

NEWS AND INFORMATION UPDATE FROM THE NATIONAL SKILL STANDARDS BOARD

## BOARD ISSUES VOLUNTARY PARTNERSHIP CRITERIA

At its May 30 meeting the National Skill Standards Board approved the criteria for the "voluntary partnerships" that will develop skill standards systems. The voluntary partnerships must be employer-led but include the full participation of unions, workers, educators, trainers, and community organizations. Within each partnership's decision-making leadership, employer representatives must constitute between 35 and 50 percent of the members, national union and employee association representatives between 25 and 40 percent, and public interest representatives between 20 and 40 percent. The third group must include individuals from educational institutions, community-based organizations, state and local agencies responsible for education or job training, other policy development organizations with expertise in workforce skill requirements, nongovernmental organizations that protect the rights of racial, ethnic or religious minorities, and assessment experts. The ranges provide flexibility, but the NSSB expects the voluntary partnerships to make every effort to include equal representation from the three primary groups.

The Board made several changes in its proposed criteria as a direct result of a May 12 public hearing. At the hearing, Phyllis Eisen of the National Association of Manufacturers testified, "You have a golden opportunity to bring employers to the table and give them the responsibility for making this system work." John Saia of Toyota Motor Sales stressed, "Any effort to establish and maintain voluntary skill standards must be broadly supported by the industry served."

Eisen and Saia were among 17 witnesses— from business, trade and professional associations, labor unions, education and training organizations— who testified at the NSSB public hearing held May 12 in Washington, D.C. The Board sought advice from the public on proposed criteria for the structure and membership of the voluntary partnerships that will set national voluntary skill standards for broadly-defined occupational clusters. "Many high quality standards-setting efforts have evolved over the years," commented Carolyn Warner, Co-Chair of the Board's Voluntary Partnership Committee, "It just wouldn't make sense for the Board to move ahead without tapping into this expertise."

Labor witnesses unanimously backed the Board's original proposal to include equal numbers of representatives from the three broadly defined groups. Al Bilik, President of the AFL-CIO Public Employee Department, noted, "Equal voting weight among the partners has proven its effectiveness in our State and Local Government Labor/Management Committee. We strongly encourage the same principle in the NSSB's operations." Anthony Sarmiento of the AFL-CIO Education Department made another point also shared by all union witnesses: only national employee organizations should be included in a voluntary partnership's voting membership.

Education representatives were concerned that the Board's rules clearly make a place at the table for educators. "State and local vocational technical education leaders must have guaranteed participation in all voluntary partnerships," said Kimberly Kubiak, Executive Director of the National Association of State Directors of Vocational Technical Education. Bret Lovejoy, Executive Director of the American

## WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

**Why skill standards?** A more skilled workforce will enhance the global competitiveness of the U.S. economy, increasing the productivity and competitiveness of employers, and raising the living standards and economic security of American workers.

**What are skill standards?** Skill standards specify the knowledge and competence required to successfully perform in a given occupation or field.

**What we do, and who we are.** The 1994 National Skill Standards Act charged the National Skill Standards Board (NSSB) with "stimulating the development and adoption of a voluntary national system of skill standards." The 27 member Board was appointed by the President and Congress, and includes representatives of employers, workers, educators, community groups, and government.

**What we don't do.** The Board itself will not set skill standards, but rather establish the guidelines used to endorse standards created by groups called "voluntary partnerships" in the 1994 law. The law requires that voluntary partnerships include employer, union, worker, community, and education and training representatives.

### THE BOARD'S MISSION

The National Skill Standards Board encourages the creation and adoption of a voluntary national system of skill standards which will enhance the ability of the United States to compete effectively in a global economy. These skill standards will be developed by industry in full partnership with education, labor, and community stakeholders, and will be flexible, portable, and continuously updated and approved.

*Permission to reprint items from this newsletter is expressly granted.*

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### IN THIS ISSUE

This special issue of WorkWise shows how you and your organization can get involved with the National Skill Standards Board: through our Web Site (p. 2), by writing us (p. 2), by testifying at a public hearing (p. 1), or by signing an NSSB Statement of Support (p. 4). Skill standards should benefit us all, and the Board heartily encourages your involvement. In addition, our regular "best practice" feature appears on p. 3.

# TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

The NSSB strongly believes that seeking and listening to the views of interested and informed people like you is critical to building a national skill standards system that benefits everyone. The Board has – and will continue to – share its preliminary thinking and get input from others before making decisions.

There are several ways that you or your organization can express your views to the NSSB: write us directly, attend a public hearing (see article on p. 1), comment on our Internet Home Page (see article below), come visit us, or ask an NSSB representative to meet with your organization.

NSSB proposals (or a summary version) appear on our Internet Home Page, in our newsletter, and sometimes in the U.S. *Federal Register*. Or you can simply call or write to request our current proposal(s).

