Investing In People

The Story of Project QUEST
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The activities of the community organizations described in this publication are not the activities of the IAF, but rather the activities of those organizations themselves, independent of the IAF, even though the organizers and leaders of such community organizations have received extensive IAF leadership training. Some of those community organizations that are referred to are exempt from federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Others, those which become involved in legislative or political action beyond that permitted for 501(c)(3) organizations, are separately funded, separately operated nonprofit social welfare organizations that are exempt from such taxation under Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(4).
he leaders of two Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) organizations in San Antonio have created a new model for economic development. This model places people at the center of a genuine, far-reaching economic development strategy, based on educating hard-working people for high-skill jobs.

It grew out of a new social compact among employers, workers and the community at large. To help working families adjust to the rapid transition in the new economy San Antonio’s Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS) and Metro Alliance have engineered the development of a new kind of labor market intermediary. This new intermediary recognizes the legitimate interests of employers for effective, capable and competent workers while addressing the needs of workers for jobs that provide decent wages, health benefits, a career path, meaningful work and stability in the framework of a dynamic economy.

Project QUEST: The result is Project QUEST (Quality Employment through Skills Training), created through collaborative relationships involving IAF leadership, employers of high-skill workers, the City of San Antonio, the regional Private Industry Council (PIC), the governor, the Texas Employment Commission, education and training institutions, and state social service agencies. It is a job training program that begins not with job training schools, but with people. Project QUEST discards old assumptions and addresses real employment opportunities and needs in the community. It trains workers for employment that will be available upon completion of instruction. Project QUEST centers on the market empowerment of the worker, rather than the financial support of job training providers. It is a program created through a new relationship between the community of employers and the community of the unemployed and underemployed.

Most important, Project QUEST would not have existed without the IAF organizations, COPS and Metro Alliance, acting as mediating institutions, bridging the gaps created in today’s market economy. These organizations built upon the nearly two decades of organizing in San Antonio and the accountability they had accrued in the process to find a solution to a problem plaguing many American cities. Years of training leaders in the communi-
ties of inner-city San Antonio bore fruit when these leaders, their families and their neighbors worked together—and with the business and government leaders of the city and state—to put together a plan not just for their own employment but for the long-term economic development of their city. In the process, they are building a skilled, educated workforce that will enhance San Antonio’s economic well-being for years to come.

Closing pathway: Project QUEST arose out of a disaster: the sudden closing of a Levi-Strauss cut-and-sew factory on San Antonio’s South Side in 1990. Coming on the heels of several other plant closings and workforce reductions, as well as impending defense cutbacks that threatened good-paying employment, the Levi’s closing pointed to the loss of good-paying blue-collar jobs and rise in the low-paying employment in low-skill service industries. At the same time, high skilled jobs such as those in the health industry, were going begging for lack of skilled workers.

New opportunities: The leaders of COPS and Metro Alliance took this crisis and turned it into an opportunity to remake the economic relationships governing the city. In this book, Metro Alliance and COPS leaders describe how they put their principles and values into action, conceiving and pushing to implementation a complex multi-million-dollar job training program. The extraordinary work of ordinary people has created a job training and creation project that could serve as a model for cities around the nation. And it all began around the kitchen tables of the IAF leaders on San Antonio’s South Side. For every person mentioned in this book, there are a hundred other volunteer leaders who have devoted thousands of hours to the effort to bring good jobs at good wages to San Antonio. This book is dedicated to them.
Awakening to a Crisis

It was still dark in San Antonio, Texas, at 6 a.m. on the chilly morning of January 18, 1990, when Father Al Jost’s clock radio blared on. Before Father Jost could shut the noisy machine off, he recognized a voice on the radio. It was Elvira Solis, a leader in his church’s religious education program. She was being interviewed by the morning news reporter. With dawning horror, Father Jost, a Franciscan friar on San Antonio’s South Side, realized what they were discussing: the just-announced closing of the Levi’s plant where she worked. The plant made the popular Dockers casual pants. More than 1,000 employees, mostly Mexican-American women, would be out of a job within two months.

“I just went cold,” Father Jost remembered later. “I knew three or four people who were automatically out of a job, major leaders in our church. Besides them, I knew other people who had been common laborers before they started working at Levi’s. A lot of the Levi’s workers were single mothers who were the heads of their households. I remember thinking, ‘My God, I know someone on every street who’s going to be affected by this.’”

It’s fitting that the story of Project QUEST literally begins with the sounding of an alarm. The Levi’s announcement was a wakeup call not just to Father Jost, but to the city of San Antonio. It symbolized a phenomenon that had been growing over the years, but so gradually that no sense of crisis had developed with it. The Levi’s closing forced residents to take a hard look at a low-wage economy that didn’t work for most San Antonians.

Struggling on the South Side

As you drive through the South Side of San Antonio, evidence of economic disruption surrounds you. The neighborhoods have long been impoverished and industrialized; it bears a disproportionate supply of junk yards, used car lots, families living in trailers, burglar bars and gang graffiti. Many homes were built on tiny lots and expanded over the years by families struggling from paycheck to paycheck. But even though they were blue-collar, South Siders knew they could provide their children a decent home, an education and a chance for a brighter future. They could do this because, despite their lack of education or skills, they could find work that required little training yet still paid a decent wage: at Kelly Air Force Base, the Roeglein
meat packing plant, construction companies, Miller Curtain, San Antonio Shoe and the Levi’s plant.

“People basically had the sense that if you worked hard and showed yourself to be a faithful and loyal employee, you’d get what you needed to make it,” Father Jost remembered. “People tended to gravitate to the jobs their parents had. You got jobs through relationships; that’s how it worked.” But all that started to change about 10 years ago.

“There were really two stories going on at the same time in San Antonio in the 1980s,” Father Jost explained. “There was this boom in development for some parts of town, but the people on the South, East and West Sides were getting chewed up at the same time. People seemed to be working more and having less time with their families, less time to spend in the community. They were working harder, making less, and weren’t really getting anywhere. After the meat packing plant closed down, I remember seeing people selling fruit along the streets, doing anything they could to make some money. The plant closings didn’t really jibe with the message that business was great here.”

An Economy in Transition

What was happening on San Antonio’s South Side as the 1980s ended was no isolated phenomenon. In San Antonio as elsewhere, families were caught in the transition between the old economic reality and the new. San Antonio lost more than 14,000 jobs in manufacturing, textiles, transportation, construction and other industrial occupations during the 1980s. At the same time the city gained almost 19,000 relatively well-paying jobs in fields that demanded relatively high skills: from health care and education to auto repair and legal research. Other gains occurred in low-wage, low-skill jobs, such as those in the tourist industry. Those jobs, however, didn’t pay enough to support a family.

San Antonio’s struggles are part of a worldwide economic metamorphosis triggered by technological advances, the decline of union power, integration of national economies and increased competition for U.S. products from foreign companies. Making matters worse, changes in tax and other economic rules by the federal government during the 1980s benefited a few privileged interests at the expense of many more U.S. workers, leading to plant closings, job transfers abroad and declining opportunities.

The low-skill/moderate-wage jobs, such as those at Levi’s that lifted poorly educated workers into the middle class, disappeared. In the past, workers could earn a living wage by performing unskilled labor in steel mills, auto factories or mines. Now, the jobs that pay high wages demand specialized education and training to operate higher tech machinery or to manipulate words and ideas. Many employers attempt to protect their profits by cutting the incomes and security of workers. Families experience the downward pressure directly, as employers lower workers’ wages, cut their hours to part-time, trim back their health care insurance or lay them off in increasingly common corporate downsizings and restructurings.

Dramatic change: San Antonio, with its low-skilled labor force, was an early victim of this trauma. “If you were growing up here 20 years ago,” remembered COPS co-chair Pat Ozuna, who has lived her entire adult life on the South Side and raised three children there, “you were going to get a job at the manufacturing plants we had around here, or at Kelly. You can’t count on that anymore.”

If you were growing up here 20 years ago, you were going to get a job at the manufacturing plants we had around here, or at Kelly. You can’t count on that anymore.”

COPS Co-chair
Pat Ozuna
over the last two decades. Workers entering entry-level jobs often cannot find career paths. Employed workers discover that seniority does not necessarily give them increased opportunities for promotion or protect them from layoffs. They cannot assume that they will stay with the same employer or even career throughout their work life, but must face starting over with another employer or career. Educational credentials do not necessarily give reliable access to good jobs.

Higher demands: Furthermore, the paths to good jobs have changed. Employers have always found family connections useful for recruiting and screening young workers for entry-level jobs with relatively low demands for skills and experience. And families could prepare workers with the skills employers required; for example, a father could teach his son how to repair a car engine, creating a "family-to-work" transition. At the very least, families could provide workers with the one trait most demanded by employers: a strong work ethic.

Now, willingness to work hard isn't enough. Given employers' higher demands upon entry-level workers, families alone cannot give their children the skills they need to find good jobs. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has predicted that half of the fastest growing occupations in this decade will require significant education beyond high school. But even those who do have such credentials are finding they need specialized skills and experience in the field to impress employers.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics has predicted that half of the fastest growing occupations in this decade will require significant education beyond high school. But even those who do have such credentials are finding they need specialized skills and experience in the field to impress employers.

Impact on children: The symptoms affected children as well. "They felt there wasn't any tomorrow, nothing to work towards," said Father Wauters.

"The manufacturing jobs where their parents worked—Levi's, Roeglein, Kelly Field—were being taken away from them. They saw their future flipping hamburgers at McDonald's."

South Side parishioners were bearing the brunt of San Antonio's unbalanced economy; the shutdown of the Levi's plant had brought that lesson home. But because this was a citywide problem, it was clear that any solution would have to transcend the South Side. So, still shaken by the bad news to which he had awakened, Father Jost reached for the phone. He called the one citywide organization that might be able to find that solution. "As soon as I got past the shock," he recalled, "I called the COPS office. I said, 'We need to do something.'"

Symptoms of Stress

San Antonio was ill-prepared for these changes. Before the economists and politicians realized what was going on, ministers like Father Al Jost and Father Will Wauters of an Episcopal Church on the South Side knew something was wrong. They saw the impact of a changing economy on their parishioners.

"I saw the strains, the burdens that so many people were under," Father Jost recalled. "Divorces increased. I saw women becoming heads of households, not making it on one income. And even when two members of the family might be working, they weren't making enough money to support a family. The result of that was a lot of domestic violence, a lot of drinking, a lot of drugs. There was no sense of purpose in life. It wasn't just the people from Levi's. We saw people trying to work through this burden, trying to make a better life for themselves and their families and not being able to."
AWAKENING TO A CRISIS

San Antonio: Growth without Prosperity

San Antonio is a poor city that's getting poorer. While the population and number of jobs are both growing, the pay for many of those jobs is abysmally low by urban U.S. standards. An increasing percentage of San Antonians work in the low-wage service sector of the economy, in occupations such as private household work and food preparation, health service, and cleaning and building service. Meanwhile, middle-income jobs comprise a smaller proportion of the local job market.

This is no accident. For many years, the city's business leaders cultivated a low-wage economy in San Antonio, pursuing low-skill jobs that provided little social mobility for families. In 1930s, for example, business leaders rebuffed Ford Motor Company's attempt to locate a manufacturing plant there, fearing it would spark a rise in wages. As recently as the late 1970s, the city's Economic Development Foundation issued a report calling San Antonio a low-wage haven and urging business to relocate there to take advantage of a reliable but low-paid work force.

Figure 1.1 shows that during the 1980s, the distribution of jobs in San Antonio shifted away from middle-wage jobs toward high-paying or low-wage employment.

San Antonio's wage structure is related to a gap between the rich and poor. As seen in Figure 1.2, San Antonio's poverty rate was the second highest among the 15 largest U.S. cities.

Figure 1.3 shows the changes in employment in Texas that have had repercussions throughout the state.

Source: Partnership for Hope, the Urban Institute, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs and Texas Employment Commission.
or nearly 20 years, COPS and the Metro Alliance have brought together San Antonio churches and congregations of diverse faiths and ethnic backgrounds to improve their families’ quality of life by reshaping San Antonio’s political culture. The organizations have initiated new ideas for the creative use of local, federal, and state public dollars so that working families could rebuild their neighborhoods, physically and socially. They have developed goals and strategies from the experiences and dreams of working families. They have created a culture of accountability, negotiations, respect, and compromise within which the powers of a city can guide its destiny.

COPS and Metro Alliance have changed the way people think about power and politics in San Antonio. Policy decisions with major economic or social consequences cannot be made in this city without taking into account COPS and Metro Alliance and the people they represent. As a result, government policy and spending of public dollars more accurately reflect the needs of all the citizens of San Antonio, not merely the privileged few.

While the organizations neither endorse candidates for public office nor support political parties, they have set agendas for action by both public and private sector institutions. Over the last two decades, COPS and Metro Alliance have redirected more than $850 million dollars in infrastructure development to the inner city. However, the real success of IAF organizing isn’t measured in dollars, programs or votes. The ultimate goals are empowering communities and developing leaders.

