2004). A cost-effective approach to increasing the skills

and knowledge of intermediaries would be to develop a toolkit, for dissemination to workforce intermediaries, describing the key elements of an effective workplace ESL program. The dissemination of toolkits through one or more informational seminars would be even more effective. This toolkit can be modeled on *Filling America's Jobs*, a “how-to” series developed by the Center for Workforce Success (see [www.nam.org/workforce](http://www.nam.org/workforce)).

This research suggests that employers who consider ESL a potential benefit for their workforce and/or their firms have already taken steps in that direction; the remaining employers—the majority—do not currently consider ESL valuable to their firms or their workers. Therefore, a potentially important role for intermediaries would be to increase the number of firms supporting ESL by working with the companies to convince them of the competitive value of investing in the skills of frontline workers, starting with English language proficiency. The Northwest High Performance Consortium is an excellent example: It persuades individual firms to participate in a larger multifirm training effort that embraces lean manufacturing and related ESL.

### **Factor: Union support for workplace-based ESL.**

For organized labor, representing the interests of workers increasingly means negotiating contracts that include English language instruction in the workplace. A little more than one-third of the companies covered by our research are unionized; each firm has implemented programs that place it among the more successful firms regarding training the immigrant workforce. These programs tend to emphasize longer-term English instruction that is integrated with hard-skills training. Some of these programs also draw on community-based organizations to provide support services that better enable workers to participate in training.

As an example, the United Steel Workers of America has been instrumental in promoting ESL training at Pferd Milwaukee Brush, a Wisconsin manufacturer of wire brushes for industrial use. Milwaukee Brush also uses bilingual team leaders with the language and cultural skills to work with other non-native English-speaking workers, as well as the technical skills to manage workflow, scheduling and quality issues.

*Recommendation:* Work with interested unions to increase their awareness that English language instruction, especially instruction that is customized to meet business objectives, is a benefit for both workers and their employers—a “win-win” that deserves support in collective bargaining and other relevant situations.

### **Factors that Inhibit Exemplary Practices**

The research also identified a number of factors that inhibit expansion of exemplary ESL in the workplace. The primary factors are—

- insufficient public funding for ESL;

- uncertainty in the field regarding whether ESL programs customized for employers meet federal standards;
- limited capacity in the field to develop and deliver ESL customized for employers; and
- insufficient attention in the field to developing and supporting program models that meet the needs of both employers and employees.

### **Inhibitor: Insufficient public funding for ESL**

Generally speaking, employers interested in ESL for business goals are willing to share the costs of ESL (such as offering training on the clock), but they look to the public sector for part of the expense. Unfortunately, public funding, especially at the federal level, has declined, despite growing demand for services. Federal funding for the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), the enabling legislation authorizing federally funded ESL programs declined from \$591.1 million in 2002 to \$579 million in 2006. While a 3-percent decline may seem relatively small compared to other cuts in social services, it is a cut from an already poorly funded program. State grants in 2003 for AEFLA ranged from \$843,000 in Wyoming, to \$63.2 million in California (Rubinstein). It is also a cut that has come during a period in which demand for services, as reflected in the number of immigrants in the workforce, has grown. Between 1996 and 2004, the number of foreign-born workers in the workforce increased 32 percent, from 14.4 million to 21.4 million (Moisisa).

The federal government however only partially bears the burden of funding ESL programs. Many states have come under increasing budgetary pressure lately, and, in some cases, have significantly scaled back their level of investment in Adult Basic Education and ESL instruction. Michigan, for example, had a total budget for Adult Basic Education and ESL of more than \$75 million in 2001, of which \$58 million were state funds. By 2003, the total budget for Adult Education and ESL in Michigan had shrunk to \$20 million, with more than \$16 million of this coming from its federal grant (MacDonald). Michigan's budget for 2007 is \$24 million, with just more than \$16 million coming from the federal grant (U.S. Department of Education).

It is instructive to note that a number of states continue to invest significant state resources in literacy and ESL instruction, as shown in Table 1 on page 52. There also are instances in which states have explicitly included ESL when establishing state-level funding sources for workforce development—Massachusetts' Workforce Training Fund (funded by an unemployment insurance assessment) is an example.

