

## WORKADVANCE PARTNERS

Towards Employment

Compass Family and Community Services

Center for Families and Children

Ohio Means Jobs-Mahoning/Columbiana County

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The Literacy Cooperative of Greater Cleveland

WIRE-Net

Magnet

The Center for Health Affairs

Multiple education, training and business partners

## SPECIAL THANKS

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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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# TRAINING GUP

Customized, accessible,  
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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,<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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).

## THE WORK

**Cleveland Industrial Training Center (CITC)** is a private, for-profit training facility specializing in training for CNC Machining, an in-demand and well-paid position. For over 20-years, CITC has provided hands-on training to small classes of students within a real manufacturing environment; the training site is housed within a working machine shop. In addition to training job-seekers, CITC offers companies customized training to enhance the skills of incumbent workers. Prior to WorkAdvance, TE had worked only sporadically with CITC. This was the case because few TE clients were able to meet the rigorous math on CITC's entrance exam, tuition supports were only available on a limited basis, and it was difficult to coordinate CITC training with existing work schedules. With a new collaboration built through WorkAdvance, TE and CITC successfully piloted a number of solutions to address these challenges and increase access to this in-demand training, leading to improved employment outcomes for participants who otherwise would have been stuck in low wage jobs.

In the first attempt to increase access to CITC training, WorkAdvance asked CITC to create a program that prepared individuals for entry-level CNC Operator jobs rather than higher level CNC Machinist jobs. As a result, CITC took what had been a 17-week program to prepare people for \$14-16/hour jobs and developed a new 8-week program to prepare people for \$10-12/hour jobs—the entry point to a career pathway in machining. WorkAdvance vetted the new curriculum with industry partners to make sure a more entry level program still met business needs while limiting the rigorous math required for machining positions.

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: customizing cohort training to increase access and success for low-income populations. Low-skill job-seekers are often unable to access demand driven training programs due to literacy and numeracy levels, time and financial constraints, or insufficient support while in training. This case study provides an example of how a flexible technical training provider can partner with a workforce initiative like WorkAdvance to address these challenges.

When this change was made, CITC adjusted its entrance criteria to make it possible for early WorkAdvance participants to enroll in the training. The longer term goal was to enable these graduates to advance on a path to higher-level positions, with on-the-job experience and additional classroom training.

While the 8-week program offered a new approach to increasing access, WorkAdvance still aspired to place participants directly into higher wage jobs in machining, and businesses continued to be interested in hiring higher skilled candidates. Two additional approaches were tested:

1. Participants who could not pass the entrance exam were given access to Tooling University, an online manufacturing program with math modules. Both WorkAdvance career coaches and the CITC instructor were able to monitor students' progress, and support sessions were available for those who needed more personal interaction to get through the material. Individuals who successfully completed the Tooling U modules by the required deadline were able to retest and start the more robust CITC course.
2. CITC agreed to allow participants who tested close to the admission threshold for the 17-week program to enter the program immediately rather than waiting to retest for the next class. Entrance was conditioned on agreement to participate in additional tutoring and/or additional hands-on training alongside the traditional program. WorkAdvance career coaches and CITC staff helped ensure these participants had the necessary support to catch up to their peers and ultimately succeed in the class.

**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.**

Both of these approaches yielded positive results. A key factor was the use of a cohort model, e.g. WorkAdvance students participated in their own class. This allowed for maximum flexibility of scheduling and customizing curriculum, as well as ease of access for the WorkAdvance Career Coach to provide support to all those enrolled in CITC at one time, and to communicate with the instructor about their progress. CITC instructors were excellent partners in monitoring progress and sharing information about any circumstance that could potentially derail a student's success, so that the WorkAdvance coach could intervene where possible. CITC has been willing and able to accommodate these modifications to its traditional way of operating, because WorkAdvance delivers a reliable pool of training candidates that succeed in training. Building on Towards Employment's strength supporting participants along a pathway, WorkAdvance has improved the pipeline of students who attend CITC training. The WorkAdvance partnership exceeded CITC President Tim Duffy's expectations: "We didn't initially have high expectations for WorkAdvance participants. There are a lot of barriers for them. That proved to be a bad assumption. Now, we will take risks to accept WorkAdvance students into our program that we would not take on other applicants." The pipeline has been so stable that CITC has been willing to adjust tuition based upon economies of scale created by the reliability and persistence of WorkAdvance participants.

## THE IMPACT

In addition to considering refinements to the admission process and the way in which students are supported throughout the training, CITC has provided a flexible course schedule that works better for many WorkAdvance participants, added mid-day classes to accommodate multiple shifts, and provided dedicated one-on-one assistance to help students succeed in classes. CITC has also been willing to run training cohorts with reduced numbers to help WorkAdvance launch training without the delays of extended recruiting to meet enrollment numbers. Each of these factors has increased lower-skill participants' access to training. WorkAdvance participants are quickly placed into good paying jobs ranging from \$12-\$14/hour.

“ The advantage of this partnership is TE students are ready to succeed. They do the math and stick with the program. And we get them to where they can make the parts when they walk out the door. ”

**Tim Duffy**  
President,  
Cleveland Industrial Training Center

## THE NEXT STEPS

Given the success of this partnership, WorkAdvance hopes to expand CITC training to other programs within TE. WorkAdvance staff is working to develop and support supplemental training for graduates in high-demand fields, such as Swiss Machining, to expand participants' advancement opportunities. To support this training, both organizations are investigating a shared funding model to continue the work beyond the scope of the WorkAdvance grant. Such a model could incorporate employer support for tuition and leverage public support.



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<sup>1</sup> Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc, Analyst, accessed November 11, 2014

<sup>2</sup> 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.