

Redesigning Recruitment: Tapping New Talent Pools in Manufacturing

Evidence and Action for Employers, Workforce Developers, Policymakers, and Funders

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In today's labor market, manufacturers, like many employers, recognize that recruiting and retaining workers often means rethinking diversity considerations and identifying new talent pools. A new WorkRise-funded report, *Advancing Economic Mobility in Manufacturing: Results from an On-Ramp Training Program for Recruiting Black Workers into the Sector*, presents findings from the Advancing Economic Mobility in Manufacturing (AEMM) pilot program, which aimed to understand and reduce racial disparities in job placements and wages within a specific, credential-based training program meant to address a local talent shortage in Ohio. With this pilot, researchers tested an intervention that provides career training and wraparound services for those underrepresented in manufacturing, including Black/African Americans workers, formerly incarcerated people, and unemployed young people ages 18 to 24.

The AEMM project team consisted of the Manufacturing Advocacy and Growth Network (MAGNET), with research partners Towards Employment, PolicyBridge, and The New Growth Group (New Growth). The following recommendations describe how employers, workforce practitioners, industry sector partners, and policymakers can support underrepresented populations entering the manufacturing workforce and securing high quality jobs.

WorkRise staff have synthesized the report's findings and recommendations to inform next steps for employers, workforce developers, policymakers, and funders to change policy and practice.

Employers

Address discrimination by creating welcoming and productive environments for underrepresented populations and through changes to practices and consequences related to employee supervision, training, and performance reviews. Participating employers implemented new practices that improved the working environment for underrepresented populations through tailored support to the employee and the employer swiftly responding to conflicts between employees as they came up. For example, some trainee participants reported experiencing discrimination from work peers after job placement. Their employers were then responsive to their concerns and immediately addressed the employees involved and resolved the issues.

Participate actively in industry sector partnerships to implement new inclusive business practices and build a talent pipeline. The original training program was designed to meet the talent needs of employers. During this pilot, employers were open to adjustments and recommendations to their own hiring and retention practices. For example, participating companies informed the program

curricula, taught hands-on lessons, conducted employer showcases, and interviewed during class time. Employers also participated in peer learning sessions to influence how they hire and retain workers who are navigating challenges and/or interested in advancement at the company.

Workforce Intermediaries

Only engage employers who are committed to collective problem-solving, practice change, and positive outcomes for the targeted populations. MAGNET is the Northeast Ohio partner of the Ohio Manufacturing Extension Partnership and serves as the intermediary of the Manufacturing Sector Partnership in Cuyahoga County, the largest county in Ohio in terms of manufacturing establishments and workers. They bring together manufacturers and community partners with the common goal to meet the employment and skill needs of workers and manufacturers. MAGNET's long-standing relationships with employers enabled high employer commitment and engagement in all areas of the program. As a result of these relationships, they did not struggle to engage employers, even when a company was not able to hire from the current cohort.

Coordinate multiple components of the workforce development ecosystem to build an effective recruitment pipeline that serves both the interests of workers and employers. The AEMM program created a leadership team that consisted of the local chamber of commerce, manufacturing CEOs, and MAGNET's managing director, who has direct experience as a manufacturing CEO. Additionally, the AEMM program interviewed over 60 manufacturers, 45 workforce organizations, and over 30 other sector partnerships around the country to deepen the understanding of industry needs and possible solutions. With investment from knowledgeable, experienced senior leadership across sectors, the group possessed a depth of perspectives used to strengthen the program's curriculum and engage the community.

Employers In Partnership with Workforce Intermediaries

Conduct targeted outreach in Black communities through cultivating a large network of referral organizations, along with engagement activities such as consistent communication, plant tours, and manufacturing engagement activities for career coaches. The AEMM program conducted outreach among a broad network of referral partners across human services, re-entry, workforce, behavioral health, housing, and community organizations, as well as direct appeals to job seekers and their contacts at community events of all kinds. As a result, the program recruited nearly five times as many Black participants as white participants (134 and 28 people, respectively) in an area where just 17 percent of manufacturing workers are Black.

Provide comprehensive, coordinated services and long-term coaching as part of recruitment, workforce training, and employee benefits. The AEMM program provided comprehensive services including skill development for in-demand jobs, access to wraparound supports, direct connections to employers, and long-term coaching focused on career advancement. Participants reported positive experiences with the training and coaching services, which taught practical strategies such as how to address past involvement with the criminal legal system in interviews.

Pay consistent training wages. AEMM replaced the previous program's weekly training stipend with an hourly training wage that increased over the program cycle. This stable compensation attracted workers from traditionally underrepresented communities, and workers who were unaware of the benefits of a manufacturing career—particularly Black participants. Participants reported that they were drawn to the program because it paid a regular wage throughout training.

Consider a coordinated, data-driven strategy that includes industry sector partners and employers to jointly create solutions to recruitment, retention, and racial disparity challenges. With funding from WorkRise, MAGNET, Towards Employment, PolicyBridge, and The New Growth Group joined together to create the Advancing Economic Mobility in Manufacturing (AEMM) project. AEMM is a coordinated, data-driven strategy aimed at understanding and mitigating disparities in economic mobility between Black and white participants in the ACCESS to Manufacturing program in Northeast Ohio. The program tested interventions with each new cohort to tailor the program to the needs of participants and employers.

Policymakers and Funders

Create new federal, state, local, philanthropic, and employer sources of funding that support comprehensive workforce services. Many of the AEMM program components are not fully supported by traditional training dollars. The program requires complicated braiding of funding from federal, state, local, and philanthropic sources, which may not be possible in many communities or may present multiple challenges to access.

Allow existing training dollars to cover comprehensive workforce services. To spur diverse participation, the program provided wraparound services to participants, including long-term coaching, consistent and quality hourly training wages, and pathways to career mobility. The program also included plant tours, engagement with local career coaches, and access to a large network of trusted referral organizations.

Errata

This brief was corrected on December 18, 2024. The description of the AEMM pilot program was updated to clarify that it was designed for groups underrepresented in manufacturing, including Black/African American workers, formerly incarcerated people, and unemployed young people ages 18 to 24.

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For more insights on these findings and recommendations, see the full report authored by MAGNET, Towards Employment, PolicyBridge, and The New Growth Group, *Advancing Economic Mobility in Manufacturing: Results from an On-Ramp Training Program for Recruiting Black Workers into the Sector* at <https://report.manufacturingsuccess.org>.