In 1974, a coalition of Catholic churches on San Antonio’s West Side engaged Ernesto Cortés, a San Antonio native, to put together the organization that would become COPS. San Antonio then was on the threshold of change: the city’s Mexican-American community had just become a numerical majority. But city polices, perpetuated by an almost all-Anglo city council elected at-large to minimize minority voting strength, still emphasized development on the mainly Anglo North Side. Meanwhile, the mostly Mexican-American West and South Sides of town, and the predominantly African-American East Side, were deteriorating from official neglect.
Top concern: Cortés talked to the people in congregations and neighborhoods, learned their interests and taught them to organize for change. Their immediate concern was storm drainage; the West Side turned into a swamp whenever it rained heavily. Homes and cars flooded, children were swept to their deaths and most activity ground to halt until the waters receded days later. COPS leaders discovered that bond money approved by voters over three decades for drainage projects on the West Side had instead been spent to benefit suburbanites and developers, primarily on the North Side of town.

Bold tactics: COPS tried to get the city to address the problem, but their efforts were repeatedly rebuffed. Shut out of conventional political channels, the organization used confrontational tactics to force the power structure to listen to their concerns. In 1975, hundreds of COPS members lined up at the teller cages at the city’s oldest and largest bank (whose president wielded considerable political influence) to change pennies into dollars, and then dollars back into pennies, tying up the lobby for a day. The purpose was to get the local power establishment to recognize COPS’s demands by demonstrating the power of organized people. This and similar tactics worked: the local establishment began to meet with them, and in 1975 the city council agreed to draw up a $46 million bond issue to fund many of the overdue projects. Thanks to COPS-sponsored voter turnout drives, that bond issue passed, as did others. As a result, new libraries, parks, schools, streets and drainage projects were built in previously neglected neighborhoods.

Over the next few years, COPS forced the city to clean up blighted areas and to construct storm

"Over the years, COPS has won many issues and lost some, but its presence fundamentally redirected the flow of political power in the city."

William Greider, author of Who Will Tell the People?
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drains, curbs and better water mains to prevent flooding. It also stopped freeway construction that would have disrupted long-standing communities, halted construction of a supermall that threatened the city’s source of drinking water and forced adoption of an interim ordinance restricting polluting development.

The Metro Alliance: Citywide Clout

In the early 1980s, residents of areas outside COPS’ West and South Side strongholds took note of COPS’s stunning successes, and formed two new IAF-affiliated San Antonio organizations: the Metropolitan Congregational Alliance (MCA) and East Side Alliance (ESA). They worked to control water and utility rates, helped institute the city’s first energy conservation plan, made developers pay more of the cost of development and prodded the city to improve neighborhood security through community policing. The two organizations also worked with COPS on citywide issues such as bond elections, aquifer protection and adequate drinking water supply for the city. ESA and MCA merged in 1989 to form the Metro Alliance, whose

Twenty Years of Progress for San Antonio

During the past two decades, COPS and Metro Alliance have improved the life of the community in San Antonio in several ways.

Education

- Palo Alto College: COPS forced the Alamo Community College District board of directors to place Palo Alto College on the previously underserved southwest side of town.
- San Antonio Education Partnership: A partnership with the city, school district, colleges and universities, and the business community, SAEP prevents dropouts by awarding high school students with a “B” average and 95 percent attendance rate a partial scholarship to a San Antonio college or university, or a job opportunity. Since 1990, more than 1,500 students have gone to college as a result of this initiative.
- After-school programs: A partnership with the city, local communities and school districts, these programs provide elementary and middle school students recreation and academic assistance in an extended learning day. City officials credit the programs with reducing crime and improving academic performance. By the end of 1994, 300 elementary and middle schools in San Antonio will have an after-school program.
- Alliance Schools: A partnership with the Texas Education Agency, local school districts and individual schools, this initiative encourages parental involvement and school restructuring to give parents and the community more ownership of the schools. It’s credited with improving school performance.

Housing

IAF organizations in San Antonio are responsible for the construction of 1,000 units of new housing, rehabilitation of 2,600 existing units, and purchase of 1,300 more, and the numbers grow every year.
- Housing Trust Fund: IAF leaders pushed the city council to set aside $10 million to endow the Fund, ensuring an annual stream of $500,000 to $1 million for flexible home financing. This helps low-income families who don’t qualify for other housing programs buy their own homes.
- Select Housing Target Areas: Formulated with city officials and the San Antonio Development Agency (SADA), the program redevelops blighted neighborhoods.
- Homeownership Incentive Program (HIP): Enables moderate-income families to receive a 30-year, zero-interest second mortgage to use as a down payment on a new home.

Neighborhood Improvement

- Bond issues: Over the years, COPS and Metro Alliance have worked to include in bond issues items such as street repair, drainage improvements, park and library
BRINGING POWER BACK TO THE PEOPLE

combined strength, along with COPS, gave IAIF a citywide presence, influence in more city council districts and therefore greater clout. Since the merger, Metro Alliance has also taken on new issues, such as keeping dangerous gasoline storage tanks out of residential neighborhoods and a parental empowerment initiative that teaches parents to play a larger role in their children’s education.

Metro Alliance and COPS now represent nearly 50 congregations and 90,000 families. The decay of the central city has been reversed, and once-declining areas are springing back to life. COPS and Metro Alliance could legitimately claim a large share of the credit. By January 1990, when the Levi-Strauss plant closed, the organizations had gained enough power and experience to address the rapid decline of good jobs in San Antonio—an issue considerably more complex than any they had taken on before.

COPS and Metro Alliance have tapped into the legitimate anger that many San Antonians have felt about unfair city policies construction and upgrading, community centers, and other capital improvements. They have worked to educate voters and get out the vote to support the bond issues. The organizations have also drawn up master plans for parks and libraries in underserved areas. As a result, hundreds of millions of dollars have been raised through bond issues and spent to rebuild inner-city neighborhoods; and new parks, libraries, community centers and health clinics serve the people there.

■ Community Development Block Grants (CDBG): Each year COPS and Metro Alliance present budgets outlining their priorities for the city’s annual federal CDBG money. Most of their proposals are accepted. CDBG provides $18 million annually for housing and capital improvements. San Antonio’s program has been recognized nationwide as a model CDBG project.

■ Safety: COPS and Metro Alliance have worked to protect communities by spurring the city to institute community policing, enforce compliance with city health and safety codes, and use zoning laws to protect neighborhoods from dangerous or disruptive industrial development, junkyards and polluters.

■ Single-member districts: In 1977, COPS was instrumental in bringing single-member city council districts to the city, ensuring fair minority representation after decades of Anglo domination. In 1984, they got out the vote for a referendum that made the South San Antonio Independent School District board elected from single-member districts, improving accountability to parents and the community.

■ Reducing rate increases: In 1975, COPS held public actions demonstrating that the City Water Board’s huge proposed rate increases were unnecessary and were caused by city subsidies to developers. They stopped the subsidy and reduced the rate increase. Later, COPS held the city and contractor accountable for cost overruns in the South Texas Nuclear Project. Since then, Metro Alliance and COPS have been a constant watchdog at rate hearings, exposing extravagant or fiscally unsound expenditures and forcing reductions in unjustified rate increases for water and electric service that would have hurt lower-income residents.

They have checkered the developer-dominated city council’s practice of subsidizing extension of utility services to far-flung private subdivisions that were weakening the inner city. The participation of Metro Alliance and COPS in these issues has permanently transformed San Antonio’s political structure. “COPS was the force most responsible for the present structure of government in San Antonio,” says former Mayor Henry Cisneros.
and helped transform that anger into a passion for work and change. They have empowered whole communities and created a legion of new neighborhood leaders who are taking the future of their city into their hands. Though their tactics have changed over the years, the underlying philosophy that guides them and the justified anger that fuels them has not. "A lot of people misunderstood COPS in the early days," says San Antonio Mayor Nelson Wolff. "But they were after the same thing everyone was after: decent streets, parks, housing, job opportunities. For a long time they were banging at the door, and now, after a 20-year period, COPS and Metro Alliance are very much in the door and they're very much in a powerful position in the community. So the tactics and the way they accomplish things have certainly changed, but not their philosophy. If they can get it done with sugar and spice, they'll get it done that way; if they can't, they'll be banging on the door again."
The Industrial Areas Foundation

The Industrial Areas Foundation is the center of a national network of broad-based, multiethnic, interfaith organizations in primarily poor and moderate-income communities. Created over 50 years ago by Saul Alinsky and currently directed by Ed Chamoes, it now provides the leadership training for more than 30 organizations representing nearly 1,000 institutions and more than 1 million families. The central role of the IAF organizations is to build the competence and confidence of ordinary citizens and taxpayers so that they can reorganize the relationships of power and politics in their communities in order to reshape the physical and cultural face of their neighborhoods. The IAF works with organizations in the New York City area, Texas, California, Arizona, Maryland, Nebraska, New Mexico, Tennessee and the United Kingdom, and is assisting the development of about a dozen more in other regions. The Southwest Industrial Areas Foundation Network, which includes The Metro Alliance and COPS in San Antonio, brings together 400,000 families and 500 congregations in Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Louisiana and Nebraska.

The IAF trains ordinary families to organize their congregations and communities to take responsibility for their futures. It organizes people based on the Iron Rule: "Never do for anyone what they can do for themselves." The IAF's mission is to make democracy work for all citizens through the restructuring of power and authority. It teaches ordinary people to organize their communities to participate as partners with government bureaucracies, corporations, banks, elected officials and others who commonly exercise power in American society.

"The quality that makes the IAF organizations so distinctive," says political analyst William Greider in his 1993 book, Who Will Tell the People?, "is their relentless attention to the conditions that ordinary people describe in their own lives. Their authority is derived from personal experience, not from the policy experts of formal politics."

Together in the last two decades IAF families and congregations have:

- Re-directed billions of dollars of public investment to inner cities: IAF organizations have directed Community Development Block Grant, bond, and other moneys to rebuild inner-city neighborhoods. In San Antonio alone, IAF organizations have been responsible for the building of more than $850 million of new streets, drainage, sidewalks, parks, libraries, community centers and clinics the past 20 years.

- Created thousands of new homes: IAF organizations have directed state, local and federal resources to leverage new housing developments in neglected communities. Nehemiah Projects have built or are building over 3,000 new homes in the most devastated neighborhoods of New York City, Baltimore and Los Angeles.

- Revitalized neighborhood schools: IAF organizations have been working since 1986 with over 100,000 families in over 100 schools in 30 districts in Texas, Arizona, California and New York to bring schools, families, and their communities together to improve public education. Public-private partnerships in Baltimore, San Antonio and Houston reward successful graduates with scholarships and jobs.

- Raised the living standards of poor workers: The Moral Minimum Wage Campaign in California in 1987 increased the incomes of poor workers by more than $1 billion by raising the state's minimum wage to $4.25, then the highest in the nation.

- Brought water and sewer services to the colonias in South Texas: The IAF Network initiated and led two statewide referenda that pledged $250 million in grants and loans to develop safe drinking water and sewer services in poor, semi-rural neighborhoods—home to more than one-quarter million Texans.

"What Metro Alliance and COPS did is be part of the solution instead of part of the problem."

San Antonio banker
Tom Frost
Laying the Groundwork

When Father Al Jost called the COPS leaders to tell them about the Levi's plant closing, the organization was already poised to act.

Responding to what they had heard in their regular meetings in the community, COPS leaders had begun preliminary research on the issue of work in the mid-1980s.

"The issue of employment had been with us for a long time," said Pat Ozuna, a co-chair of COPS's job training committee. "We had been hearing about it in bits and pieces, one family here, another there. But when Levi's closed, it really hit us hard because it was so many people at once."

Around the same time, Metro Alliance was hearing similar stories. "People in the neighborhoods talked to us about wanting better jobs," said Metro Alliance co-chair Marcia Welch. "Many wanted to go into health services. We found out that the hospitals here were importing people from the Philippines. We had people here who wanted to be nurses, but they didn't have the opportunity."

The Levi's closing intensified their efforts. "We were starting to talk about work and the salaries our people were making. We talked about everything that affects the family, and work was one of them," said COPS co-chair Virginia Ramirez. "But something had to happen to bring it out. When Levi's closed, people were so upset. It was a tremendous opportunity for us to really get people to understand the things that were affecting them. More than anything else, the political will had to be there, and Levi's gave us that."

Investing in people: At its May 1990 annual convention, COPS voted to make job training and workforce development one of the organization's top priorities; Metro Alliance soon voted the same priorities. "Economic development is meaningless," Pat Ozuna told the assembled COPS leaders and politicians such as San Antonio Mayor Lila Cockrell and gubernatorial candidate Ann Richards, "unless we have programs to invest in people."

The leaders had to educate themselves about labor economics, job training program design, and demographic changes that were depriving families in Metro Alliance and COPS neighborhoods of good jobs. For much of 1990, dozens of volunteer leaders—all of whom had full-time jobs or the duty of taking care of a family in addition to their work with the
organizations—devoted thousands of hours to hundreds of house and church meetings and research actions on existing job training programs, economics studies and the local economy. The leaders were careful to listen not just to high-powered economists and business leaders, but also their own neighbors. Often the stories from their communities contradicted the rosy portrait painted by the business community.

Commitment: In the spring of 1991, COPS formed a job training core committee to oversee the entire effort; Metro Alliance joined soon after. This group included leaders such as Gay Guerra, Al Gray, Mary Rivas, Genevieve Flores, Coralee Fenner and Eloise Ortega, and met every other Monday for almost two years.