*Recommendation:* Where state investment in ESL is low, employer associations and state and local officials should consider learning about and adapting the strategies used in the higher-investment states. These strategies could include advocacy for increasing state matching funds for AEFLA beyond the minimum 25-percent match, to adopting alternative (and flexible) financing strategies for ESL.



### **Inhibitor: Uncertainty in the field regarding whether ESL programs customized for employers meet federal standards**

An important purpose of this research was to learn about the attitudes and actions of state and local officials with an actual or potential interest in promoting the expansion of English language instruction in the workplace. In general, these officials turned out to be people with a common interest in developing their economy, particularly in deploying public resources to attract and retain firms, and the jobs they provide residents, in their locales. When asked to identify factors that inhibited their work vis-à-vis immigrants, the most frequently cited factor was lack of access to ESL funds.<sup>4</sup>

These officials all put forward a similar line of reasoning: We want to retain the firms, especially manufacturing firms that are currently in our area, and even attract new ones. We focus on high value added manufacturing firms because their jobs pay well and are less likely to move overseas. These firms require skilled workers. We would like to upgrade the skills of the current workforce to meet the needs of such firms. A growing portion of our workforce is composed of immigrants, most of whom have very limited English proficiency—but a level of English proficiency is needed to participate in technical skill training. Consequently, for this portion of the workforce, we want to start by upgrading English skills.

However, most employers said public funds for ESL can't be used for the kind of workplace-based, business-focused ESL they need to support technical skill development. When asked for more details—"Why can't you?"—few specific answers were forthcoming. Most responses were some version of, "We've tried everything we can think of, and are always told that's not permissible."

Further research suggests that a major source of confusion grows out of rules developed in the 1990s to implement the AEFLA, Title II of Workforce Investment Act (WIA). In most states, federal funds for ESL provided through Title II of WIA represent the lion's share of all available public funding or are the sole source of public funds. The issue of whether Title II funds can be used for customized ESL in the workplace, as a result, has a significant impact on the general availability of funds.

It seems that two related aspects of the AEFLA rulemaking are at issue. First is AEFLA's establishment of performance standards for the delivery of and outcomes from adult education. Second is the delegation to the states, by the U.S. Department of Education, the Office of Adult and Vocational Education, of significant responsibility for both setting specific performance targets and for distributing funds to providers in ways that meet the targets.

AEFLA's performance standards were established in large part to respond to research findings that: public funds for adult education were stretched too thin in many communities; individual participants received, on average, too few instructional hours to advance

educationally; and, as a result, the public investment in adult education did not seem to improve the skill levels of America's adults. In light of these findings, AEFLA reconfigured adult education—including ESL—to ensure that students make measurable gains on an objective assessment test.

The U.S. Department of Education established the core performance measures and the guidelines and parameters for states on how to meet these standards, but states are responsible for establishing the specific standards. For example, the department's guidelines require assessments of participants' progress and identify the assessment tests it considers acceptable; states identify the particular tests that its programs will use. States are required to report annually to the U.S. Department of Education on these standards. Financial incentives and penalties reward programs and states that report measurable learning gains and penalize programs and states that do not.

AEFLA establishes standards in two areas that are relevant to literacy instruction customized for business needs. One is the way adult literacy instruction, including ESL, is delivered. Each state's plan must describe the standards it will use to assess the programs it funds in three key areas: courses must last for a certain length of time, be delivered at a certain frequency and teach content that will ensure testable learning gains. In addition, funded programs must result in demonstrated, objectively measurable learning gains.

The sort of ESL that has been developed to support employer competitiveness generally fails to qualify in one or more of these three program design standards, and it rarely produces learning gains of the magnitude sought by the AEFLA. Usually, it is short term and intensive, and often its content is abridged and customized to the firm's business needs. Equally important, participants' gains in English proficiency usually lack the breadth and depth needed to meet state and federal standards. As one state official with long experience in trying to cobble together workplace training programs commented, "Employer product lines change every six months, so they don't have time to send their workers off for a year to ESL that probably won't have anything to do with work."

The lean ESL delivered at Woodfold-Marco and other firms is an example. Its purpose is to give workers a quick dose of key concepts and vocabulary regarding lean manufacturing; it provides little in the way of general English language improvement. Participants would be unlikely to show an advance on the CASAS, a test used in Oregon to assess basic reading, math, listening, writing and speaking skills. Not surprisingly, the lean ESL program was not delivered by an AEFLA-funded program.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, AEFLA did not fund any of the ESL programs we studied—that is, programs that were part of a larger competitiveness strategy. One was paid for by the employer, one through governors' discretionary funds, one through an unemployment insurance diversion, and one through a state fund for economic development.

