

WORKADVANCE PARTNERS

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WorkAdvance is a national initiative, currently operating in Northeast Ohio, New York City, and Tulsa, funded through the federal Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a public-private partnership administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). The Social Innovation Fund combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the United States. This SIF project is led by the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City and the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) in collaboration with MDRC, and is operating in eight cities nationwide. Funding for WorkAdvance was also provided by The Corporation for National and Community Service, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Open Society Foundations, The Rockefeller Foundation, Benificus Foundation, Ford Foundation, The Fund for Our Economic Future, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, Surdna Foundation and The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Inc.

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PARTNERUP

Accelerating access and improving
outcomes through partnership



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THE NEED

Although the Great Recession hit Northeast Ohio (NEO) hard, employment in manufacturing is rebounding and driving regional job growth. Productivity is increasing, and manufacturers are demanding a more highly skilled labor force. Since 2010, manufacturing employment in the region has grown by more than 7 percent, or 8,400 jobs,¹ but many Northeast Ohioans are not adequately prepared to meet the requirements of the available openings. Forty-seven percent of Northeast Ohio adults have no education past high school and lack relevant job skills.² Companies report challenges finding skilled workers to hire – a challenge exacerbated by retirements, emerging technology, and recent re-shoring (manufacturing jobs returning to the US).

WorkAdvance, an initiative coordinated by Towards Employment (TE) across Northeast Ohio, offers a continuum of appropriately aligned, sector-specific workforce services that successfully meet business needs and move low income individuals into quality jobs, with established career pathways and supports for advancement.

This case-study explores a key WorkAdvance strategy: accelerating access to businesses and improving programmatic outcomes

THE WORK

Based in Cleveland, Ohio, **WIRE-Net** is a non-profit economic development organization dedicated to improving the community by supporting the manufacturing industry. With a membership of over 300 primarily small and medium-sized manufacturing businesses, WIRE-Net has been working on behalf of Northeast Ohio’s manufacturing sector since 1989. TE approached WIRE-Net early in the development of WorkAdvance to leverage the expertise of the organization and its members in the design of the program. WIRE-Net’s business members provided input into recruitment strategies, screening criteria, the identification of demand occupations and associated training programs and credentials, and continuous improvement strategies for WorkAdvance. The partnership grew even deeper when WIRE-Net received funding to expand on its advisory role and lead job development activities in the manufacturing sector.

WIRE-Net staff worked directly with businesses to vet candidates and match them with manufacturing jobs. TJ McGowan, WIRE-Net’s Employment Specialist, has been dedicated to the project since it began. He holds weekly meetings with TE career coaches to review job opportunities, assess candidates, and suggest preparation to

through partnership with an industry association. Industry associations typically have well established relationships across member businesses that either work directly in or support a targeted sector. These businesses vary in number of employees, revenues, and footprint. Associations that have demonstrated a track record of developing services to meet the needs of their members and are willing to partner with community based organizations on workforce programs, offer the potential to accelerate access to businesses and improve workforce outcomes for both businesses and job-seekers.



help candidates qualify for available jobs. McGowan defines his role as “getting companies engaged, gauging interest and skill needs of manufacturers, and trying to connect WorkAdvance workers to job openings.” McGowan’s industry relationships and deep understanding of the needs of specific companies—such as unique work environments and customized equipment—has expedited placements.

TE’s partnership with WIRE-Net has enhanced various WorkAdvance programmatic components. For example, WIRE-Net members highlighted the need for drug screening early in the process. Their input also led to the inclusion of integrated manufacturing math and an overview of basic quality instruments into job readiness workshops. WIRE-Net staff and member companies reviewed potential training curricula and recommended adjustments, and WorkAdvance selected training partners to design technical skills training programs tailored to the needs of WIRE-Net businesses. WIRE-Net’s established relationships with businesses have helped WorkAdvance staff more quickly develop industry knowledge and access information about open positions than they could have otherwise. Businesses



WorkAdvance is coordinated by **Towards Employment**, a Cleveland-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to empower individuals to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency through employment. Towards Employment helps individuals prepare for jobs, get jobs, keep jobs and advance into careers. Through holistic programming and strong employer partnerships, TE builds skills and confidence, removes barriers to employment and helps individuals meet employers’ workforce needs. With a 37-member staff and an annual budget of \$3.7 million, Towards Employment has served more than 128,000 people in its nearly forty-year history.



WorkAdvance seeks to boost the earnings of unemployed and low-wage working adults by helping them obtain quality jobs in targeted sectors with opportunities for career growth. WorkAdvance delivers a continuum of appropriately aligned services to meet business needs and move low-income individuals onto manufacturing and healthcare career pathways. WorkAdvance offers career advancement workshops, wrap-around supports, technical skills training, job placement, and up to 2-years of sector specific career coaching.

benefited as well: they were not asked to join a new advisory group or spend time getting to know a new account manager. Instead, McGowan remained their primary contact, and he provided additional value to them through the new talent development resources available through WorkAdvance.

As WIRE-Net Executive Director John Colm acknowledges, “We’re not a service provider to individuals. What we’re really good at is managing employer relationships.” WorkAdvance is such a provider of direct services. And with WIRE-Net’s input, WorkAdvance was able to more efficiently recruit and prepare candidates to meet the needs of WIRE-Net members. In addition, the ongoing wrap-around supports and post-placement career coaching provided through WorkAdvance benefits employers by contributing to strong job retention rates. Leveraging WIRE-Net’s employer relationships with WorkAdvance’s individual workforce development activities is a win-win.

THE IMPACT

The TE/WIRE-Net partnership in WorkAdvance has benefited both organizations. TE has increased engagement with manufacturing companies and WIRE-Net has gained access to additional resources for workforce development. The partnership contributed to TE winning a major U.S. Department of Labor Grant which included the manufacturing sector and also aided WIRE-Net’s successful bid for local foundation support for a new Apprenticeship Accelerator. Perhaps most importantly, 76 unique manufacturing companies have hired WorkAdvance participants.

“Companies are flush with applications for entry-level workers, and it’s sometimes hard for companies to wade through the applications and make good picks. But, TE does a good job to ensure the quality of their candidates, which provides value for our members.”

John Colm
Executive Director, WIRE-Net

THE NEXT STEPS

TE will continue to partner with WIRE-Net. The organizations are developing a model to improve apprenticeship opportunities for TE participants while reducing high apprenticeship cancellation rates among manufacturing businesses. Additionally, WIRE-Net will play a key role in a new project to prepare individuals returning from prison for employment in manufacturing careers.



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¹ Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc, Analyst, accessed November 11, 2014
² National Skills Coalition Middle-Skill Jobs State-by-State. Retrieved from <http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Ohio-Middle-Skill-Fact-Sheet.pdf> on 11/7/14.