"The commitment of our leaders was just amazing," recalled Ozuna, who initially chaired and spearheaded the campaign. "They spent hundreds of hours researching, just for Project QUEST and, that was only one of the issues the organization worked on. Even before the research into job training, there were hundreds of individual meetings and house meetings just to bring the issue of work to the organization's attention. There were 40 people on the job training committee after the Metro leaders joined, and they all spent up to 20 hours a week on it."

Much of IAF's work takes place in house meetings held throughout the neighborhoods of member congregations. The meetings, usually involving one or more COPS or Metro Alliance leaders and up to a dozen people from the community, help leaders reconnect to their neighbors and hear the community's concerns. They provide an opportunity for conversations among neighbors about common difficulties (such as layoffs and low wages), allowing people to process their private pain and make it public, to realize that others in their neighborhood share it and then to get down to business. IAF organizing converts despair into constructive passion for change, and in close to 300 house meetings, COPS and Metro leaders found a lot of anger to tap.

"You can learn more at a house meeting with 10 people than in a church meeting with a hundred people," Ozuna explains. "You talk about what's happening with your family, because the people that are sitting around you are people like you, and they understand. This is a community that shares, and everybody's in the same boat."

Frustating system: The house meetings brought to the surface a high-pressure stream of resentment about the existing job training programs that people
relied on to teach them new skills.  
“Our people were suffering all kinds of indignities,” Ozuna says.  
“People going to proprietary schools and getting a worthless piece of paper, going into debt. A ‘job training’ program where they would say, ‘there’s a newspaper, go out and find a job.’ You would come to a job training agency, and the staff would talk down to you. Eventually you fill out your papers, and they’d say, ‘We’ll call you when we’re ready.’ And you’re sitting at home for weeks, your children are going hungry, and you’re wondering ‘When am I going to start my training?’ The whole attitude was, ‘Who are you, anyway? You’re garbage!’”

Sometimes more than a hundred people—some illiterate in English, others high school honor graduates—would be sent to a classroom, all taught the same lessons by one or two “trainers.” Often trainees had to share books. No day care was provided, so parents had to bring their children to class.

“Once you’d gotten a story like that,” Father Jost noted, “you could repeat it, and other people would say, ‘Yeah, I’ve seen that.’ That’s often the opening of a house meeting: telling one of those stories and asking if people had heard anything like it.”

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**Job Training Experiences**

- Gilbert Gallego went to a private school to become a pharmacy technician. He took out a $4,100 loan and spent nine months in classes. When he graduated, he found out his diploma was useless because his instructors were not certified. He had no job in that field, but still owed a $4,100 debt.
- Margie Castro was one of the workers laid off by Levi Strauss. She, like many others, entered the local Job Training Partnership Act or JTPA, the federal government’s principal job training program. The company she was placed with was to teach her how to sew baseball caps. She saw her salary drop from $8 to $5 an hour, while the company collected on the job training subsidies for a skill she already had.
- Juanita Sanchez, a single mother with four children, scraped together $600 for a three-month course to receive training for home health care work. She couldn’t afford any more time or money to take a longer-term training course to become a LVN. When she finished her course, her best job opportunity was to work in a private home at less than the minimum wage 12 hours a day, seven days a week.
LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Research Actions

COPS and Metro Alliance leaders also commenced a series of "research actions," explorations of the San Antonio economy and existing job training efforts. These actions involved not just researching studies, but also meetings with state and city officials and economists. They found that what was happening in San Antonio was a systemic, national problem.

"It became clear that what had happened with Levi's was a pattern," said Father Al Jost. "The jobs that offer security are leaving. The data made it clear that the only way to make it in the future was to have a trained workforce."

Economic forces: COPS and Metro leaders also met with economists and job training experts, including former U.S. Secretary of Labor Ray Marshall (now a professor at the University of Texas' LBJ School of Public Affairs), Chris King and Robert Wilson, also of the University of Texas.

"I learned how hard it is for people now with this new global economy," says Pat Ozuna. "Unless you have some kind of good training, there's no way people can go from high school to good jobs. My husband is a mechanic, and he learned from his dad how to be a mechanic. You can't do that anymore. You need all this machinery and high tech equipment. When I started as a secretary, all you had to know was how to type. That won't do it anymore. You need computer skills."

They also learned about the existing flawed job training system. "We needed to understand how JTPA worked," said Pat Ozuna, "because before you can change anything, you need to know the ground rules." What they found gave them the basis for a new approach to job training.

"We discovered that the money was connected to the institution of training, not the person being trained," Father Jost recalled, "and therefore there was no accountability for how the money was spent." The leaders found that the government would pay a private training provider hundreds of dollars for a quick training program in, say, computer programming, when a much better

The Outdated Job Training System

The house meetings and research actions uncovered some of the reasons why San Antonio's job training programs weren't working. These were some of the obstacles to be overcome if the concerns expressed by residents were to be addressed.

- Outdated rules: JTPA rules encouraged short-term rather than long-term training, usually no more than two months, far short of the time needed to teach basic literacy and math, much less more advanced skills. A recent Texas Employment Commission study found that the median stay in a Texas JTPA program was only 14 weeks. Other studies showed that short-term training at best equipped trainees for dead-end, low-wage jobs. For example, nearly three-quarters of all Texas JTPA placements fell into low-wage job categories.

The system was designed for the old economy, in which most layoffs were temporary, and workers only needed a few simple skills to find another good job. In the changing economy of the late 1980s and 1990s, however, that policy was and is flawed. IAF leaders were among the first to realize that instead of merely helping people look for jobs and learn a few basic skills, the system needed the greater resources required to give people long-term training.

- Political favoritism: JTPA funds were often directed to training providers based on their political relationships rather than their effectiveness. The leaders discovered that the San Antonio Private Industry Council board controlled the city's JTPA funds. But "the PIC was controlled by many of the job training providers who received JTPA money," said Mayor Nelson Wolff, who campaigned on a promise to clean up the program. Their interest lay more in making a profit churning people through quick, inadequate programs than in training people for good jobs. And since the training providers controlled the PIC board, they were able to stifle reform.

- Improper incentives: Many of the agencies would not only perform the training but would also evaluate applicants to find what training they were suitable for. This encouraged a few unscrupulous training providers to "evaluate" clients as suited for whatever job the provider happened to have trainers for regardless of whether there was an actual demand or market for those jobs. The agencies were also reimbursed for each evaluation, so several performed five or six evaluations on the same person! No effective sanctions existed to punish providers who failed to provide trainees with jobs after being paid for "training" them.
INVESTING IN PEOPLE: THE STORY OF PROJECT QUEST

class in the same subject was available at nearby Palo Alto College for $20. Taxpayer money was paying administrative costs for training providers that were not training San Antonians for good jobs. Instead, trainees were learning how to write resumes that listed no skills employers wanted. Finally, the leaders identified what city, state and federal funds might be redirected to pay for a new job training program.

From Listening to Teaching

The house meetings and research actions also served a teaching function: broadening families’ understanding of the impact of a changing economy on their lives. The meetings built the political will for action to stir up community support for the inevitable day when COPS and Metro Alliance would formulate a plan, confront city hall, and demand action. Working people in the parishes, business leaders, politicians all had to understand why this was a critical issue in order to secure their support for change.

“As we were becoming more educated through our research, we would feed that information back to the house meetings and research actions to find out whether it rang true,” Father Wauters recalls. “We’d come back and present those statistics in the house meetings, and people would add to that their own stories of the loss of real income. They’d say, ‘Yeah, when we were working at Roeglein, we were making $6 an hour, and now we’re making $5 an hour, so we understand that.’”

New perspective: Pat Oznina remembers when the character of the meetings started to change. “As we did our research actions, the house meetings evolved from just listening to their horror stories to educating them about how the problems were created.” The meetings transformed the anger

“I think the real strength [of the fight for Project QUEST] was listening to people’s stories and then using that anger. You had a real passionate group of folks who wanted not only jobs for themselves, but also a lot of parents and grandparents who understood that this is the future for their family and the community.”

Metro Alliance Co-chair
Father Will Wauters
LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

over lack of good jobs into clamor for job training opportunities and, eventually, willingness to sacrifice time and money to participate.

As the house meetings continued into 1991, they built momentum for change. "You could feel this gathering sense of progress," said Virginia Ramirez. "As we learned more and began to see what needed to be done, you could feel the anger and the power growing. With all that energy on our side, we knew we were going to make something happen."

At the same time they were teaching and learning from working-class San Antonians, Metro Alliance and COPS leaders were also talking with another group of city leaders who could help them do something about the lack of good jobs in San Antonio.

Victims of a Changing Economy

Economic trends may emerge slowly and subtly when viewed from a distance, but for those directly affected, shifts in the economy are swift and lethal. Workers lose their jobs and oftentimes their self-esteem, families lose security and in many cases, hope.

- José Jimenez started work at the Roeglein meat packing plant when he was 14 or 15. He had some education but not much. He worked there nearly 20 years, eventually earning $7.50 an hour plus benefits. It was not a huge salary, but enough to support his wife and three children. Then he lost his job when the plant closed. He could only find a job as a busboy, earning $4.50 an hour, including tips. The job had no benefits.

- Oralia González is a single parent with three children. Her job at the sewing machine was the primary means of support. Even though she had only a grade school education, her work at Levi’s was enough to support her family and to make the payments on a small house. But after losing her job, her prospects were dim. Her English was poor. She was afraid of losing her house. She didn’t know if she could keep her kids out of the gangs.

- Estela Sotelo, the oldest daughter in a family of six, was a bright student who worked hard, pushed herself and was an honor student in high school. She was a leader in the youth group at her church. She won a scholarship to Trinity University in San Antonio, a prestigious private school. However, her father, a construction worker, lost his job and could not find another. To help her family meet the financial crisis, Estela didn’t enter school, but took a job at a food stand in the airport. She still hopes to go to college, but because she interrupted her studies, she lost her scholarship.

- Mary Moreno worked at Levi’s for over 12 years. Her husband was a mechanic at a factory making turbines. Both were laid off within two months of each other. Her family lived from week to week on the edge of financial and personal disaster. She needed to have an operation, but wasn’t sure if her insurance would pay the bills. To help the family, their son in high school had to go to work part-time. He dropped out of all his school and church activities to keep an evening job in a fast-food restaurant. Mrs. Moreno’s husband found only odd jobs as a mechanic for nearly two years. She looked for work for nine months before finding a low-paying job.
Working with the Business Community

Why are we all here anyway?” bellowed B.J. “Red” McCombs, owner of one of the largest car dealerships in San Antonio. “Everyone knows there are no jobs in San Antonio!” The beefy, redheaded owner of the Spurs professional basketball team and local power broker smiled as he said it, but the assembled COPS and Metro Alliance leaders knew that many in the San Antonio business community shared that view.

The IAF leaders who gathered in the conference room at the downtown office of Frost Bank had put together this meeting of the city’s major business leaders to discuss the possibility of their supporting a new job training initiative. And now here was one of the most powerful men in town telling everyone that it was futile.

Strong relationships: Why were these powerful business leaders willing to meet with COPS and Metro leaders—housewives, ministers, bus drivers—and listen to their ideas on job training? Over two decades, the organizations had built up a sizable reservoir of credibility and relationships with business and political leaders. Banker Charles Cheever, for instance, had tangled with COPS in the 1970s when they protested the Economic Development Foundation’s attempts to lure only low-wage employers to San Antonio. But in 1988, COPS approached Cheever, then chairing the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, to represent the business community in a new joint endeavor.

“I was impressed with their work on the San Antonio Education Partnership,” Cheever remembers. “That’s where I really got to know some of the people in COPS and Metro Alliance, and saw that they were intelligent, sincere people who had a conscientious agenda and could work with the business community.” Cheever later agreed to serve on the board of directors of Project QUEST, taking over as chairman when banker Tom Frost was named chairman of a state job training task force.

Building respect: Frost, whose bank had been a target of those first COPS actions in the early 1970s, had also grown to respect the organizations. “Even though they started out with a radical approach, the projects they were supporting were reasonable, and
they were responsible in the way they approached the community,” Frost says today. “My agenda has not always had the same priorities as theirs, but we’ve found that we have a lot of areas in which we agree.”

Over time, business leaders had learned that IAF’s strategy of economic development through investment in communities was in the long-term self-interest of business and cities. IAF leaders met regularly with Frost and other San Antonio business leaders; in one such exchange, Frost agreed to become involved with QUEST. “They were concerned about job training programs,” Frost recalled. “I said I’d heard in the press that there were some problems, and they said, ‘We have a solution.’ Through several different conversations, I was impressed that they were correct, and that led to my involvement in Project QUEST.”

**Connections:** IAF leaders asked Frost to call several of San Antonio’s large employers, including Callie Smith of Baptist Hospital, John Howe, president of UT Health Science Center, McCombs, and others, and request their participation in a meeting to discuss job training. Virtually all of them agreed. When asked why he agreed to come to a meeting with COPS and Metro leaders, a local hotel magnate said “When my banker calls, I come running.”

