

Regional Ohio Manufacturers Team Up to Tackle Workforce Challenges

For more than 100 years, the Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA) has helped manufacturers succeed and grow. This effort is more important than ever today as the state faces a growing national concern: a critical labor shortage and skills gap.

Building on its experience, OMA's statewide network of Industry Sector Partnerships (ISPs) enable manufacturers within a shared labor market to align around common workforce development solutions. This includes collaborating with educational institutions, service providers, philanthropy and local government to develop strategies and mobilize resources.

Because sector partnerships are industry led and locally driven, they are in a position to identify the specific needs and challenges



The Dayton Region Manufacturers Association hosted 34 career awareness events at middle and high schools in 2023, including this one at Northridge High School in Dayton, Ohio. (All photos provided by DRMA)

will work best for members. More than 1,600 manufacturers comprise OMA's statewide ISP network.

Granting Good Jobs

In August 2022, OMA was awarded a three-year, \$23.5 million federal grant through the United States Economic Development Administration's \$500 million "Good Jobs Challenge."

Some 120 manufacturers submitted letters of commitment to source new hires from this initiative. Combined, these employers indicated a demand for 25,000-plus hires over five years at an annual wage of about \$15 per hour, which reflects the prevailing wages for machining, production, welding, industrial maintenance, automation and robotics jobs. Such occupations are projected to have more than 150,000 openings in the next 36 months in Ohio.

The Dayton Region Manufacturing Workforce Partnership (DRMWP) is one of OMA's network of endorsed ISPs that were named as a sub-recipient of the Good Jobs grant. It received \$930,000 to help drive manufacturing competence and growth in southwest Ohio.

"Not having enough people with the right skillset has been a challenge of manufacturers for decades; and since the pandemic and all the demographic changes, it's just made it worse, particularly now, as every other industry is affected in the same way," says Angelia Erbaugh, president of the Dayton Region Manufacturers Association (DRMA), the regional trade organization leading DRMWP. "We determined early on that what we can do and what we should do is own the responsibility of attracting people to work in our industry."

DRMWP is implementing the WorkAdvance model developed and evaluated by Cleveland-based Towards Employment Inc. The strategy, which allows employers to build a workforce trained to meet specific needs, includes recruiting, pre-screening, work readiness and manufacturing skills training, onboarding, ongoing support and job coaching components.

WorkAdvance intentionally seeks people who aren't currently pursuing manufacturing positions.

"The purpose is to bring more entry-level people into the manufacturing workforce pipeline by tapping into previously untapped audiences," Erbaugh explains. "What we're doing is working with community-based organizations that are already established and serving those audiences. "They deliver the components from recruiting to training, and we bring manufacturing employers to the table to interview and hire."

Job coaching is a significant component of the program. When Towards Employment piloted the model over five years, participants who received post-employment coaching were 10 times as likely to advance in their jobs as those who did not receive such services, according to Erbaugh.

Committed to enrolling 70 people in WorkAdvance, DRMWP says it's already seeing progress. Eight people have completed the program, three of whom have found work at DRMA member companies and another three who landed other manufacturing jobs.

The Good Jobs grant isn't the only initiative that OMA and DRMA have partnered on. In early 2022, OMA acquired grant funding from the Ohio Defense Manufacturing Community with the goal of increasing the number of credentialed manufacturing workers in the region.

As a result, DRMWP enrolled 68 incumbent workers in Toolingu U-SME's Certified Manufacturing Associate (CMfgA) online training program. Participants paid no training costs or credential assessment fees. Graduates received a CMfgA certificate, focused on basic manufacturing concepts, demonstrating a person's potential for high-demand, entry-level manufacturing roles.



Dayton, Ohio-based Noble Tool Corp. is one member of DRMA that participated in the organization's WorkAdvance program. WorkAdvance completer and Noble Tool employee Mckeisha Hamilton stands with company owner Jim Bowman.

"The Dayton region was one of the top, if not the top performer, of how many tours were offered on that first Friday in October," Erbaugh says. "In 2019 for instance, we had about 60 companies doing tours and had 4,700 students from about 60 schools across the region attending."

While Manufacturing Day tours have slowed since COVID-19, Erbaugh has reimagined the initiative.

"I'm promoting it to our members and schools now as 'Manufacturing Day year-round. Do a student tour whenever it makes sense for you and your partner school to do so.' We've long known that the first Friday in

October doesn't work for some companies and schools. Now we're starting to really get the word out and promote the opportunity to get our members to do a tour, and an effective tour, and then we do the matchmaking," Erbaugh says.

Connections

Erbaugh and her team not only connect with students, they also actively engage with the education institutions in the region. Through advisory committee participation, DRMA staff and volunteer members advocate for curricula that equip graduates with the skills and competencies in demand by modern manufacturers. DRMA wants to bridge the gap between academia and industry, ensuring a seamless transition for aspiring manufacturing professionals.

"One of our mottos is: We can't complain if we don't tell them what we need," Erbaugh says.

DRMA is at the forefront of efforts to integrate manufacturing credentials into educational programs, enhancing students' employability. By championing certifications such as the CMfgA, DRMA underscores the value of lifelong learning and skills development in securing rewarding manufacturing careers. ➡

Rallying Allies

Another key service DRMA provides is networking, which can be an overlooked part of workforce development.

DRMA regularly hosts free "Meet Ups" with subject matter experts, where members can participate in small discussion groups designed to help each other build peer groups within a common area. Topics for the Workforce/HR Meet Up include internships and apprenticeships, training funding and related resources, recruiting methods, assessments, compensation strategies and compliance issues.

DRMA also holds career awareness events, where experienced professionals engage students in exhibits hosted at middle and high school career fairs. The events are designed to keep students and educators informed about myriad manufacturing career paths. Last year, DRMA completed 34 such events, discussing career trajectories, wage prospects and educational pathways with students interested in manufacturing.

In addition to visiting schools, DRMA brings students to production facilities. For example, member companies host annual Manufacturing Day tours of their sites to provide real-world experiences.

**TRANSFORM YOUR
WORKFORCE**

CONTACT US FOR MORE INFORMATION:



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