Let us know of your in-

terest! The Board is currently seeking advice on the proposed NSSB guidelines on the skill standards systems (the coalitions that form the voluntary partnerships will actually institute these skill standards systems -see article on p. 1).

## GUIDELINES FOR A NATIONAL SKILL STANDARDS SYSTEM

The Board is currently reviewing the comments on its Proposal to Establish a Voluntary National Skill Standards System, issued in December. The proposal appeared in the NSSB newsletter and website as well as the *Federal Register*, and the Board has distributed it in various meetings with stakeholder groups. We have heard from employers, trade and professional associations, unions, coalitions that have already developed skill standards or work-related assessments, educational and training institutions, local

organizations, state and federal government agencies, and various experts.

All of the respondents enthusiastically supported the concept of skill standards. The National Tooling & Machining Association characterized skill standards as “extremely important.” Michigan’s Office of Career and Technical Education noted, “The impact of skill standards cannot be overestimated, with skill standards having positive implications for individual, regional, and national economic well-being and competitiveness.”

Most respondents also endorsed the need to group jobs into clusters for the purpose of developing skill standards, in order to build a workforce that is well-rounded enough to meet employer needs and facilitate upward mobility for individual workers. Nor surprisingly, there was some dispute over whether the Board’s proposed clusters met this inherently challenging objective. The American Vocational Association noted “the difficulty of attempting to neatly define the nation’s industries into specific sectors.” Tennessee’s

Education Department said that one of the proposal’s strengths was its “clear definition of broad clusters.” On the other hand, a number of respondents suggested that the NSSB cluster broad groups of occupations and avoid industry groupings. For example, the Boeing Company stated that “broad occupational clusters would be more useful for job preparation and placement.”

Every facet of the proposal received at least some comment. A detailed compilation of the responses received in response to the *Federal Register* notice is posted on our Internet Home Page. If you or your organization would like to comment, we welcome your input.

If you would like to submit comments, please address them to “NSSB Proposal Coordinator” at our address.

“We are deeply grateful for the thoughtful advice we’ve received,” said NSSB Chairman James R. Houghton, retired chairman and CEO of Corning Incorporated, “and if we haven’t heard from you we encourage your feedback.”

## WEB SITE MAKEOVER!

The NSSB Web site has a new look and feel. On March 24, 1997 the National Skill Standards Board unveiled the newest version of its Web site located at WWW.NSSB.ORG. Make it your first stop to stay current on the development of a voluntary national system of skill standards, and to connect with the Board and other organizations that support skill standards.

### The Site Offers You . . .

- ▶ an on-line literature data base with over 400 documents on skill standards and related material;
- ▶ information on existing skill standards and pilot project efforts;
- ▶ NSSB current events and announcements; and
- ▶ the NSSB WorkWise newsletter.

For fast and easy access to the latest news, click on the “What’s New” box to get the most up-to-date information on Board-sponsored Requests for Proposals, press releases, *Federal Register* notices and other Board activities.

You can **Talk to Us** in several ways. Ask questions, post comments, show support or simply make the Board aware of you and your organization by using the:

**Feedback Button:** You can make general comments or pose questions. Information in this section is downloaded daily, and messages that require a response are addressed within 24 hours by the NSSB Clearinghouse staff.

**Guestbook Button:** Post your name, organization, address and phone number for placement on the NSSB mailing list for the newsletter and other up-

dates. Organizations that post their Web address might also be added as a linked site to the NSSB page.

**Bulletin Board Service (BBS):** Interested in participating in an on-line dialogue regarding skill standards? Post or respond to messages and questions on the NSSB’s BBS.

**Statement of Support:** You have an opportunity to show your support for the Board by adding your name and organization to an on-line “Statement of Support” (see the related article on p. 4). Individuals or organizations who respond will later receive a certificate of appreciation from the Board.

## NSSB MEETINGS

Friday, September 26, 1997  
Friday, November 14, 1997

*Locations to be determined.*

# SAN FRANCISCO'S *Grand Hotels*

In the late 1980's San Francisco's largest hotels were in trouble: these unionized hotels faced stiff competition from new non-union, luxury hotels, and labor-management relationships were highly confrontational.

But in the 1990's both employers and unions decided to try a new approach that relied – among other things – on developing training standards to boost workers' skills. The partners included San Francisco's largest hotels – two Hyatts, four Holiday Inns, the Palace Hotel (of Sheraton), the San Francisco Hilton and Towers, the Westin St. Francis, ANA, Fairmont, and the Handlery – and Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union Local 2 and the Service Employees International Union Local 14.

## LABOR/MANAGEMENT EDUCATION FUND

The new strategy began to emerge in 1991 when the San Francisco Hotel/Restaurant Labor/Management Education Fund broadened the training it provided beyond traditional apprenticeship occupations. The Fund, to which employers contribute under the collective bargaining agreement, offered job-site training to more than 1,200 workers in some 20 different areas in 1996, including guest services, various types of cooking, fine dining services, housekeeping, banquet serving, and hosting. For individuals hired on short notice from the union hiring hall, management and labor agreed that the workers would be qualified in at least one of four areas of cooking skills. These performance standards were developed in conjunction with management chefs, college instructors, and workers. "Training is now number one on everyone's list," says Joan Ortega, the Fund's Director.