When the business leaders gathered at Frost Bank in July of 1991, the IAF leaders had the confidence of, as Mark Twain once put it, “A Christian with four aces.” They had done their homework on job training through a year of research and earned a place at the table. “It wasn’t frightening to me to sit with Mr. Frost and the mayor,” Virginia Ramirez said, “because you’re talking about your people, and you know that your strength is your people. And that gives you the courage to talk to those businessmen.”
INVESTING IN PEOPLE: THE STORY OF PROJECT QUEST

**Turning Point**

That hard work, credibility and confidence is what enabled them, at the initial meeting with business leaders, to transform potential disaster (Red McCombs’s opening comment) into triumph. Virginia Ramirez remembers what happened next.

“I knew we were going to be successful when Red McCombs said, ‘There are no jobs in San Antonio,’ and then the CEO from Baptist Hospital, Callie Smith, said, ‘No, that’s not true. I have 200 jobs I can’t fill.’ And all of a sudden it started coming together. That was the turning point. That’s when it hit me that this was going to work.”

**Preparation:** The IAF leaders had anticipated such skepticism. They had heard the line from some corporate pessimists that there were no jobs in San Antonio, and they didn’t want to let that myth thrive over this meeting. Their research had disclosed that employment in the burgeoning health care industry, among others, was booming. So they made sure to invite executives from that field, to refute the notion that no good jobs were out there.

“Most of them had bought into the myth that there weren’t any jobs in San Antonio,” COPS’s Pat Ozuna recalls. “Sometimes we had to push them a little bit. A construction company executive said, ‘I don’t have any trouble getting roofers.’ And we asked, ‘How about sheet metal workers?’ And he said, ‘Well, now that you mention it, we are having a little trouble getting some sheet metal workers....’”

By the time the meeting was over, the executives had agreed to work with the organizations on the workforce development concept that eventually became Project QUEST. And as with the house meetings, they used this meeting and many others not just to listen to the business leaders, but to educate them, get their reaction to their preliminary thinking and eventually secure their cooperation in QUEST.

**Business commitment:** “John Howe, for example, suggested that we have an evaluation of the program, so we’d know what worked and what didn’t. That wasn’t in our initial concept,” Father Wauters remembered. “So it was definitely an exchange. And eventually we got to the point where we were asking for a commitment of a certain number of jobs.”

At first, business leaders were reluctant. How could an employer know, two years in advance, how many positions it would have open? But Metro and COPS showed how businesses were going to benefit from this program: they’d get skilled employees. The price: they had to buy in by promising to hire the graduates. “As they began to hear us, they really did see that this was in their self-interest as well,” said Father Wauters. “If they were going to compete with Houston and Dallas, they needed more skilled workers.” (Eventually, business leaders would commit to hire 650 QUEST graduates.) A month after the initial gathering, IAF leaders met with 40 more local business leaders, and such sessions continued throughout the process of setting up Project QUEST. The business community’s early participation made the program appealing to employers whose commitment of jobs was an essential component.

The health care jobs were crucial. “On behalf of Callie Smith, I called a meeting of local health care chief executive officers to talk about job training in November 1991,” recalled Peggy Brown, administrator of the Institute of Health Education at the Baptist Memorial Hospital system. “There has been a severe shortage of qualified employees in every kind of nursing and allied health care profession for the last five to eight years.”

**“I think the business community has given up the idea that COPS and Metro Alliance are temporary organizations. They’re going to be here, and if they want to be part of the process, the business community is going to have to work with COPS and Metro Alliance.”**

Mary Beth Rogers, former chief of staff to Texas Governor Ann Richards
years. We need a steady flow of good people, and those jobs fit nicely into what COPS and Metro Alliance were looking for."

Besides identifying jobs for QUEST, those meetings have resulted in the creation of a permanent advisory group among San Antonio-area health care employers. The group meets regularly to project employment needs in this rapidly growing field. It also works with Project QUEST to create training programs in areas of need, such as a new surgical training program for nurses scheduled to begin in 1994.

COPS and Metro organized corporate involvement for political reasons as well. COPS and Metro Alliance wanted job training to be viewed as an economic development strategy, and business participation would give political leaders confidence that it was a practical one. That’s also why the leaders, drawing on the organization’s Iron Rule (“Never do for anyone what they can do for themselves.”) built in so much accountability and spoke the language of economic development. They had to show that this wasn’t a giveaway but an investment for which recipients would be held accountable.

“I’ve been really impressed by COPS and Metro’s work on QUEST,” says Brown. “When I was growing up here, COPS always sounded so radical. But as I’ve gotten to know them, I’ve been impressed in how two strong-willed groups like COPS and Metro Alliance can come together and really agree on goals that help the city.”

Power of the people: Besides bringing powerful business leaders on board, those meetings also confirmed to COPS and Metro Alliance leaders just how much power organized people could wield. Beginning with that meeting, they had woven, almost from scratch, a vital new network of relationships concerned with jobs and job training, connecting employers with potential workers, political leaders, even with each other. “In that first meeting,” said Virginia Ramirez, “I realized, all these important people were sitting there, and they had never talked to each other about what jobs were available. And I realized, we had brought them all together to talk about jobs.

“I remember thinking,” she continued, “Here’s Virginia Ramirez, who a few years ago could only get a job sweeping floors. Most of our people never finished high school. And now we’re telling these men how we are going to change the face of San Antonio.‘ It was powerful. So powerful.”

“I remember thinking, ‘Here’s Virginia Ramirez, who a few years ago could only get a job sweeping floors. Most of our people never finished high school. And now we’re telling these men how we are going to change the face of San Antonio.’ It was powerful. So powerful.”

COPS co-chair
Virginia Ramirez
CHAPTER 5

Designing QUEST

By the fall of 1991, after months of collecting information from the working people in their neighborhoods, employers, studies and statistics, Metro Alliance and COPS leaders realized why high-wage jobs were becoming increasingly out of reach for working-class families: too many San Antonians lacked the skills needed to fill those positions in the new economy.

"The employers were telling us that they needed workers," said Father Wauters, "and our people were telling us that they were willing and good workers, and they needed jobs. How could we create a marriage of those interests?" Instead of starting at the "top" consulting experts at think tanks and universities or in government, the job training core committee members looked to the grassroots, to the community.

Pat Ozuna describes how the job training core committee discussions translated ideas from the community into concrete proposals for QUEST. "Ideas would be thrown around and we would discuss them; someone would tell a story they'd heard in a meeting, and the ideas would come out of that," she said. "For example, when we started hearing about the problems with short-term training, we would ask, 'Well, what about long-term training?' And that idea would go into the proposal." By the end of 1991, the broad principles of the program were clear.

Next, the job training core committee began to flesh out the concept. Who would provide the training? Since most of the private job training providers were geared to short-term, low-skill training, the logical venues were community colleges in the San Antonio area. However, their emphasis had hitherto been on preparing students for major, four-year universities. After negotiations, Alamo Community College District officials agreed to provide classes that would teach the skills needed in high-paying jobs.

Custom design: The house meetings also uncovered reasons people dropped out of training, which in turn suggested further components of QUEST. Trainees often felt that no one cared about their progress, and many people had to drop out of classes because of family problems. "We needed counselors that were also case-workers," said Ozuna. "We needed to have remedial schooling
because some of the people had been out of school for 15 years, and they had forgotten their math. Women with small children needed day care during classes.” Those components were added.

**Finances:** The main barrier to training for many, of course, was money. Everyone agreed that QUEST had to provide a stipend for trainees in real need. But how to safeguard against abuse? Again, the answer was to be found in the house meetings. “Several of the people there had been beneficiaries of the GI Bill, where the money was attached to the individual,” said Father Jost. “They knew that was a successful program, so we decided to have the money attached to the individual, not some bureaucracy.”

**Ensuring success:** One fear, especially among employers, was that trainees would take public money in stipends and tuition but wouldn’t complete the program. IAF leaders feared a high dropout rate would damage the program’s credibility. The training would be arduous, especially for people whose prior educational achievements might be lacking. The trainees, who would be receiving stipends and other support from the taxpayers, would have to be the kind of people who would be willing to work hard and stick with it through tough courses and difficult times.

An intermediary was needed to determine whether a person was likely to stick with QUEST and to offer trainees the kind of emotional support families used to provide.

The IAF leaders decided their organizations would assume that responsibility. Thus were born the community outreach committees in most Metro Alliance and COPS congregations. Several community leaders would pre-screen applicants and be there to offer encouragement through the training.

The leaders also met with some of the experts in the field of job training from the University of Texas, the Governor’s State Job Training Coordinating Council, the Texas Employment Commission, the San Antonio Works Board, the Alamo Community College District, social service agencies, the city’s Department of Community Initiatives and others. Those meetings taught them how to accomplish and fund the goals they had identified in the house meetings.

**Broad participation:** Once they had the commitment of jobs in hand, Metro Alliance and COPS appointed a committee to oversee the design of the strategy to put a plan into action. This committee included leaders of the IAF organizations as well as Tom Frost, Henry Cisneros, Nelson Wolff, Charles Cheever, and representatives of such major local corporations as the HEB supermarket chain, major hospitals, and USAA insurance company.

“The employers were telling us that they needed workers, and our people were telling us that they were willing and good workers, and they needed jobs. How could we create a marriage of those interests?”

Metro Alliance Co-chair
Father Will Wauters
“We knew that too many programs trained people for jobs that weren’t out there, so we decided to not train for anything until there was a clearly identified job opening. QUEST is tied to the San Antonio labor market. That’s the most important piece.”

Employment specialist Bob McPherson

Training for existing jobs:
Many of the principles that IAF leaders had specified matched the conclusions McPherson had reached over 25 years of observing failed job training initiatives. “We knew that too many programs trained people for jobs that weren’t out there,” explained McPherson, “so we decided to not train for anything until there was a clearly identified job opening. QUEST is tied to the San Antonio labor market. That’s the most important piece.” QUEST also separated the assessment function from the job training itself, eliminating the conflict of interest under the old system. Previously, training providers were paid by the number of warm bodies that walked through that door, so they were steering people into whatever training the providers offered, not the jobs people needed.

“The other important component is that community people are doing the pre-screening for applicants,” said McPherson. “In San Antonio, we’ve got two very impressive community-based organizations, so we felt we ought to let them identify which [candidates] are serious about long-term training.”

McPherson, who had seen a number of well-intentioned programs sink after a few years, chose to work on QUEST because of “the power of those two community organizations that put it together,” he said. “They are well-established entities with real grass-roots political power. By the time we were putting together the design, they already had Henry Cisneros and Nelson Wolff signed on, along with key people on the city council and recognized business leaders. Most of the time those programs don’t have anywhere near that kind of support.” COPS and Metro Alliance had more than a good idea: they had the power to make it happen.

By the time they had a basic design, the leaders were exhausted yet exhilarated. “It was a powerful
The principles underlying Project QUEST all derived from the experience and wisdom of working-class people in San Antonio, as voiced in the house meetings. These principles were supported by research actions conducted by Metro Alliance and COPS leaders with business leaders, economists and city, state and federal officials.

- **Long-term training:** The house meetings revealed that families weren’t making a living wage because of inadequate training for existing jobs. The interviews with business leaders and economists disclosed that the jobs that pay a living wage would require more skills. Short-term training, their research revealed, wouldn’t provide those skills. “The key is, we need to provide long-term training, with skills that are measurable and marketable and certifiable,” said Father Jost.

- **Job-driven:** In house meetings, the leaders heard tale after tale of people who invested hard-earned money in job training only to learn that there were no jobs available when they finished. If participants were going to invest months or years of study, jobs would have to be guaranteed. “And we wanted the jobs to pay well enough to support a family, at least $7.50 an hour,” insisted Pat Ozuna.

- **One-stop shopping:** A prime complaint that surfaced in the house meetings was that people seeking job training or other government support were shuttled from office to office, filling out forms that asked for similar information, but for different purposes: job training, health care, GED training. It was time-consuming and difficult for poor people who didn’t have a car or were juggling children and a low-wage job. Metro Alliance and COPS leaders were determined to avoid that, so in QUEST, applicants can go to one central agency, tell the staff their skills and interests and be directed to the appropriate place that provides training in the fields they are qualified and interested in. If they need a GED, the agency will tell them how to get one. If they need remedial training, QUEST sets that up. And the program coordinates all available social services, such as food stamps, housing aid, AFDC and transportation.

- **Individual training accounts:** In the house meetings, reported Pat Ozuna, even the people who endorsed the idea of job training would say, “This training sounds great but I need a job now. How is my family going to live when I’m in school for two years and not earning any money?” In fact, the core committee’s research showed that, at the Texas A & M University Extension Service, half the enrollees in a highly successful training program were unable to graduate because of family crises and routine needs. The solution was obvious: a stipend to help clients in need pay for tuition, books, and family bills while they were in training.

- **Community support:** Volunteer leaders from COPS and Metro Alliance outreach centers encouraged good candidates to apply for training, evaluated applications, explained the rigors of the program, and monitored trainees progress. “We would not be nearly as successful at getting cooperation from employers, elected officials, and the community college district without the continued support of the community from COPS and Metro Alliance,” said QUEST director Jack Salvador.
 Persuading the Powers

"We were taught to believe that if you worked hard, you could buy a home, send your kids to college, and save for old age," Metro Alliance's Marcia Welch told the 3,000 COPS and Metro Alliance leader assembled for a convention in 1992. "This dream is gone."

