

# Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund Connects Workers to Employers



Jiebin Tan stands with Governor Charlie Baker and Secretary Ronald Walker, II of the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development.

**T**here has been a lot of buzz in the CommCorp halls about the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund: for the first time ever, it has a chance of being funded for a consecutive year. We are excited that this crucial program was included in Governor Baker's budget because it supports a population in tremendous need and helps employers find skilled, motivated workers. While Massachusetts has an unemployment rate of 4.4% (MA Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, March 2016), we still have unemployed and underemployed workers across the state who struggle to find work. These job seekers are ready and willing to start a career, but they lack the support and networks to find one. Jiebin was one of those workers, and support from the WCTF changed his life.

Jiebin was a middle school teacher in China. In 2011, he made the courageous choice to move to the United States in search of a better life for his family. At the beginning, he remembers it was a challenge. His first job was as a bus person at a restaurant. Often working 15-hour days, he lost precious time with his wife and son. He soon wondered if he made the right choice in leaving China. He never got to see his family, he had no health care benefits and earned low wages. There was no opportunity for growth in his position.

Unsure of what to do or how to help his family, Jiebin continued to work odd jobs with difficult hours until he learned about the Hospitality Training Center.

Also known as BEST Corp, the Hospitality Training Center offered classes where he learned professional English, body safety, customer service and the standards at Boston's luxury hotels. He learned about hotel branding, blood borne pathogens and how to work with difficult customers.

After completing the class, he job shadowed at two hotels, and upon graduation got a job at the InterContinental Boston. Jiebin lights up when he says, "I am so proud of this job because it actually changed my life. I get paid well now and my family has health insurance and other benefits."

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-Jiebin Tan, program graduate

The class at the Hospitality Training Center didn't just help Jiebin find a job – it gave him the tools to build a career and a life. Soon after securing a job in the hospitality sector, he began to establish credit. He bought a two-family house where he rents out one floor. He and his wife had a second child. He said, "it's not easy, but I did it. It's an achievement in my life. I am so proud of this."

Jiebin's career transformation was possible because of several important factors, one of the most essential being his own drive and determination. Another critical component was the training and support he received from BEST Corp, employer partners, the union, and other parties. The network of players is a key element to the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund. It doesn't simply fund grantees: it funds partnerships. We know that tackling the challenge of placing unemployed and underemployed individuals in careers doesn't rest with one organization. It is essential to provide additional support services for these job seekers.

This is a problem we can solve, and we're proving it one job seeker at a time. There are a lot of Jiebins out there ready and willing to do the work. We simply need to give them the tools and the opportunity.