

In this discussion we'll look at the local experience of job training offered by Project Quest, then expand our vision by looking at the political organizing by the Industrial Arts Foundation (IAF), then address larger policy questions discussed by Uhalde, et al, which is an inside-the-Beltway perspective, the nuts and bolts from liberal advocates on what needs to be done in legislative terms.

The Experience of Project Quest

1. How is Project Quest organized? How is it different than other standard training programs? The job training is deeper and lasts longer than training in other programs---two years compared to most programs that offer last 4-6 months since they lack funding and can't pay stipends. Why are programs so often short term? Politicians rather give a little to a lot of people. The other differences are that under other JPTA and WIA programs, stipends are ineligible. Project Quest secured other funding for stipends. And an important difference is that Quest has jobs lined up beforehand (650).
2. How did Quest manage to get the jobs lined up? Church leaders associated with Quest inquired with business leaders who made moral commitments. Quest paid attention to lining up workers for an expanding industry.
3. How did Quest relate to employers? Quest insisted that wages were at a living wage. Some education going on between Quest and employers, some creation of job ladders.
4. Why did Quest want the community colleges to do the training? Quest did none of the training itself (community college did). Their intent may have been, in part, to improve the community college system; more likely the reason was why start from scratch when a system already exists. The colleges were seen as legitimate institutions with credibility. Furthermore, it was cheaper to contract with community colleges than to invest in one's own buildings, trainers. The role of Quest then turned to the provision of financial support and counseling.
5. Who gets into Project Quest? Who are the trainees? The candidates are disproportionately female, mainly Hispanic, 97% US citizens; mostly had high school degrees and GEDs; most had one or more barriers to employment.
6. So, is the program "creaming"? Does Quest only train those who are likely to succeed anyway (i.e., without training)? Trainees do have barriers to employment but are not the worst off in the labor market. Two ways to understand creaming: taking people who are not on the bottom rung according to qualifications; or people who show motivation and inner resources. In the Quest case, trainees clearly have barriers, but the selection process does involve enrolling people who display motivation. In that sense, it is not clear if the trainees would have done okay without the training.
7. Why did the program require a high school degree? First of all, the program planners wanted the program to be successful. For IAF, the program was high stake since this was their first major foray into labor market and so program was risk averse. And secondly, high school degrees were required for the types of better paying jobs which were being sought as placements for the program.
8. What are the claims of the evaluation of the program? The program helped raise wages for the trainees quite dramatically. Furthermore, the program helped orient and stabilize the community colleges and helped shape industry towards

these types of workers. The program was an appropriate investment, i.e., gave favorable returns on the investment as measured by the income gains.

9. Is the evaluation credible? A methodological problem is that the entrants were not accepted based on random assignment. Random assignment was not possible because the program had already started.

The wage gain claim was based on pre- and post- wage data and is fairly compelling although other exogenous factors cannot be discounted. But because the wage gains were so big, one has to give the program attribution for the wage gains. The appeal in the evaluation is to common sense, based on data, not incontrovertible evidence. The evidence included a comparison group of wage gains for others and Quest trainees were much better. The evaluation suggests that part of the program was to deal with crisis in people's life through counseling which helped turn people around.

10. The program served 600 people, but was the impact on a larger scale? Program changed the community colleges and made the colleges more attuned to market labor demand. How did the community college change practices for all students? It improved their remediation approach on unprepared students and allowed students for open entry/exit for students. This is an important point because if the program can change institutions, then the impact is much larger than the direct impact on the trainees.
11. Is there a displacement effect? It's always an issue and is nearly impossible to quantify in an evaluation. In the Quest case, foreign hired nurses would have been displaced by US trained nurses or medical assistants. In the diesel mechanic positions, employers claim that they couldn't find candidates, so there is no displacement effect.
12. Program is dependent on health care. Why? It's an expanding sector; it offers career ladders; the industry is locally based and not going offshore.

Project Quest has since been replicated by IAF in Texas, Arizona. Project Vida in Rio Grande. Capital Idea in Austin, for example. In Capital Idea training is provided to get trainees to GED level.

One way to think of Quest is as a program model which embodies best practice: employer-based and sectoral (medical, banking and diesel mechanics); employers are part of the review; program is long term; provides support. Another way to think of Quest is its link with political organizations and power that reinforces its programs. To that issue we now turn.