They had gathered in the San Antonio Convention Center to celebrate the creation of a program that could restore hope to San Antonio families. COPS and Metro Alliance leaders announced that Project QUEST would begin taking applications the following week.

They were joined by Governor Ann Richards, who a year earlier had committed $2.5 million in state funds to the project. Richards told the assembly, "I want this program to work. This is not just a jobs program. This is a program of economic development for the state of Texas. I think what you're doing here with Project QUEST is a model for the rest of the nation."

She promised to monitor the program's progress and support it. Minutes later, candidates for state and local office pledged support for QUEST and other IAF agenda items in an "accountability session." It was a rousing kickoff for Project QUEST. But it was also much more.

Show of power: The convention provided a public moment for the leaders themselves, tangible evidence that all their hard work over the past few years—walking precincts, studying job training, organizing rallies—had produced a concrete benefit to their community. QUEST was a good idea, but good ideas without political power to propel them travel about as far as a beautifully designed plane without an engine. Actions like this one were part of turning a vision into reality.

The September 1992 rally culminated two years of building political power to push QUEST to fruition. The organizations had won backing of the business community for their job training strategy. Then they used that support to win the assistance of the governor, then used both of those commitments to gain the city's cooperation and funding.

IAF earned Ann Richards' cooperation. "We've worked with her through the years on other issues, so she knows our history," said Pat O'zuna. "And she's worked with Valley Interfaith on the colonias. So she got her staff to work with us to see what money they had available."
The first $2.5 million: On November 17, 1991, at a major meeting with 1,500 COPS and Metro Alliance leaders, city officials and business leaders in San Antonio, Richards announced her contribution to QUEST: $2.5 million, one of the largest grants made from the discretionary budget, called Wagner-Peyser funds. These monies are available for the governor to designate to job training projects through the Texas Employment Commission.

Why did Richards grant so much money out of a sparse budget to this single project? "She had a certain affinity for the philosophy of the IAF," said her then-chief of staff, Mary Beth Rogers. "particularly for the Iron Rule, and she knew they would hold people accountable for that money." In fact, the governor told the leaders at the 1992 rally that she would hold COPS and Metro Alliance accountable not just for the state money, but for creating a model jobs program.

"COPS and Metro Alliance could have had all the credibility in the world," Rogers said, "but if they had come in with some kind of shoddy product, they wouldn't have had a chance. They had a track record and a program that was comprehensive. It was one of the best-planned proposals I'd ever seen."

Other state officials agreed. Bill Grossenbacher, administrator of the Texas Employment Commission (TEC), worked with COPS and Metro leaders and McPherson to guide QUEST through the maze of state and federal rules governing job training. "They were very knowledgeable, very committed," said Grossenbacher. "They truly are community-based and represent the interests and needs of local folks. This has been the most successful collaborative effort I've seen between the state and local groups." In 1992, QUEST received enthusiastic endorsements from

"I would love to showcase Project QUEST because I believe there is no reason to reinvent the wheel if the wheel is already rolling."

Texas Governor
Ann Richards
TEC analysts, Department of Commerce JTPA specialists, the governor’s policy council and the state job training coordinator.

Statewide political power played a key role in garnering Richards’ support. In October 1990, at the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation statewide convention in San Antonio, the jobs issue was one of the four priorities the organizations demanded state leaders address. Candidates for various statewide offices, including Richards, pledged to work with IAF to address those issues. By helping fund QUEST, she was honoring her commitment.

The Fight for Funding

As gratified as they were about receiving the state funds from the governor, the IAF leaders knew they needed more money and more backing from the City of San Antonio. Their campaign for support by the city had begun before Levi’s closed, with a May 1990 action at Burbank High School calling on then-Mayor Lila Cockrell and then-gubernatorial candidate Ann Richards to support a new job strategy, including a commitment to individual training accounts. “The future of San Antonio is in its people,” Ozuna told the COPS leaders and politicians assembled there. “Investment in people is the real work of economic development. It is job training that focuses on developing the person and not subsidizing agencies.” Cockrell agreed to set up meetings with business leaders to discuss the ideas. A few weeks later, the city council adopted a COPS-sponsored resolution to make preparing San Antonians for good jobs a city priority. The IAF campaign continued in meetings with city leaders in the wake of the Levi’s closing, in a January 1991 rally at City Hall calling for restructuring of job training programs in San Antonio and in accountability sessions before the 1991 city elections.

In May 1991, at the height of the mayoral campaign, COPS and Metro Alliance held an accountability session with the two major mayoral candidates calling for commitments of specific funds to the effort. The organizations announced that they had identified several sources of funds: money from business subsidies, hotel taxes, and the sale of the city cable franchise. Both candidates agreed to work with Metro Alliance and COPS to find the money.

Change in job training: After Nelson Wolff was elected, he responded to reports of the PIC’s corruption and inefficiency by dismissing the entire PIC board of directors. Its replacement, an agency called San Antonio Works, took over administration of the city’s JTPA funds, including $2 million in discretionary federal money to spend on job training. When Metro and COPS leaders learned about the funds through their research, they convinced the mayor and city council members to designate them for new the job training pilot program. They made a strong case: the commitment of jobs from employers like Frost Bank and Baptist Hospital, promises of support extracted during accountability sessions from the mayor and most council members, and a commitment of state funds from the governor. On September 12, the San Antonio Works board voted to apply the JTPA funds to QUEST.

Those funds, while substantial, weren’t enough because state and federal rules prohibited use of those funds to pay for a critical component of the IAF program support payments for families during training. QUEST required an additional $2 million in funding for the stipends to work.

Unacceptable alternatives: There was only one source for such money: the city’s general revenues. But no American city had ever committed its own
revenues to job training. And though the council members had promised during the campaigns to secure the funding, by fall 1991, they had not yet allocated funds from the city budget. Facing a budget shortage, city leaders started floating less expensive compromises that would water QUEST down. One proposal was to provide low-skill, part-time city jobs for stipend recipients, which would undermine the intensive training needed to attain high skills. Another was to make QUEST a very small ($200,000) and limited demonstration project.

"Initially, we were getting a lot of lip service from the council and the mayor," recalled Pat Ozuna, who spearheaded the political strategy. "But we worked with [council member] Frank Wing, and we agreed to take the first $400,000 from CDBG funds. So that money really came from our projects, because that was the money we used every year for streets and libraries and sidewalks. In return, we asked them to make a public commitment for the other $1.6 million." By showing willingness to put up some of "their" money (the CDBG funds) for QUEST, Metro and COPS ratcheted up the pressure on the council to reciprocate. And the organization turned up the heat still further by scheduling a public rally for council members to affirm their commitment to full funding on September 3, 1991, the day after Labor Day.

**Showdown at City Hall**

City leaders were in a tough position. This battle was occurring in the context of public resistance to government spending, only three years after a public vote to roll back property taxes, and five years after a referendum to cap public spending. "The council wanted to live in a 'No-new-taxes' environment," Ozuna recalled, "so $2 million was a real stretch for them. We had to push, push, push them, every step of the way."

COPS and Metro leaders knew that the public would support public investment that benefited the city and not powerful interest groups; they worked hard to make the case that high-skills job training would do that.

Despite a series of one-on-one meetings with crucial council members over the next few weeks, the politicians' waffling continued. Councilman Wing tried to persuade the IAF leaders that a smaller demonstration project—which wouldn't have been extensive enough to prove that the concept worked or to attract the massive commitment needed from

"They (COPS and Metro Alliance) had a track record and a program that was comprehensive. It was one of the best-planned proposals I'd ever seen."

Mary Beth Rogers, former chief of staff for Governor Ann Richards
community colleges and employers—was all they could get at the moment. "An hour before the rally, we met with the mayor and some council members," said Ozuna. "He told us he had met with the city manager, and they were still waiting to figure out where the $1.6 million was going to come from. We told them we needed a specific commitment now."

This is where the long months of research and working with the business community paid off. The leaders responded to the scaled-down proposal by invoking the 650 jobs that their diligent efforts had secured from local employers. Those jobs were already lined up, and a small-scale program wouldn’t have trained enough people to fill them. Wing nodded; he was convinced. But Wolff, reluctant to oppose the powerful city manager, still hesitated.

At this critical juncture, COPS and Metro Alliance’s power and organizational skill carried the day. "The buses were arriving with our people in them," Ozuna recalled. "My son had put up big banners above the city hall steps. Our people were gathering on the east entrance to City Hall, and we’re sitting right inside in this conference room. And the mayor and Wing and all of them are telling us, 'No way.' Meanwhile, there’s 800 people outside chanting, 'Invest in Us.' So we tell the mayor, 'OK, go out and face the people and tell them 'No way.'"

**Moment of truth**: The tension mounted as the undecided council members and IAF leaders marched out to the top of the massive cement steps. "So we all go outside to the microphone, and he sees all the people there, chanting louder and louder," Ozuna remembered. "And we ask the question: 'Will you commit to $1 million in city funds for job training?'

Wolff looked out at the hundreds of Metro Alliance and COPS leaders. "Invest in us! Inv
PERSUADING THE POWERS

in us!” they shouted in unison.

“Yes,” he said.

The crowd cheered. Pat Ozuna approached with a huge placard bearing the pledge Wolff had just made. “We gave him a black marker and he signed his name to the poster,” Ozuna said. “All the other council members are standing behind him, and we asked them, ‘Will you sign?’ And they did, one by one.”

Organized people had forced the city to keep its commitment. Still, one last hurdle remained: the city hadn’t specified when they would produce the $1.6 million. So two months later, the organizations invited Wolff and other council members to the meeting at which Governor Ann Richards committed the $2.5 million in Wagner-Peyser money to the pilot program. A few minutes later, Tom Frost, on behalf of other business leaders, announced the fruits of the COPS/Metro meetings with the business community: 26 local employers had pledged 650 jobs to the program. Then Pat Ozuna took the podium and upped the pressure on the city.

“Think of this job training project as a wagon,” she said. “This wagon is going to take us to good jobs for our people. But right now, it only has three wheels: the governor’s commitment of state funds, the corporate leaders’ commitment of jobs, the $2 million in JTPA money,” signed over by the San Antonio Works board. Ozuna then turned to the mayor. “Mayor Wolff, will you come up with the fourth wheel?” she asked, in front of 1,500 COPS and Metro Alliance leaders former Mayor Cisneros, County Judge John Longoria, Archbishop Patrick Flores, and assorted council members and other dignitaries.

The mayor then made the commitment to identify the $1.6 million—not all in one bundle at the front, but as it was needed within a week.

“Getting the money was the hardest part,” said Virgínia Ramirez. “There was a lot of work pushing, pushing, pushing to get them to understand how important this was. It was a tremendous challenge. We kept telling ourselves, ‘If we don’t do this right, nothing is going to change for our families.’”

Leveraging Power

Wolff recalled how the QUEST struggle looked from a politician’s perspective. The leveraging of other commitments secured during the long campaign for QUEST was crucial, he said. “We couldn’t have done it had they not gotten the governor committed to the $2.5 million. And the business community responded to it. The timing couldn’t have been better. The idea was very well thought out. If you have a strong idea and a vision of how it ought to work, it’s easier to put it all together.”

He remembered the September 3 showdown at City Hall as a tense moment. “I don’t think anything meaningful gets done in any government without a little tension, and COPS and Metro helped to heighten the tension on this. And when you see a lot of people supporting that idea, it makes your job a little easier to do. It brings pressure on your council colleagues. It’s important to show that it’s not only a belief of the top leadership of COPS and Metro, but also that the membership believes in it, and they had hundreds of people there.”

“Strong focus: Why did Wolff, not an ‘inner city’ candidate, work so well with COPS and Metro Alliance? “They have a strong focus on their issues, and they don’t overload their agenda,” the mayor explained. “They do job training, education, and housing. They’re tenacious, but they don’t dilute their power by being up here every week recommending people to boards, or taking a position on every issue. They’re very targeted in what they want to do. There are no other groups in

“There is now a strong voice representing poor and low-income families that holds political officials accountable....When officials make promises, COPS works to see that promises are kept.”

U. S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development
Henry Cisneros
"I don’t think anything meaningful gets done in any government without a little tension, and COPS and Metro helped to heighten the tension on this. And when you see a lot of people supporting that idea, it makes your job a little easier to do. It brings pressure on your council colleagues."

San Antonio Mayor
Nelson Wolff

town that could have pulled this off." Wolff was so convinced of QUEST’s viability that his office set up meetings with local employers, and he accompanied COPS and Metro Alliance leaders to meetings with them to urge their participation in the program.

Ultimately, politics is about negotiating interests. COPS and Metro won because they designed QUEST to meet the interests of all stakeholders involved in it: Businesses will save the costs of searching for and moving employees from other cities to fill high-skill positions here, and the new hires will have the training that the employers think necessary for the new jobs. The city gains by reducing the number of unemployed and under-employed citizens, whose augmented incomes will boost the city economy. The trainees, of course, benefit by having better jobs that pay more money and enhanced skills that are transferable to other jobs.