As a result, employers and public officials supporting employer-driven ESL turn to other funding sources that are perceived as more flexible. We found examples where both workplace-based ESL instruction funded by WIA Title II and customized ESL funded by other flexible sources were delivered in the same region.

A close reading of OVAE's guidelines suggests, however, that states may have more latitude than they currently seek to exercise regarding support for non-traditional programming. For example, it seems possible, based on the language of the guidelines, that states might be able to request waivers for a portion of their funding that could be made available to ESL customized to meet business needs.

*Recommendation:* State and local officials should work with the U.S. Department of Education to determine whether and to what extent flexible state plans that permit ESL customized for the workplace are acceptable.

**Inhibitor: Limited capacity in the field to develop and deliver ESL customized for employers.**

While this research was not designed to learn about or assess the capacity of current providers of AEFLA-funded ESL, it did yield two observations that seem important for future efforts in this area. First, some well-respected ESL providers who attended our focus groups said they avoided delivering ESL in the workplace. They explained that it was virtually impossible to structure employer-based ESL to be sufficiently intensive and long-term to meet the needs of the students/employees.

Second, officials and employers who had experience with customized ESL said that many traditional ESL providers lacked the experience and capacity necessary to adapt instruction for employers' needs. For example, only 11 percent of the employers who responded to The Manufacturing Institute survey said they turned to local ABE/ESL providers, while 49 percent said they used their local community colleges.

We concluded that, even if employers could find additional funds for customized ESL programs, there would likely be a dearth of interested and capable providers in many areas.

*Recommendation:* Employer associations and state and local officials should consider and adopt procedures for identifying ESL providers with interest in customizing curricula and delivery for employers. And, where possible, they should invest in developing their capacity.

The Coiné Language School provides an instructive example of attitudes and methods that businesses find attractive. It advertises, "We speak business!" and guarantees that workers will meet improvement goals—at the expense of the school if necessary. Its instruction for frontline workers is provided on-site, on weekends, nights and weekdays, with weekly progress reports. The curriculum is customized for each employer's culture and practices and focuses on spoken English skills. At least half of the curriculum is reserved for non-business content.

## A FINAL NOTE: THE LIMITS OF ESL CUSTOMIZED FOR BUSINESS NEEDS

According to employers, employees do benefit from customized ESL. The primary benefit is enhanced job security resulting from increased productivity. External stakeholders said that this training also increases the likelihood that the firm would not go out of business or move away—further strengthening workers’ employment prospects.

That said, two limitations should be noted. First, such instructional programs are not designed to recognize employees’ learning gains; that is, no credits are awarded toward educational degrees or industry-recognized certifications. Workers cannot take advantage of their skill gains to increase their bargaining power in the labor market, nor can they obtain credit for progress made in educational programs.

Certainly, these issues do not fall into the employer’s domain. But they are of concern from a larger perspective and could be addressed by other community stakeholders. For example, a workforce intermediary could broker arrangements whereby traditional ESL providers offered programs that supplemented workplace programs and built on skills developed in the workplace.





## CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Our research and findings address how to foster sustainable workplace-based ESL by seeking out and studying exemplary practices in the manufacturing industry. This research suggests that many manufacturing employers of limited English proficient immigrants have little interest in programs for increasing their workers' English skills. In their business models, work assignments can be made without recourse to verbal instruction, and there is no perceived need to increase employees' technical skill levels.

Given that most employers provide little or no ESL training for immigrant workers, existing, publicly funded, community-based ESL programs are manufacturers' best options. However, a movement toward wider employer use of publicly funded ESL programs will need to consider limitations in the current legislation.

Even with current limitations of public funding for workplace-based ESL programs, some U.S. manufacturers recognize that their survival in a global economy depends upon continuous learning and improvement—including investments in improving their employees' English language skills. In order to provide a common language platform for on-going learning, they have developed programs that share several common features:

- ESL content customized to meet particular employers' needs;
- Cost sharing between the public and private sectors, with employers contributing to employees' paid time and workplace instructional locations;
- Successful completion of ESL instruction tied to incentives;
- Access to flexible funding sources;
- Availability of education and training organizations with the capacity to collaborate with employers; and
- Use of workforce intermediaries.



