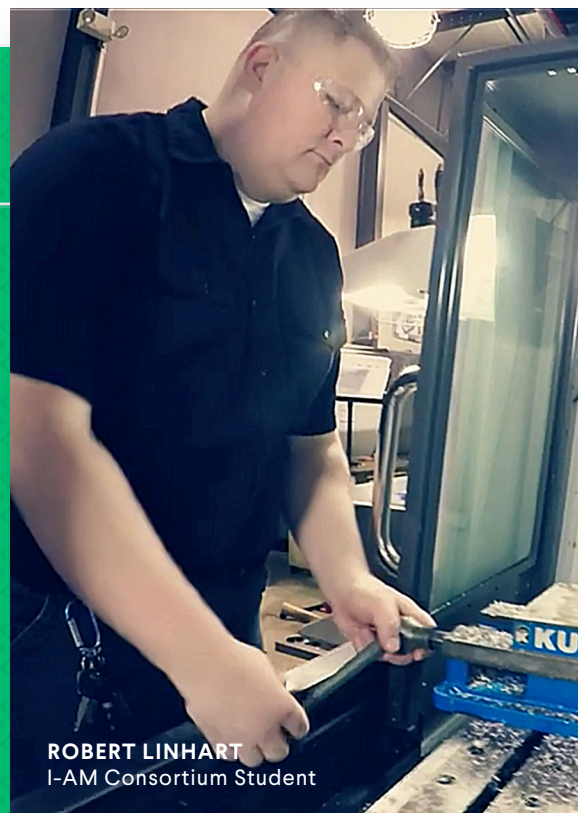


Statewide Employer Engagement in Iowa

Robert Linhart went straight into the workforce after dropping out of high school. After a while, he realized he would need additional education to advance in his career. By that time, Robert was a working adult, so he searched for a program that would allow him to work, and even spend some time with his family, while pursuing his education. He chose Eastern Iowa Community College's computer numeric control machining program, a course of study designed by I-AM (the Iowa-Advanced Manufacturing: A Talent Success Strategy for the 21st Century Workforce consortium). Formed under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Labor's TAACCCT program¹, I-AM designed advanced manufacturing programs to meet the needs of students like Robert, serving him and thousands of others during the life of the grant and beyond. Thanks to his training, Robert got a new job with higher pay. His experience is one of many student success stories from the I-AM consortium.²



ROBERT LINHART
I-AM Consortium Student

PREPARED FOR



EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

BY



Building a
Future
That Works

The From Programs to Systems series highlights community college programs and innovations that were initially funded through the U.S. Department of Labor's TAACCCT program, but sustained beyond the life of the grant and scaled for greater reach, through changes to systems within colleges, between colleges and partnering organizations, and across colleges within a state.³ By systems, we are referring to practices, policies, and processes within and between organizations.

In 2012, the 15 Iowa community college districts joined forces to form the I-AM Round 2 TAACCCT consortium, with the goal of building a talent pipeline for Iowa's advanced manufacturing sector. The consortium's primary objective was to meet the needs of employers seeking skilled workers. To do that effectively, it needed to find a way to coordinate the community colleges' employer engagement efforts. A number of schools had forged partnerships with businesses on their own, but they determined that a unified approach would be more effective. Therefore, the I-AM consortium and the Iowa Association of Business and Industry (ABI) launched a statewide initiative

called Elevate Iowa, which established a sector approach to working with employers in advanced manufacturing. Today, Elevate Iowa continues to support statewide collaboration among employers and colleges to boost the supply of workers available to fill advanced manufacturing jobs.