The leaders pushed QUEST to completion by leveraging power: showing each player—business leaders, politicians, working people—how the program served their interests, then using each commitment of support to obtain other commitments. (The leveraging continues. Governor Richards wrote a letter to President Bill Clinton in early 1994, touting QUEST as a model for the nation’s job training system.) Metro Alliance and COPS had cultivated allies and given them the political support necessary to push QUEST to completion. The battle wasn’t over, but after the pivotal September 3 confrontation, Metro and COPS had momentum on their side. San Antonio would have a new job training program.
January 25, 1993

The Honorable William Jefferson Clinton
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Clinton:

The nation is waiting and watching on the issue of welfare reform.

We have something working in Texas that you and your staff should see. For over a year we have been operating a pilot program in San Antonio that could break the welfare cycle as we know it in this country.

PROJECT QUEST is a Governor's funded program combined with city funds and commitments of actual jobs from the private sector. The concept is simple.

People who need a job enter a two-year job training program that is custom designed to meet their needs and qualifies them for an existing job in their community. The business community has pledged over five hundred jobs that pay a living wage and have health benefits.

The initial investment per participant is $10,800. In three years of employment, the taxes the person pays as a working member of society will repay this initial investment of government. Our statistics project that breaking the cycle of welfare for a twenty-five year old mother of two children will save the government over $55,000 in a ten year period for AFDC, Food Stamps, and Medicaid costs.

I suggest that if, as a nation, we changed our existing federally funded job and employment training programs for people on public assistance, we could limit their assistance to two years once they commence a program like PROJECT QUEST.

We are convinced in Texas there really is a way to learn and earn your way off welfare. It is not a hand out. It really can be a hand up.

Texas always likes to be the launchpad for innovation and creative ideas. I would love to showcase PROJECT QUEST because I believe there is no reason to reinvent the wheel if the wheel is already rolling.

Sincerely,

Ann W. Richards
Governor

Texas Governor Ann Richards wrote this letter in support of Project QUEST to President Clinton.
INVESTING IN PEOPLE: THE STORY OF PROJECT QUEST

CHAPTER 7

Project QUEST in Action

All the work that went into creating Project QUEST is paying off. Today, hundreds of San Antonians are working hard in community college classrooms and other training locations, making a new future for themselves. Hundreds of volunteer community leaders are interviewing applicants for the program. And Project QUEST's staff of 26 is working feverishly to recruit employers, design training programs and support the trainees.

"We are serving economically disadvantaged people who have the aptitude and motivation to engage in the more difficult training programs," said QUEST director Jack Salvadore. "There are other programs for people who require English as a Second Language training or GED education. Some people need survivor jobs: working in a restaurant may be appropriate for them until their skills are developed. We're not a social service agency," he insisted. Half the enrollees are on some form of public assistance, so once they have jobs, the government will save at least a million dollars directly, in addition to reaping the taxes they will be paying on their new incomes.

Even faced with these challenges, Project QUEST has been remarkably successful. Project QUEST has experienced less than a 5 percent annual attrition rate, with only 12 trainees leaving training in the first six months. One-third of its participants were on the honor roll in fall 1993.

Adapting to Change

The program has inevitably had to adjust course slightly after it began operation in earnest in 1993. "We were blessed with a comprehensive conceptual design," says Salvadore, "but no plan can be built to make it unnecessary for adjustments."

Some companies were at first reluctant to commit jobs to QUEST because their naturally fluctuating business makes it difficult to precisely predict employment a year or two in advance. QUEST solved this problem by obtaining collective commitments from all the companies in a given industry. For example, 10 hospitals have promised more than 350 jobs for allied health technicians. Because it's designed to be responsive to local economic and community needs, QUEST can quickly adapt to changing circumstances.

Improving programs: Second, said Salvadore, "There turned out
to be a lack of quality training programs. For example, despite the high demand for diesel mechanics, only one good program existed for training, and that was in Waco, two hours away from San Antonio. Poor people here can’t afford to leave their children and drive to Waco,” he said. The community college’s existing program took two years to complete, used an obsolete equipment, and lacked viable links with local employers. Not surprisingly, student interest was low.

QUEST job researchers discovered that if San Antonio had a modern diesel mechanic training program, there would be a good market for its graduates. So QUEST plugged the gap between need and reality. “In a collaborative effort with the community college and the QUEST occupational advisory committee, we created a diesel heavy-equipment repair course at St. Phillips College’s southwest campus,” said Salvadore. The training lasts nine months, awards graduates a nationally recognized certificate, and teaches the skills that local employers feel are important for skilled technicians in diesel equipment repair. A skilled instructor was hired to provide the training, and QUEST obtained

This telecenter pledged 20 jobs to Project QUEST participants.
INVESTING IN PEOPLE: THE STORY OF PROJECT QUEST

donations of engines for the school and additional equipment so students have sufficient training aids.

The new program has made a real difference, Salvadore says. "The students are getting a course that employers believe in, so the

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How QUEST Works

Project QUEST organizes each trainee’s education, evaluation, referral, training and support, helps design training programs, and matches employers, training and employees. Its activities fall into several categories:

- Recruiting employers, securing job commitments: Project QUEST negotiates partnership agreements with local employers who agree to hire successful participants for jobs that pay at least $7 to $8 an hour, full benefits and opportunities for advancement. A staff of three job development specialists researches the area job market through analysis of business data and interviews with local employers, and also meets with local employers to show how it is in their self-interest to have a well-trained workforce.

- Designing a training program: Project QUEST has set up occupational advisory committees in each major occupation to create an appropriate training program for each participant. Employers collaborate with QUEST staff and local educators at every step in establishing certification requirements, achievement standards and curriculum design. These committees make sure the courses meet the needs of both participating employers and students, who want skills and certification that make them attractive to many companies.

- Recruiting trainees; evaluation and referral: In initial interviews at outreach centers around the city, community leaders explain the program to applicants. After hearing about the personal commitment needed to complete QUEST training, between one-third and one-half of applicants do not proceed to the evaluations phase at the QUEST offices. The program requires that an applicant hold a GED or high school diploma. Those not qualifying are referred to other public agencies that help people obtain GEDs and remedial education.

Those who do advance to evaluation spend one to three weeks in an intensive assessment of their skills, capacities, and interests. They take aptitude tests that measure such abilities as basic English and math, reasoning and workplace skills, as well as their interests, temperament, and work preferences. Upon entry, QUEST participants have an average eleventh-grade reading ability and ninth-grade math ability. Applicants and counselors then jointly decide which occupation they will pursue from among the various jobs available, and the counselors create an employment development plan for each participant.

- Counseling and supporting trainees: An occupational counselor works with each participant through training and into the first several months of employment. The counselor expedites the applicant through the community college’s (or other training institution’s) procedural requirements, often serving as an advocate to negotiate various bureaucratic obstacles.

Trainees participate in weekly mandatory group counseling. Counselors convene the groups by occupation, conduct workshops on motivation, and discuss the demands of course work, study habits, and work behavior, as well as personal issues such as self-esteem and coping with family and life crises. At each phase of the program, QUEST staff and COPS and Metro Alliance leaders emphasize the trainees’ responsibility for their performance.

- Supporting families: Project QUEST assists families that otherwise would be unable to finance additional education from their own resources. Counselors ensure that participants and their families receive all services and income support they are eligible for, such as food stamps and AFDC. They arrange housing, if needed, through arrangements with the local housing authority or a homeless shelter. Project QUEST has secured inter-agency agreements with local social service providers to provide speedy access to services for eligible trainees.
graduate is more employable. People whose life circumstances may not permit them to take years to complete a traditional program are getting a course that takes less time and is focused on the task of being a diesel mechanic. They spend 25 hours a week on it, double the time they were putting in under the old program.”

QUEST is still changing. “We are a work in progress,” admitted Salvadore, pointing out that experience is teaching the staff lessons about how to reach out to employers and potential trainees, and how to assess capabilities.

In working with QUEST, the community colleges have begun to modify their curricula to make them more flexible and to better serve the needs of both the trainees and employers. They are providing more courses applicable to high-skill job training, and streamlined student registration so that enrollees can complete all necessary paperwork in the Project QUEST office under their counselors’ supervision. The counselors have also increased the available training in some occupations by arranging for employers to help fill teaching vacancies in the community colleges.

QUEST has also changed the way remediation is taught. Staffers were surprised to discover that 95 percent of participants required some remedial work in math or English skills before they could embark on more sophisticated classes or training programs. QUEST responded.

“With the help of the community college district, there is in place a computer-based skills academy at the community college which uses a nationally recognized computer-based system,” said Salvadore. The new system is quite different from the kind of high school and college classes many trainees had trouble with earlier in life. Participants attend intensive remediation classes four hours a day, five days a week, and complete the courses in three months or less, rather than the year or two it would take on the traditional academic cycle.

“It does diagnostics, it’s user-friendly, self-paced, and high-intensity,” Salvadore points out. “It gets their basic math, English and reading skills up to speed so people can get to high skill training quicker. It cuts their remediation time in half and therefore cuts down on cost. And it keeps them interested because they can get engaged in their job.
INVESTING IN PEOPLE: THE STORY OF PROJECT QUEST

New Relationships

Project QUEST is more than a training institution; it has become a broker of relationships among labor market institutions.

- It brings employers together to assess more clearly what they are seeking from potential employees and what commitments they are willing to make.
- It creates solid links between training institutions and employers so that the training programs better meet employers' needs.
- It operates as a mediating institution to bring families back into relationship with employers, training institutions and social service providers.
- It connects people from working communities with good jobs.

training much sooner."

Besides improving the remediation system and upgrading the diesel repair course, QUEST has also created an entirely new training program. The large financial institutions in San Antonio were finding a dire shortage of financial customer service representatives, employees who can answer customers’ questions from all over the country about accounts and services offered in the rapidly changing banking and insurance fields.

"In conjunction with Palo Alto College and the American Institute of Banking, we developed a financial customer service certificate program," reported Salvador. "It lasts a year, and also provides an opportunity for students to pursue the program further on their own. The classes are accredited, so if they want to put more time in later, they can turn it into a BS in accounting or finance, or associate programs. It offers people a good entry-level opportunity in banking."

Thanks to Project QUEST, the community colleges have become an vital contributor to economic development in San Antonio. Securing these changes would have been impossible without the political clout wielded by the IAF organizations and the allies they had recruited in putting together the job training effort. In fact, Salvador would like to see the IAF organizations play an even greater role in QUEST. "If somebody’s having difficulty at home or at school, we’d like to get the community involved in helping them work out their problems. We’re just getting into that, and the organizations are interested in doing it. I’d like to see them involved all the way along."

COPS and Metro Alliance are also holding the program accountable. "I’m most impressed with the accountability they built into the program," says Peggy Brown, administrator of the Baptist Memorial Hospital system’s Institute of Health Education. "They demand that the people in QUEST work hard and adhere to high standards. And they in turn are holding QUEST’s feet to the fire, making sure that all this taxpayer money is going to be used effectively. They’re constantly checking the number of people who are being hired into desirable positions, how many are successful in training and making it into the work force."

Partnerships for Progress

For years, entities with major impact on the lives of working people had been disconnected. QUEST is becoming the central thread that ties all the others together into a fabric that can support business, working people, educational institutions and community organizations. By the end of its first year of operation, QUEST had signed 42 agreements, setting up linkages with agencies such as the Texas Employment and Texas Rehabilitation Commissions, local chambers of commerce and various social service agencies. Looking ahead to the end of the demonstration project period, QUEST officials are working with the community college district and federal officials to make QUEST a JTPA-funded permanent institution. All three parties in this joint venture would benefit from the arrangement; QUEST would receive a reliable source of federal dollars; the community college would gain higher enrollment and better training programs, and JTPA would get a new philosophy of job training that meets the needs of employers and the community. The main beneficiaries, however, will be the thousands of hard-working San Antonians who obtain new skills from the program.

Finally, QUEST has made a less tangible, but perhaps more far reaching contribution: changing the way people think about
PROJECT QUEST IN ACTION

economic development in San Antonio. "With the help of partners such as the Texas A&M University Engineering Extension Service, the community college district, COPS and Metro Alliance, and employers, we're putting a new emphasis on occupational training," says Salvadore. "Everybody now recognizes the fact that in order to become a world-class community capable of attracting businesses that bring good jobs, we have to develop a world-class job training program. I think we're doing that with QUEST."

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### Real Jobs

In its first year of operation, building on commitments obtained by COPS and Metro Alliance leaders, Project QUEST has already lined up an impressive roster of 650 good jobs for its participants.

- Twelve local hospitals have committed jobs in 13 allied health care occupations such as registered nurse, licensed vocational nurse, respiratory therapy technician, physical therapy assistant and radiologic technologist.
- A money center bank opening a telephone service center has contracted for 20 customer service representatives. A local air force base has committed aircraft maintenance technician positions.
- A manufacturer of computer modems will hire electronics technicians.
- Project QUEST is helping to train chemical lab technicians for a consortium of a local Air Force base and small laboratories; hazardous materials technicians for a consortium of small companies; and dental hygienists for the local dentists' professional association.
- It is actively pursuing agreements with employers of diesel mechanics, heavy equipment repairers, facilities technicians and other skilled workers.

### Project QUEST Demand Occupations

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our people sat around a folding table at Our Lady of Angels Catholic Church on San Antonio’s South Side. A 23-year-old Hispanic woman was near tears as she explained to Eva Criado and two other COPS members why she dropped out of college two years ago.