However, employers and public officials who seek to strengthen the competitiveness of the U.S. manufacturing industry report a number of impediments to expanding the incidence of such programs. These include a lack of—

- flexible funds to customize and deliver ESL instruction in the workplace;
- understanding among many employers of the features of successful programs, including the need to offer instruction on-site and on the clock; and
- experience and capacity among many providers to work effectively with employers.

Consequently, this report has included a number of recommendations for the field that could address these impediments. These recommendations include suggestions for creating a set of flexible but responsible standards for workplace-based ESL responsive to employers' needs, as well as ideas for disseminating information to the nation's manufacturers regarding effective practices for immigrant workers; increasing the capacity of ESL providers to respond effectively to employers' needs; and supporting intermediaries to work in this field.

### **Next Steps To Address This National Challenge**

The findings, conclusions and suggested best practices offered in this document lead to a number of potential next steps for researchers, funding agencies, national agencies, national business organizations and others. No disagreement exists regarding the reality and growing nature of the problems herein described. America needs immigrant workers but America's businesses—especially manufacturers—are unprepared to lead immigrants quickly to productive workplace contributions. The authors of this report offer these next steps in addressing the growing challenges and helping American business:

- Confirm the lack of American business preparedness by conducting research from a larger sample of manufacturers.
- Seek, through further investigations, additional good practices, especially practices that are woven into a manufacturer's business plan. Determine the density of these practices and how widespread they are.
- In leading manufacturing states, identify state policy and practice that has been demonstrated to support the challenges of immigrant workers. Compile and disseminate findings and best policies.
- Create documents and toolkits for manufacturers that efficiently describe the problems and potential solutions—and widely disseminate through a series of national-level events and actions.
- Further investigate the use of intermediary organizations as the most effective vehicle for assisting local manufacturers and prepare training materials and planning documents to assist them in assuming the role.
- Use the lessons, conclusions and best practices presented in this project. Test these by conducting a series of local-level projects to assist local challenged manufacturers with immigrant worker issues.



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## ENDNOTES

- i A small but growing number of employers have found it more efficient and cost-effective to provide training in the native language of its workforce. As expected, we found workplaces in the Southwest, where the incidence of Spanish-speaking residents/workers is increasing dramatically, that operated entirely or primarily in a language other than English. However, we were surprised that such practices are increasingly common elsewhere in the country. In some cases, firms use Spanish to instruct workers in basic technical skills needed for the job; other employers invest significantly in competitiveness-related technical training for frontline workers. These firms are convinced that it is more effective to develop and deliver such training in Spanish—and to train English-speaking managers in some level of Spanish—than it is to train workers in English.

For example, the Greater Boston Manufacturing Partnership is finding that demand from regional employers for training delivered in Spanish is high. Sales are brisk for its Spanish-language training CD-ROM for lean manufacturing. Its experience is that employers would prefer to cultivate English as the common language for workers and management, but business practicalities (for example, that most of the frontline workforce speaks Spanish but little or no English) are causing many of them to turn to less-than-perfect solutions such as Spanish-based training.

In several of our focus groups, however, employers showed signs of growing resistance to English language training in communities where the density of Spanish-speaking inhabitants is high and Spanish language supports are increasingly provided. One employer—a staffing firm—reported that when she encouraged clients to improve their English skills, the typical response was, “Why do I need English? I can get whatever I need with Spanish.”

- ii For firms with stable workforces, ESL instruction is likely to be offered only until the entire workforce reaches a certain level of proficiency; at this point, ESL is no longer necessary from a business perspective. Once some firms reach this point, they institute (or have planned to institute) a test for English language proficiency when hiring new workers.
- iii For a fuller description of workforce intermediaries, see Giloth (2004). For a description of employer-led workforce intermediaries, see Center for Workforce Success (2004).
- iv Case studies on workforce intermediaries aggregating employer demand are available at [www.nam.org/workforce](http://www.nam.org/workforce).

