

# Research and Evaluation Brief

Facts, figures, and insights for workforce development practice and policy

Volume 2, Issue 10  
January 2005

## The Power of Combining Services: An Evaluation of the Power-One Project

### REPORT FOCUS

*Evaluation of the Power-One Project: A Re-employment Program for Dislocated, Limited English-proficient Electronics Workers in the City of Boston*

### Description of the Program

In 2001, 379 workers at Power-One International in Allston, Massachusetts, were laid off from their manufacturing jobs. The Power-One Project was designed and implemented to address the needs of these dislocated workers. Led and sponsored by the **Boston Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services**, the project attempted to maximize and customize federal and local resources to address the needs of this mostly Chinese-American workforce. For more information on their work visit [www.cityofboston.gov](http://www.cityofboston.gov).

Of the 280 workers served through this project, 97% were Chinese-American immigrants, four-fifths were female, the average age was 44 and average earnings were \$8.60 per hour at the time of the layoff. English levels were very low, with 35 individuals deemed to have no English at all. The average education level was 10<sup>th</sup> grade (ranging from no school to College study).

### Questions Addressed

- What was the impact of the Power-One Project on the employability of these workers?
- How have re-employed workers benefited from this program?
- What is the effect of programs serving limited English proficient (LEP) displaced workers?

### Key Findings

At the time of the analysis, three years after layoffs began, 52% of the workers were re-employed and earning hourly wages slightly higher (8%) than what they earned at Power-One, which is significant given the language barrier and difficult labor market conditions.<sup>1</sup> The remaining Power-One workers were without permanent employment or unemployment benefits at the time of the study. Some are being supported by family members while others may have secured temporary, part-time or unreported work, or simply retired.

Through the program, 94% of participants had at least six months of English classes, and 60% received a full year. Those who followed up their English classes with skills training were twice as likely to find employment, and had stronger wage gains than those who did not. The combination of English and occupational skills training also improved labor market outcomes.

Participation in skills training improved labor market outcomes, with participants receiving skills training following an English for Employment course seeing significantly higher placement rates. In particular, those participants who received English and skills training under the group contract had 70% placement rates, compared to 38% for those who had the English classes only.<sup>2</sup> Customized skills training services worked better for Power-One workers than did enrollment into existing training courses, as limited English speakers

<sup>1</sup> In November 2004, 61% of workers were employed.

<sup>2</sup> In November 2004, this percentage had increased to 40%.



in particular need services attuned to their language, cultural, and social backgrounds and needs.

Most workers, whether re-employed or not, will require additional assistance to reach family sustaining wages. Re-employed workers were earning an average of \$9.29 per hour.

Most workers who found replacement jobs wound up working in retail, hotels and motels, health services, and manufacturing, with 19% working in restaurants. Participants who went through skills training in culinary arts or hospitality were more likely to find employment in related jobs than those who went through office skills or childcare assistant training.

### Factors for Success

The involvement of the Chinese Progressive Association, a grassroots, community-based advocacy organization, had a tangible positive effect on program participation levels, the efficiency and coordination of service delivery, and in a more limited way, the workers' engagement in decision-making. The program participation level was 74%, very high compared to other dislocated worker programs.

Collective action and group cohesiveness was a strength of the Power-One group, supported mainly through organizing by the Chinese Progressive Association, which helped workers win concessions from their former employer, survive a difficult period, and understand their rights. These approaches were less helpful in helping workers transition into the labor market, where individual initiative is critical. The program struggled to address workers' inexperience and insecurity in job hunting.

The workforce development providers and others involved in the project reached a new level of program planning and coordination through this initiative. The project served as an opportunity for the workforce development system to develop successful programs and

policy to accommodate language and cultural issues of different workers.

### Workforce Development Implications

The positive effect that the presence of a grassroots community-based advocacy organization had on program participation levels suggests that future workforce development planners and service providers could benefit from engaging similar community groups in outreach. Such groups might also be helpful in designing approaches to training that are more culturally appropriate for the population than current approaches.

Better collection and use of data are essential in order to make program planning decisions and to evaluate processes, outcomes and impact. Much improvement is needed in the accurate and regular collection of benchmark data such as English skills development. Likewise, data on placement jobs, including number of hours worked and benefits status, and industry and occupations, also needs much greater attention. Program administrators need to require higher levels of accuracy in these areas, and staff should review data as they are received.

English skills assessment tools that are more standardized across service providers would be helpful in future programs. In addition, it would be useful to have a minimum of three assessments of all participants using the same test, making longitudinal analysis possible. Even among the small network of service providers involved in the Power-One Project, the lack of standard tools created difficulties and uncertainties. From a planning perspective, sound information is needed to determine the right mix of services at the beginning and interim points in the program. Language skills also should be assessed after skills training, particularly when the program integrates English as a second language, to help determine the impact of training.

For more information, please visit our web site at [www.commcorp.org/researchandevaluation](http://www.commcorp.org/researchandevaluation) for additional workforce development findings.