“My husband was out of work, and he was jealous that I was studying so hard in school,” she began. “He was real possessive; he used to follow me to school every day and wait outside my class until class was out. I couldn’t study under that kind of pressure. I dropped out. I finally had to divorce him.”

Mrs. Criado nodded sympathetically. “Well, QUEST can give you a second chance. But this program isn’t quick and easy. It’s hard work, with a lot of studying. Are you willing to work that hard for two years?”

The young woman nodded resolutely. “Just give me the chance,” she said. “I can do it.”

Community commitment: Almost every day a scene like this takes place at the 15 neighborhood outreach committees COPS and Metro Alliance set up throughout the city to take applications and interview candidates for QUEST an entirely new community infrastructure. By January 1994, after a year in operation, they had screened more than 3,200 applicants and invested 18,000 hours of their personal time.

Many worthwhile programs have quickly withered after initial community enthusiasm and participation waned. But QUEST continues to benefit from the active participation of the organizations that created it.

“Because we have the outreach teams, because we’re not just an office downtown, we keep ownership of QUEST in the community; it’s not just another bureaucracy,” asserted Sister Gabriella Lohan of Metro Alliance. “I think it makes a connection between the community and the applicants.”

The Eyes of the Community

IAF leaders put the word out about QUEST through the well-honed public communications channels the organizations have used over the years: announcements from the pulpits and on bulletin boards at member churches, flyers at community centers and government offices, word of mouth through the congregations and neighborhoods.

Like many outreach committee members, Eva Criado spreads the word about QUEST every chance
she gets. "When I’m in a restaurant and I see a young guy washing dishes, I ask him if he would like to go back to school, and I give him an application. Or a lady may tell me her daughter is pregnant and has had to drop out of school, I’ll give her a flyer about QUEST."

COPS and Metro Alliance had already begun educating San Antonio about the need for job training during the creation of QUEST. "After the program was in place and we went back to the community, recruiting applicants was never really a problem for us," said Father Wauters. "After two and a half years of discussing this, people were sophisticated in the whole job-training area." Each time the organizations hold an action that talks about job training, or the newspaper runs an article about Project QUEST, phones ring in the Metro Alliance and COPS offices, with callers asking for information about the program.

About 150 people from COPS and Metro Alliance congregations, mostly leaders who are well-known in their churches and communities, have volunteered to serve at least five hours per week interviewing applicants for QUEST at the neighborhood outreach centers. They work in teams of three, interviewing each applicant individually for about half an hour. They start by recounting the history of QUEST and how much is riding on the trainees’ success.

The outreach volunteers explain the rigors that lie ahead for successful applicants. "We love these kids, they come out of our communities, and we want them to know ahead of time what they’re getting into," said Metro Alliance leader Marcia Welch. "We tell them the program is really not for people who want an easy way," agreed Metro Alliance’s Genevie Flores. "It’s for people who have initiative, who want to be somebody but who have barriers." If applicants are serious about changing their lives,
"When we went into the house meetings and got people talking about jobs, one thing they always said was that if you have a good job, your children can go to school and participate in activities. You can get your house fixed up, you can see that your communities are safe and clean. All of those things are tied together, and if we want to have a good community and people who have hope then we need things like Project QUEST."

Metro Alliance Co-chair
Marcia Welch

QUEST gives them the opportunity and the support they need.
"Every applicant has his own unique story," said outreach committee member Avertano Palomo, a long-time COPS leader. "Why they didn’t finish high school, how their family is dysfunctional, why they got into drugs, how they have to take care of their young kids because they got married at 17 and can’t afford tuition, all sorts of domestic problems. We hear a lot of stories about previous experiences with job training programs where people paid a lot of money and got worthless training. We listen, and tell them how QUEST can get them help so they can concentrate on their studies."

Why are applicants willing to come to QUEST and share their stories?
"They know us and they trust us," explained Eva Criado.
"When they come in, most of them look a little scared. We make them feel at ease. We say, ‘Look, it’s just us. You can tell us anything. We know many of them, and they know us; they’re our people. The trust is there because we are one of them and we understand them.’"

The interview teams help applicants choose whether to advance to the next step, which is an interview, at the QUEST offices, with a Project QUEST intake counselor. The interview teams’ assessments then form part of the intake counselors’ evaluations.

A Continuing Commitment

Most interview committee members are in their 40s, 50s, and 60s, their children are grown, and they have little if any personal stake in job training. Some have to sacrifice to participate. Twice a week, for example, Metro Alliance’s Louis Brown, a retired master sergeant, leaves his house on San Antonio’s East Side, boards a bus to his church, and interviews applicants for job training. Why do these
people invest so much of their time in volunteering for QUEST?

"Our dedication is there because the need is there," emphasized Criado. "The people in COPS and Metro don't just think of their families or themselves they think of the community. I'm not doing this for my children, but for everybody," she said firmly. "I feel for my people."

"There's something in this for us, too," Sister Gabriella admitted. "It's very rewarding to see people move ahead, to make a life for themselves." Eva Criado agreed. "I've been in COPS 18 years, and we've built bridges, libraries, homes, streets but this is human development. It's giving people a livelihood."

Through the outreach committees and the continuing involvement Metro Alliance and COPS, Project QUEST is inextricably tied to the grassroots where it was born. This bond ensures that the values of COPS and Metro—accountability, building relationships with other people and institutions, people taking charge of their lives—are reflected in the program and its participants. The outreach committees institutionalize the new relationships between the stakeholders in Project QUEST and the community it serves.
Cynthia Scott, 35, is a single parent of three teenagers. Ten years ago, she left an abusive husband and embarked on an odyssey in search of a career and economic independence. While working three jobs, she began with a full course load at the community college. She failed two classes.

The next semester she took a reduced load, but continued to work as a typist, nurse’s aid, and a fast food clerk. She determinedly kept up with her children’s school and Cub Scouts. Piecing together the money and time to take classes when she could, she slowly accumulated credits over several years. Often she could not complete the semester, but kept trying.

She was accepted into a registered nurse program in December 1990. She completed the first semester, but failed all three courses her second semester. Exhausted, frustrated, and discouraged, she began to lose hope.

One day, Marcia Welch, a Metro Alliance leader at Scott’s church, asked her why she wasn’t working. Scott explained how hard it was to work when it meant losing health and welfare benefits that she needed to support her family. So Welch told her about a new program called QUEST that Metro Alliance was co-sponsoring.

The next day, Scott went down to the church to interview for it.

Starting over: Lupe Alonzo always wanted to go to college, but after she got pregnant at age 18, the lifelong San Antonio resident had to go to work. “In the Mexican American culture, a woman’s job was to take care of your family,” Alonzo explained. “You work at whatever you can.” She worked as a retail clerk and as a substitute teacher, never earning much above minimum wage. Twice she tried to go to college, but her husband didn’t support her. When he left, she had to work to feed the family. She almost went into debt to pay for an eight-week home nursing assistant course. But that job still paid poorly, was physically demanding, and had no future. As she approached age 40, Alonzo knew she had to do something to turn her life around. One Sunday, her priest told her about Project QUEST.

A fresh start: Mike Gonzales, a 34-year-old San Antonio native, enlisted in the Marine Corps out of high school. After six years of active duty, ready to settle down, he went into debt to pay a Houston trade school to train him to be a mortician. Though he enjoyed the work, which brought him back
to his hometown, Gonzales soon realized that the career itself offered little opportunity for advancement and had a much greater supply of employees than demand. That's when his aunt, a leader in COPS, told him about Project QUEST.

The concept of Project QUEST appealed to employers, politicians, and people in the neighborhoods because it was designed with their input. But after a year of operation, QUEST has already won popularity with another important group: the people in the program.

**Team Spirit**

Gonzales admits to feeling some trepidation when he first interviewed for QUEST. “You go into the gym at Holy Redeemer [Catholic Church], and there are all these other people you’ve never met,” he remembered. “I thought I was going to be a number. But the interviewers put it on a much more personal level. They asked me where I had been, where I wanted to go, was I willing to sacrifice to get there.”

Getting into Project QUEST means two or more demanding years of education, weekly counseling, testing and hard work with no guarantee of success. Trainees must turn in attendance sheets for classes and report cards to their QUEST counselors. The amount of work these and other participants put in matches the sweat equity contributed by COPS and Metro Alliance leaders to create the program in the first place.

QUEST is no easy ride, and the passengers have to push. “I was working at the church, going to school, and still trying to take care of the family,” recalled Cynthia Scott, who in September 1993 became QUEST’s first graduate. “You can’t tell the kids they’re going to have to wait for dinner. You have to cook, make sure they do their homework. You still have to be a parent.”

Lupe Alonzo has to work even harder because she’s been out of school for so long. Having completed her remedial work, Alonzo is now in nursing classes at St. Phillips college. Besides taking 20 hours of classes this semester and caring for her three children by herself, Alonzo still does some part-time home health care to pay the bills. “I study during lunch, at home—any time I’m sitting I have to grab a book because I don’t have any time to waste,” she says. “My girls were laughing at me last night because I was studying anatomy while we were waiting in line at the video store.”

**Like family:** Faced with such demands, QUEST students need support. IAF works on the principle that people become powerful when they work together to accomplish goals. Similarly, QUEST offers support to its participants by helping create a team spirit. QUEST requires participants to meet in weekly group motivational sessions.

"It's a one-of-a-kind program. It really does prepare you, and not just in technical skills. It helps your self-esteem, knowing you're not in it alone. Thanks to QUEST I've been able to get not only a foot in the door, but a boost up through the door."

**QUEST participant**

Mike Gonzales
"I’ve been through other job training programs. They just had you sit at a typewriter all day, or go to cosmetology classes in old abandoned warehouse. But here, you’re getting a solid degree from an accredited school and a valid license and a real job. You’re shooting higher. This is the only program I’ve ever encountered that will do that."

QUEST participant
Lupe Alonzo

The program also offers opportunities for participants to get away from training and school. It has sponsored picnics, cookouts and softball and volleyball games for QUEST participants, staff and their families. Besides building solidarity among the participants and providing a break from the pressure of intensive study, such activities remind all concerned that QUEST is about more than a program—it’s about people.

Community college instructors report that Project QUEST students are easily identifiable in class by their enthusiasm and participation. They have formed study groups that meet in homes and on campus. They’ve even come up with their own name; they call themselves “QUESTers.”

“We’re kind of like a family,” Mike Gonzalez said. “The QUESTers will get together at lunch or at breaks and discuss our ups and downs. It’s like going to school with your family and having someone to express yourself to.”

Cynthia Scott, despite her midnight shift, is so grateful for the help she’s received from the community that she’s eager to give something back. She does volunteer tutoring in pharmacology for current QUEST trainees. “I go to the motivational meetings and show them what it’s going to take. I tell them it’s hard: you have to give things up to make it through.”

**A No-Excuse Program**

The program offers more tangible support as well. One of the most important lessons of Project QUEST’s first year has been the essential role played by social services such as child care, income support and counseling. The services and stipends it provides are keeping participants in school and in training. “Last year, I had the water and electricity cut off twice,” Scott recalled ruefully. “I just didn’t have any money left to

Weekly meetings help support QUEST participants through their training.
pay it. QUEST has an emergency fund, and when I showed them there was nothing else I could do, they got the utilities back on fast."

In fact, the direct training costs of tuition and books represent only slightly more than one-quarter of QUEST's total costs. Its largest single expense is child care, amounting to almost as much as tuition and books combined. For Lupe Alonzo, as for many others, that has made the difference. "I work from 7 a.m. to noon, study from noon to 3 p.m., pick up the girls from school, then go to class from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m.,” she says. "I couldn't do it without night care for the kids." Trainees say the counseling and financial help make the difference between QUEST and other programs. The ability to call their counselor when they were struggling with difficult courses, or a child's illness, or some other personal or family crisis, has kept many trainees from dropping out and kept them focused and motivated.

**Personal touch:** Alonzo, who hadn't been in school in almost two decades, struggles daily with feeling intimidated by younger students who had the opportunities she lacked and, to her, seem more knowledgeable, more articulate and better prepared. "It has been hard,” she confesses. "When get those feelings of no self-confidence, I talk to Mary Peña, my counselor, and she brings me back down. She's my support, the one I let out steam with.”

"They're so personal with you, you have to be honest with them about anything that's causing you problems, and that helps them help you,” agreed Cynthia Scott. "I will never forget the day I told [QUEST director] Jack Salvadore I was graduating. He was so happy that tears started rolling down his face. That's personal."

By removing such distractions, QUEST puts the responsibility for success squarely on the shoulders of its trainees. "Project
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"What QUEST says is, ‘You have talent, you have gifts and ability. But you have not always had opportunities. Now you’re given an opportunity. You can have a future. As a graduate from QUEST, you are a top-notch student. You’re the best. It brings them a sense of their dignity and self worth.”

COPS Co-chair
Father Al Jost

QUEST is a no-excuse program," declared Lupe Alonzo. “There’s no excuse not to be in class. If the need is really there, they’re going to help you. They help find you an apartment to live in if you need it. If my car broke down, they’d give me the money to fix it. Project QUEST is here for you, they’re giving you the support, the counselors, anything you need. You can’t say there’s nobody to talk to, because they’re there. You can’t say you don’t have money for school or books or rent, because it’s there. Everything is there for you. There’s no excuse for me not to do well.”

