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## Better help wanted

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MASSACHUSETTS desperately needs skilled workers to fill its 84,000 vacant jobs. A new training program can help, but only if it gets a home in the state budget.

The Department of Workforce Development's job vacancy estimate should be great news for the state's 150,000 unemployed. But many lack the required skills. Fortunately, the Legislature created a matchmaker, the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund, in the economic stimulus bill of 2006. Existing state programs offer job training. But the fund is a larger, smarter effort, which focuses on regional industries and gives grants to projects backed by partners in education and employment. Many of the jobs require training but not advanced college degrees.

Greenfield Community College, for instance, is using a \$370,000 grant to train people for "green jobs" in construction, such as installing solar panels and building other energy efficiencies. The college has 40 partners, including community groups and companies that send employees for training. The goal is to help Franklin County be a leader in the sustainable energy industry.

In Boston, Beth Israel Deaconess, Children's, and New England Baptist hospitals are using a \$500,000 grant to create a two-year Medical Lab Technician program with Bunker Hill Community College. There's a high demand for these workers, whose responsibilities can include handling specimens and running blood tests. Classes are held at Beth Israel, after work. During the last six months, participants go to labs for hands-on training. And they still get their salaries, making the training affordable.

Massasoit and Bristol community colleges are partners in Jobs in Boating (JIB). Using a \$425,000 grant, JIB offers two courses: an introduction to the marine trades, including boat repair and sales; and a marine-technician class that addresses a standing worker shortage by preparing students for entry-level jobs. The program is for the unemployed and job-changers. And My Turn Inc., a Brockton nonprofit, is recruiting youths. The workplace partner is the Massachusetts Marine Trades Association.

It's too soon for the trust fund to show results. But comparable training programs funded by SkillWorks, a local public-private partnership, have placed 76 percent of their 605 graduates in jobs.

Governor Patrick wants to give the trust fund \$15 million that would come from excess state revenues. This is prudent given the state's tight finances. The Legislature should follow suit. The state's economy can grow only if it has enough skilled workers. ■

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