This profile describes how Iowa's 15 community colleges successfully adopted a collective approach to employer engagement. By doing so, they built a system for employer engagement, which was the mechanism for sustaining and scaling the initial programmatic work of each of the colleges prior to I-AM. It explains how they worked together via the I-AM consortium

Guiding Principles for Scaling Transformative Change

The I-AM consortium's efforts to sustain and scale Elevate Iowa align with the Office of Community College Research and Leadership's (OCCRL) eight [Guiding Principles for Scaling Transformative Change](#), which are as follows:

- Adoption and adaptation
- Dissemination
- Evidence
- Leadership
- Networks
- Spread and endurance
- Storytelling
- Technology

The purpose of the guiding principles is to help community colleges sustain and scale change initiatives, whether those initiatives occur within the college itself or are broader regional or statewide undertakings.

The OCCRL developed the Guiding Principles for Scaling Transformative Change as part of the Transformative Change Initiative, which also produced a number of strategy briefs highlighting the work of TAACCCT consortia. Tools and briefs related to the guiding principles are available on the OCCRL [website](#).

and focused on the state's advanced manufacturing sector, ultimately bringing about systemic change in Iowa's approach to meeting its workforce needs by following these three steps:

- 1 Build a sector partnership among Iowa's community colleges and employers in advanced manufacturing.
- 2 Deepen engagement and leadership buy-in among community colleges and employers.
- 3 Elevate the visibility of the advanced manufacturing sector.

SECTOR STRATEGIES

Sector partnerships are commonly defined as active, focused partnerships among businesses in specific industry sectors and workforce development organizations, educational institutions, training providers, labor unions, community organizations, and other stakeholders.⁴

The U.S. Department of Labor's [Career Pathways Toolkit: An Enhanced Guide and Workbook for System Development](#) advises states to follow these six steps if they want to forge high-performing sector partnerships:

- 1 Build cross-agency partnerships
- 2 Identify a target industry sector and engage employers
- 3 Design education and training programs
- 4 Identify funding needs and sources
- 5 Align policies and programs
- 6 Measure system change and performance

Guiding Principle for Spread and Endurance

Scaling of transformative change will occur when innovations are chosen that show the potential to spread and endure. —OCCRL

I-AM's development of a statewide sector strategy, which ensured that the benefits of the community colleges' employer engagement and workforce development efforts would not be limited to a specific locality, reflects the principle of spread and endurance, one of the OCCRL's Guiding Principles for Scaling Transformative Change.

See <https://occrll.illinois.edu/docs/librariesprovider4/tci/guiding-principles/spread.pdf?> for more information.

BUILDING A SECTOR PARTNERSHIP

As the colleges in the I-AM consortium sought to engage employers in their manufacturing programs, it was evident that a more coordinated approach was necessary, according to Deborah Koua, director of grants and contracts at Des Moines Area Community College (the I-AM consortium's lead institution). "Each college was working independently to engage with employers within their own geographic districts, with varying amounts of success," she said. Part of the problem, she explained, was that the coursework of the various community colleges wasn't aligned, so the schools were unable to consistently "market" students and graduates to employers because the students' skills were not equal.

The schools realized they needed to collaborate in program design and marketing efforts—they had to speak to employers with one voice.

Their program design collaboration included developing a common curriculum of 14 courses, all aligned with courses of

the American Welding Society. Doing so benefited employers and students by ensuring consistency, universality, and industry alignment in the curriculum.⁵

To ensure their work aligned with the needs of Iowa manufacturers, I-AM partnered with the ABI. One-third of ABI's 1,400 member businesses are in manufacturing. Those ABI members hoped to work with the community colleges to address their labor shortages by changing people's perceptions of manufacturing jobs and encouraging people to pursue training and careers in advanced manufacturing.