## HOTEL PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

Training got another boost in 1994 with the creation of the San Francisco Hotels Partnership Project. Twelve of the city's largest hotels and 2 unions agreed to spend \$1.5 million over two years for education, training and problem-solving, more than thirty times the training funds previously available.

Both employers and labor are committed to quality service and cooperative relationships. A unique, collectively bargained "living contract" clause enables the partners to make changes between contracts.

Changes may be made to reorganize work to improve service and job security. Each hotel plans changes through Problem Solving Teams, which include employers, union representatives, and employees. The Teams' first main project was training.

The Project designed training in six areas: housekeeping; kitchen cooks; kitchen stewards (dishwashers); front desk; maintenance (operating engineers); and management. According to Project Coordinator Deborah Moy, "What has made the biggest difference is that all activities are customized so that the people being trained have control over content and teaching methods." Employees participated in surveys and focus groups to ascertain their training needs, and even helped select the trainers.

## EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PANEL

Another impetus for these training programs was a \$1.1 million additional grant the Project received from California's Employment Training Panel in late 1995. The grant allowed the participating hotels to train nearly one-third of their total of 5,000 employees. All training is provided at the job site, and employees are paid for the time they spend in training.

The training was designed to meet the needs of both employers and workers. The hotels customized the core curriculum to serve their varying clientele. San Francisco's extremely diverse workforce presents a challenge, which the Project met by using Chinese and Spanish translators in all team building courses, and actually teaching some classes in a foreign language.

## REAPING BENEFITS

All of these training efforts have resulted in improved guest satisfaction and employee morale, and in some documented instances lower costs. According to Project Coordinator Moy, "Guest satisfaction scores have risen at each participating hotel, and all employers have seen noticeable improvements in communication and morale." Lisa Impagliazzo, General Manager of the Marriott at Fisherman's Wharf (which used separate training funds), said, "Our guest satisfaction scores jumped 10 points as a result, and I've gotten many calls about it from our corporate office." Pennie Lau, Director of Training at the Palace Hotel (a luxury hotel of ITT Sheraton) emphasized that the program "has allowed us to create a

learning culture in our hotel. In addition, every training class is a team building opportunity." The Westin St. Francis Hotel's Richard Huang cited a single example where "training enabled revised security procedures that saved the Westin \$3,000 in one instance alone." Better working relationships have meant less work time lost due to grievances and arbitrations, as well as a rise in employee morale and job security. Greg Cornwell of the Hyatt pointed to "a dramatic improvement in our employee satisfaction survey – we jumped 40 places ahead of other Hyatt properties."

Workers have benefited not only from increased skills, but from having a greater voice on the job. "This has been one of the best training programs we've seen," said Mike Casey, President of the International Union of Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees' Local 2. "Workers have a voice in the training from start to finish, and the industry has begun to address cultural diversity in the training." Pennie Lau of the Palace Hotel noted, "Bringing managers and employees together in the same class empowered many workers to speak out for the first time." Deborah Moy said, "We now have people who were initially hostile to training who are begging for more classes."

"San Francisco's efforts are a great example of a progressive response to workforce development needs," commented Laura Pfalzer, Director of the national Hospitality & Tourism Skill Standards Projects, partially funded by the National Skill Standards Board. "The Las Vegas hotels operate a similar program through a training center, with the same high degree of success. I think we'll soon see this approach replicated in cities throughout this country."

## Public Hearing on Voluntary Partnership Participants

*Continued from page 1*

Vocational Association, seconded this point: "Educators may reject something they are not a part of. This is simply human nature." He further recommended that "the majority of voting members be comprised of business and industry representatives so that the standards can truly be industry-driven."

"Today's speakers clearly endorsed the Board's message that voluntary partnerships need to be inclusive," Warner commented after the hearing. "When you're working for something as important as America's economic future, you have to expect that there will be some tough questions along the way. I'm confident that by working together we'll find effective answers."

## SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

The NSSB thinks that skill standards are a necessary tool to meet the demands of the global marketplace. The Board acknowledges the ongoing skill standards efforts of states, businesses, unions, and associations. By integrating the Board's

work with these efforts, we can all contribute to a better American future.

If you agree that a voluntary system of national skill standards will benefit this nation and its employers and workers, we ask for your support by signing the NSSB

Statement of Support. The Statement is up on our web page at <http://www.nssb.org>. Download the Statement and return it to: NSSB Statement of Support, 1441 L St., NW, Suite 9000, Washington, DC 20005. Or write us or fax us (202/254-8646) to receive your Statement of Support Certificate.

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