The support services also create a sense of obligation that compels trainees to work harder. “They’re helping me by paying the bill, so the least I can do is sacrifice a little bit,” said Gonzales. “It’s like having another set of parents: if you make the grade, they’re happy to pay the bills.”

Positive results: The support is paying off. “We’ve been impressed by the QUEST graduates we’ve seen so far,” said Baptist Hospital’s Peggy Brown. “The advantage they have is those social and economic resources provided by QUEST that other students don’t have. We’ve found that the majority of attrition in health care training programs is due not to performance, but socioeconomic problems. These folks are relieved of child care and other worries because QUEST has these other services in place.”

Sacrifice: The help comes with a price: accountability. Not only must trainees keep their grades up, but they are required to turn in attendance records and participate in the weekly motivational meetings. The QUEST approach has been called “tough love,” because while it offers help, it requires great sacrifice, time, money, hard work. Those who don’t keep up their end of the bargain are out of the program.

QUEST is a rough ride, not a free ride. But participants say the destination is worth the journey. The best spur to sticking with a tough program is the knowledge that a job is definitely waiting for those who graduate. “Once I got into the LVN program,” said Alonzo, “and I knew I’d have a job that paid a lot better and was more satisfying. I thought, ‘I can stick it out another year, no matter how hard it is.’ I could see the light at the end of the tunnel.”

Lie Lessons

What QUEST teaches goes beyond technical or vocational skills. “What employers want is someone technically trained, who has the academic background and potential to grow,” Gonzales said. “We are weaned on to the concept that there will be changes in the economy, and that we’ll have to continue learning throughout our lives.”

As a result, both Gonzales and Alonzo plan to pursue the more advanced registered nurse (RN) certification after completing the necessary work as an LVN. Gonzales is also thinking of adding physical therapist training to combine with his nursing credentials, a lucrative combina-
tion. "They've opened my eyes to what an education can do for you," he said.

Success in QUEST's rigorous courses also imues participants with new and deserved self-confidence. "You can really see the change in attitude in the people who are in QUEST," said Avertano Palomo, an outreach committee member who has stayed in touch with several QUESTers.

Other benefits: That change in attitude affects more than just the trainees. "One woman whose husband is in QUEST told me that it has made such a difference in their marriage since this man's self-esteem has been raised so much by being in the program," reported Sister Gabriella Lohan. "Before, he couldn't get a good job. Now he's doing very well in class, and it's doing wonders for their life."

Gonzales passed the lessons he's learned down to his four school-age children, with whom he often does homework side-by-side. "QUEST has allowed me to be a better role model in academics with the kids," he explained. "I tell them that doing well means giving up the things I have to give up in order to succeed. QUEST instills that self-motivation and dignity." Since Gonzales entered QUEST, his children's grades have improved.

As the first QUESTers move into the world of work, they provide living proof to those who follow that hard work in a supportive environment can bring success. "People look at me and say, 'Cynthia, if you can do it, I know I can do it,'" said Scott. "One woman told me, 'Every time I come into this [QUEST] office, I look at your graduation picture and I say, I will be here too someday.'"

Note: Cynthia Scott began her work as an LVN in fall 1993. At the time of publication, Mike Gonzales was completing his final semester of college LVN training and had been accepted into an LVN program that was to begin in summer 1994. Lupe Alonzo had finished his remedial classes and had two semesters of courses in nursing left to complete.

"QUEST causes real change in a person's life. It gives a person a chance to get a second start in life, to raise families the way they should be raised. It gets people out of the cycle of poverty."

Sister Gabriella Lohan, Metro Alliance
The Future of Project QUEST

While QUEST is fundamentally a locally based operation, the State of Texas can help spread it to other cities by providing funding and cooperation with Texas' other employment efforts. The state, under the auspices of a job-training study committee chaired by Tom Frost, is studying ways to overhaul Texas' job training strategies, and Frost's participation is likely to make elements of QUEST prominent in these new strategies. "As results become available, I hope we can use the QUEST model in other parts of the state and even the country to make long-term training pay off," said TEC administrator Bill Grossenbacher.

At the beginning of 1994, IAF organizations in nine cities were conducting at least preliminary efforts aimed at bringing some sort of job training program to their communities. These efforts to foster job training programs in other cities raise a critical question: Is QUEST replicable? San Antonio possessed some unique advantages, including grassroots organizations that have transformed the political process to make it receptive to such projects; political leaders who were sympathetic to IAF goals; business leaders with a broad concept of enlightened self-interest who supported QUEST; a growing economy that created a demand for high-skill jobs. "If you don't have a growing pie," acknowledged Tom Frost, "you have a zero-sum game and everyone is thinking they're going to take their piece of it away from everyone else. We were lucky in that we had a growing economy."

But Frost also credits COPS and Metro Alliance with playing a crucial role in bringing business, political and working-class constituencies together in San Antonio in a way that made QUEST possible. "It's important that all elements of the community feel they're part of the decisions. If you don't have a good political process and people don't work together, then the economics don't come together."

Bob McPherson has been consulting with IAF leaders in four other Texas cities, with the aim of creating QUEST-style programs there. "QUEST isn't perfectly transferable anywhere," he conceded. "You can never take a specific design for a given labor market and just place it in another one. There are cultural, political and economic differences. The basic model for QUEST would
certainly work in other communities. Whether it’ll work in every city I don’t know. But when you get into those cities and do the hard labor market information research—actually get inside those firms—you’ll find some jobs that will be opening up.”

State leaders, impressed with IAF’s work on QUEST, believe the model can be extended to other Texas cities. “One of the real keys to QUEST is that there was a commitment of local funds,” said TEC administrator Bill Grossenbacher. “From a state and legislative perspective, the idea of a dollar partnership between the state and local areas was very attractive.” Just as COPS and Metro leveraged state dollars to attract funding from the city of San Antonio, locally raised financing may attract matching help from the state government. Finally, if QUEST proves successful in San

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**Chronology of Project QUEST**

**January 1990:** Levi-Strauss apparel plant on South Side of San Antonio announces it will close in 60 days.

**Spring - Summer 1990:** COPS and Metro Alliance begin house meetings and research actions on job training.

**Summer 1990:** COPS and Metro Alliance vote job training as one of the primary issues for the organizations to pursue in the coming year.

**October 28, 1990:** Texas Industrial Areas Foundation first state convention, held in San Antonio, names job training one of four items on the public agenda. Gubernatorial candidates Ann Richards and Clayton Williams are invited to address the convention. Richards accepts and agrees to support the agenda. Williams does not attend. Richards’ election puts job training high on the state priority list.

**January 1991:** Members of COPS call for a complete restructuring of San Antonio’s job training programs. City Council passes a resolution of support.

**March 1991:** In accountability sessions, city council and mayoral candidates pledge to work with Metro Alliance and COPS to find $5 million for job training programs in the city budget.

**July 1991:** Tom Frost hosts first meeting with major San Antonio employers to discuss job training.

**August 1991:** COPS and Metro Alliance leaders announce their plan to train San Antonians for high-skill jobs in growing industries such as health care and electronics. Local business leaders pledge public support for the draft job training proposal and commit several hundred jobs to the program. Following meetings with editorial boards to explain the program, both local newspapers endorse the concept in editorials the following week.

**September 3, 1991:** Rally at City Hall with Metro Alliance and COPS leaders calling on Mayor Nelson Wolff and the city council to “Invest in Us.” Standing on the City Hall steps, Wolff and council members sign a public pledge to earmark $2 million in federal and city funds to the program. San Antonio Works Board passes resolution supporting use of $2.3 million in JTPA bonus funds for the pilot project.

**September 12, 1991:** The City Council, in a special budget meeting, votes unanimously to approve $400,000 for the pilot project, and to seek $1.6 million from other city sources.

**November 17, 1991:** Gov. Richards pledges $2.5 million in state funds for the IAF job training program at the COPS fall assembly, attended by 1,500 leaders and political leaders. Tom Frost, on behalf of other business leaders, announces that 650 jobs have been identified at 26 local companies.

**January 1992:** Conceptual design for Project QUEST completed.

**March 1992:** City council formally receives the $2.5 million state grant for the $6.5 million program. The City of San Antonio matches the grant with $1.6 million of city funds and $400,000 from CDBG funds.

**May 26, 1992:** Jack Salvadori hired by QUEST steering committee.

**August 1992:** Project QUEST incorporated.

**September 27, 1992:** At a delegates assembly and accountability session, three thousand COPS and Metro Alliance leaders announce to Gov. Ann Richards that QUEST is officially underway.

**October 1992:** COPS and Metro Alliance leaders establish community outreach teams and begin accepting applications for Project QUEST.

**January 1993:** The first 140 enrollees in QUEST begin classes at Alamo Community College District campuses.

**September 1993:** Cynthia Scott becomes QUEST’s first graduate from St. Philip’s College and begins work as a licensed vocational nurse at Baptist Medical Center.

**March 1994:** 574 people are enrolled in Project QUEST training.

**June 1994:** 650 people are enrolled in Project QUEST.
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Antonio, IAF organizations in other cities will be able to point to that experience as proof that city and business investment in long-term job training is a low-risk, high-return proposition.

Model for the Nation?

QUEST hasn’t escaped the attention of leaders in economics and government. During his visit to QUEST, Assistant Secretary of Labor Doug Ross suggested that it would be easier to duplicate the QUEST concept nationally if a full-scale, multi-year study were conducted, measuring how trainees performed in the workplace after graduating. Plans for an evaluation are being initiated.

IAF leaders and QUEST personnel have also testified in Washington,

Beyond San Antonio

The jobs strategy forged by COPS and the Metro Alliance has inspired other Texas IAF organizations to propose their own unique approaches. In each locality, the IAF organization is bringing to a common table the stakeholders of a community’s labor markets—families, employers, training institutions and governments.

- Dallas: Dallas Area Interfaith has secured the support of the city’s top corporate decision-makers for a demonstration project in the new job training strategy. The head of the Dallas Citizens Council—composed of some of the region’s most important CEOs—and the head of the Greater Dallas Chamber of Commerce pledged that they will work to find 600 jobs that offer at least $9 an hour, benefits, and career opportunities. The Private Industry Council (PIC) of Dallas committed $25,000 to fund the initial concept design. The governor committed $1 million for the 1994-95 operating year, conditional upon local governments and the PIC raising matching local funds.

- Fort Worth: Fort Worth and Tarrant County, long dependent on military related spending, have suffered more than most communities during the defense cutbacks of recent years. Allied Communities of Tarrant (ACT) responded by organizing hundreds of conversations among employers, training institutions, economic development personnel, local officials and others to explore ways to create new access to training and jobs for dislocated or underemployed workers. As of April 1994, employers and unions from health care, construction and transportation had committed to collaborate with training institutions, government officials and ACT to design a strategy and had committed more than 400 jobs. The governor committed a $1 million challenge grant to the Fort Worth and Tarrant County stakeholders. The City of Fort Worth made a $100,000 down payment on the design and start-up phase of an effort that resembles Project QUEST.

Southwestern Bell committed $20,000.

- Rio Grande Valley: The Valley encompasses approximately 30 small cities at the end of the Rio Grande River. Although it is one of the poorest regions of the United States, the Valley is experiencing dramatic job growth and shortages of skilled workers as a result of growing manufacturers and trade with Mexico. Valley Interfaith found that hospitals spend several million dollars a year to recruit nurses from as far away as Canada and the Philippines. Manufacturing companies need hundreds of skilled machinists and tool-and-die workers. Valley Interfaith is working to bring together employers like these, local colleges and universities, and local governments. The governor has committed $50,000 for their initial work.

- Houston: Home to 17 Fortune 500 companies and the nation’s second-busiest ports, Houston has undergone far-reaching economic changes in the last decade. Employment in manufacturing and mining dropped sharply as energy-related businesses shrank, while employment in health care and business services boomed. Leaders of TMO (The Metropolitan Organization) secured the commitment of the mayor to $300,000 for the planning and start-up phase of a Houston Strategy. They also secured the tentative commitment of the business community to ask their members to designate 1,000 good jobs.
D.C., before government committees exploring new approaches to job training. In early 1994, representatives of QUEST attended a forum on job training reform, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor in the nation’s capitol. Only 11 other programs nationwide were represented. QUEST’s first graduate, Cynthia Scott, participated on a panel with President Clinton at one session and told him first hand how well the program had worked for her and why. If QUEST proves successful in San Antonio, it could become a model for the national job training strategy that Clinton has pledged to initiate. The nation needs a program like QUEST if it is to flourish in the competitive world economy of the coming century,” asserts Bob McPherson. “If this country is going to be competitive in world markets, businesses are going to require more training for people providing different services. Employers are increasingly needing workers who need more training than typical on-the-job training can provide. Few institutions are in place to provide that kind of training. In that sense, there is a bright future for a QUEST kind of model.”

There is nothing else quite like Project QUEST in the United States today. Given the widely recognized pressing need for a new national investment in long-term training for high-skill jobs, many eyes will be turned toward San Antonio to see how well this “investing in people” strategy works. The program’s performance over the next few years will likely determine whether QUEST will become the prototype for the nation’s job training program. ■

When you accomplish what you have set out to do, you will be sending a signal that San Antonio can lead the way to a new economy for the whole state of Texas and the country.

Texas Governor
Ann Richards