Regional Political Organizing

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1. COPS and Metro Alliance are IAF organizations. What is their role in these communities and why is that important? They have power, based on their people base. Because of their power, they had credibility and access. They received state funding because of their power.

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2. What is the story behind the IAF? IAF can be seen as a training program in leadership. IAF is also a story about building political power that can be

utilized for changing the labor market to the advantage of low wage workers. The attempt is to change the prevailing political climate.

3. How does the IAF organize itself and operate? IAF organizes through institutions, typically churches, but also schools, community centers and unions. Institutions, not individuals, are members of the local IAF. [In Boston, there is the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization.]
4. In Texas, IAF wanted to get involved in school reform as an organizing tool; in the school, both the principal and the parents have to be involved. After church leadership takes this on, IAF reaches out through house meetings, one-on-one conversations for a two year process. It's a slow process to develop people leadership, build "power before programs," before IAF organization takes on an issue. First set of issues are typically very local: extending hours at the local library, building a walk overpass. Local issues are more winnable and then extend into school reform or labor market development. Throughout is leadership development.
5. What are strengths and weaknesses of the model? For example, the IAF uses religious organizations as a backbone. Is that strength or a weakness? It does offer a pre-existing infrastructure, but it also erects a boundary that may exclude those who aren't religious. Some potential participants may fear a religious involvement in issues like school reform. Yet, churches are one of the few, sometimes only, social institutions that operate within the inner city which is important if part of the goal is to "re-weave the social fabric" in the cities. Churches are present in every neighborhood, they are permanent institutions, and they have stable finances that can contribute to the local IAF---one can build an organization based on churches.
6. IAF provides more systematic, ongoing leadership development than any other national movement. IAF is broad based to work on broadly affecting issues which build common ground. So they reject issues of identity politics such as gay rights, race, women's issues because they are seen as more divisive. IAF is about equity and fairness or is it about class politics. IAF doesn't organize the poorest of the poor, but it does organize poor people. Class analysis is seen as divisive so isn't talked about specifically. IAF hasn't been able to penetrate the suburbs. IAF is always looking for alliances and looking for the alignment of self interest to support the interests of poor people.
7. How does a job training program like Quest relate to an IAF organization that does political organizing? Job training is first step and not a radical initiative but it offers the organization an opportunity to broaden their base of support and provide solutions to problems, not just mobilize opposition. The IAF group first tried to start an employees association which didn't go well. Then started a living wage campaign in the Valley, raising the wages of 5,000 people for companies that got tax incentives from the city and the state. They used their power as an organization to leverage state funds for buildings to be used for training.

Some of the initiatives are contradictory. Project Quest works closely with local employers (bankers, health employers) who serve on their board. Yet, COPS mobilized their base to oppose City Council move to subsidize a

hotel/golf course resort development since it would create only a few, low-paying jobs. Employers then made trouble for Project Quest. Ordinarily, IAF is deeply pragmatic but do have principles, but flexible principles.

8. IAF is based on local organizational structures. There is no national IAF structure, yet there are national trainings, etc., but no national lobbying impact. In local areas, IAF makes alliances with unions, particularly SEIU, HERE and sometimes UFCW. But there is much conflict between IAF and unions which are typically much more top down. Unions will endorse political candidates while IAF won't.

The Larger Picture

In Securing Prosperity there are two main stories here: one based on mobility in the job market and second on countervailing power in the job market, i.e., alternatives to unions. The first story is about workers who seek better conditions by changing employers and employers who have to offer suitable enough conditions to attract decent employees. The second story is about ways that workers can gain voice and build power without necessarily expressing that through a labor union. One way to "align" interests is through Employee Stock Ownership Plans which allows workers to earn shares of the company. Presumably this provides an incentive to workers to contribute more to a firm's performance. But does this also allow a new way to relate to management? In traditional ESOP arrangements, ESOP shares are required to vote with the majority of the non-ESOP investors in shareholder votes. In non-traditional arrangements the employees can gain a voice with management in their role as co-investors in the in company.

Policy Issues

Uhalde and others offer a classic liberal advocacy agenda from respected policy thinktanks in Washington, D.C. Their agenda is less about mobilizing political pressure to get something done, rather is the legislative agenda about what needs to be done to improve worker training, across the spectrum and particularly for the low wage workers, such as TANF beneficiaries, which are in or entering the labor market.