- 1 By way of contrast, in 14 states, the state (including other non-state sources such as philanthropies) contribution is a third or less than the federal contribution. (USDOE, OVAE, Attachment B, December 2005.)
- 2 E-mail from Kristen Kulongoski to J. Taylor dated 2/18/2006.
- 3 (USDOE, OVAE, Attachment B, December 2005.)
- 4 As noted elsewhere, employers were also asked the same questions. Their responses did not focus on the area of regulatory requirement because employers have only a vague awareness of publicly funded programs and how to access them.
- 5 The Oregon State Director reports that, “The federal and state accountability requirements apply to all Title II students, regardless of whether they are receiving instruction at a workplace, church [or other site]... If there is sufficient instructional intensity, duration and quality, there isn’t a problem meeting performance targets.” (e-mail dated 2/18/2006.)

**TABLE 1.** U.S. Department of Education & Office of Vocational and Adult Education  
**ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT (AFLA) (Dec. 14, 2005)**

*FY 2002: Expenditures per participant, and federal and non-federal contributions*

State	Total Amount Spent Per Participant	Amount Contributed by States and Other Non-federal Sources	Amount Contributed by AEFLA	State and Other Non-federal Share of Spending
Alabama	\$730	\$261	\$469	36%
Alaska	\$557	\$368	\$189	66%
Arizona	\$363	\$137	\$226	38%
Arkansas	\$627	\$465	\$161	74%
California	\$1,276	\$1,141	\$135	89%
Colorado	\$470	\$147	\$323	31%
Connecticut	\$1,260	\$1,066	\$194	85%
Delaware	\$482	\$237	\$245	49%
District of Columbia	\$1,150	\$582	\$569	51%
Florida	\$831	\$744	\$86	90%
Georgia	\$208	\$73	\$135	35%
Hawaii	\$442	\$216	\$226	49%
Idaho	\$319	\$115	\$204	36%
Illinois	\$310	\$124	\$185	40%
Indiana	\$920	\$663	\$258	72%
Iowa	\$804	\$530	\$274	66%
Kansas	\$514	\$129	\$386	25%
Kentucky	\$538	\$248	\$290	46%
Louisiana	\$581	\$265	\$315	46%
Maine	\$1,361	\$1,144	\$218	84%
Maryland	\$637	\$316	\$321	50%
Massachusetts	\$1,904	\$1,375	\$528	72%
Michigan	\$2,301	\$2,053	\$248	89%
Minnesota	\$940	\$792	\$148	84%
Mississippi	\$248	\$62	\$186	25%
Missouri	\$398	\$144	\$254	36%
Montana	\$539	\$217	\$322	40%
Nebraska	\$325	\$81	\$243	25%

State	Total Amount Spent Per Participant	Amount Contributed by States and Other Non-federal Sources	Amount Contributed by AEFLA	State and Other Non-federal Share of Spending
Nevada	\$558	\$177	\$381	32%
New Hampshire	\$616	\$323	\$293	52%
New Jersey	\$1,067	\$648	\$420	61%
New Mexico	\$352	\$199	\$153	57%
New York	\$830	\$502	\$329	60%
North Carolina	\$512	\$366	\$147	71%
North Dakota	\$866	\$242	\$624	28%
Ohio	\$537	\$192	\$345	36%
Oklahoma	\$406	\$107	\$299	26%
Oregon	\$1,462	\$1,258	\$204	86%
Pennsylvania	\$772	\$309	\$463	40%
Rhode Island	\$1,140	\$579	\$561	51%
South Carolina	\$353	\$230	\$123	65%
South Dakota	\$556	\$138	\$418	25%
Tennessee	\$366	\$92	\$275	25%
Texas	\$425	\$106	\$318	25%
Utah	\$326	\$258	\$69	79%
Vermont	\$2,683	\$2,106	\$578	78%
Virginia	\$614	\$190	\$425	31%
Washington	\$623	\$479	\$143	77%
West Virginia	\$717	\$261	\$456	36%
Wisconsin	\$517	\$245	\$271	48%
Wyoming	\$557	\$234	\$322	42%
Puerto Rico	\$320	\$80	\$240	25%
Guam	\$374	\$42	\$332	11%
American Samoa	\$316	\$53	\$263	17%
Virgin Islands	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>UNITED STATES</b>	<b>\$803</b>	<b>\$597</b>	<b>\$206</b>	<b>74%</b>