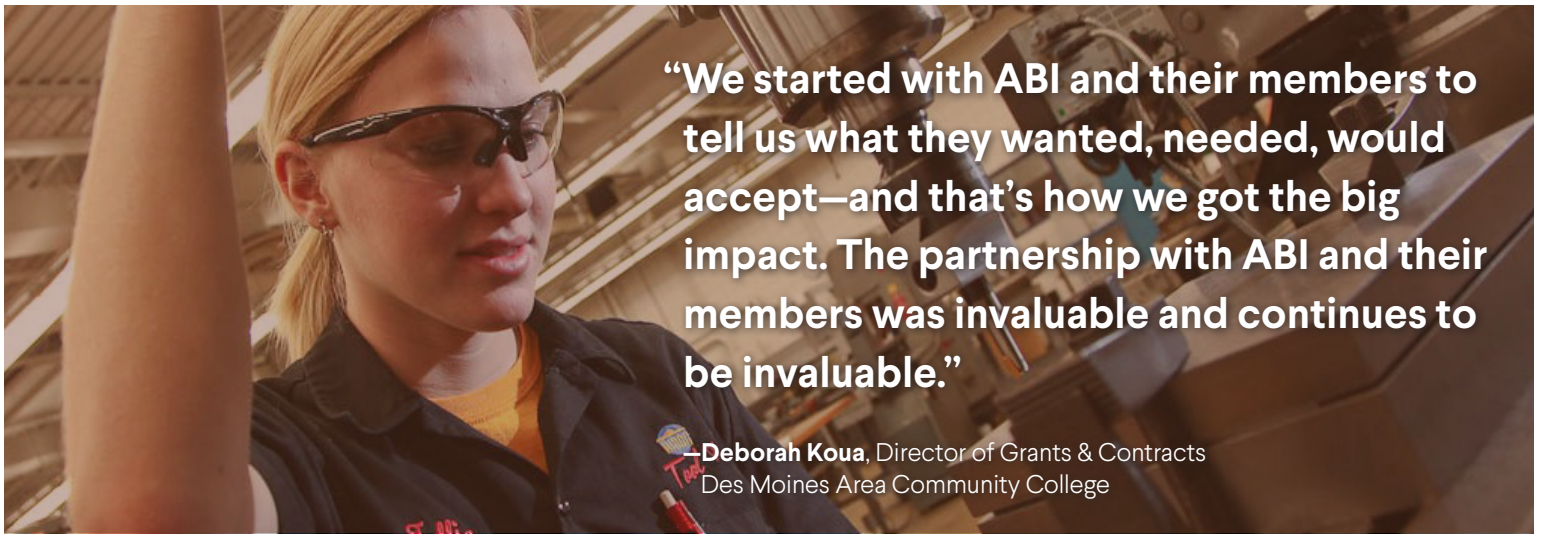
The colleges shared that goal. "A big component of the employer engagement was helping educate students . . . and the public as a whole about the great career opportunities within advanced manufacturing," Koua said. Because there was a labor shortage, the challenge wasn't to find jobs for students, but to increase the number of people pursuing manufacturing careers.

Together, ABI and I-AM worked to advance these specific goals through Elevate Iowa

Raising the profile
of careers in
manufacturing

Connecting
Iowans with
training for
manufacturing
careers

Connecting
training graduates
with jobs



“We started with ABI and their members to tell us what they wanted, needed, would accept—and that’s how we got the big impact. The partnership with ABI and their members was invaluable and continues to be invaluable.”

—Deborah Koua, Director of Grants & Contracts
Des Moines Area Community College

DEEPENING ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP BUY-IN AMONG COLLEGES AND EMPLOYERS

Elevate Iowa provided a platform to coordinate discussion between community colleges and the advanced manufacturing employers. At Elevate Iowa meetings, which are staffed by ABI, leaders of the colleges listened thoughtfully to the manufacturing employers and acted on what they heard. That built a critical level of trust.

With employers in the lead, the I-AM colleges designed programs to prepare students to enter the advanced manufacturing workforce. That effort has paid off. “The quality of the employee we get from the community colleges is exceptional,” said Beth Downing, human resources manager at The Raymond Corporation, a global manufacturing company. She added that the training that students receive “prepares them with skill sets that are very useful, meaningful, and practical for our business.”⁶

Elevate Iowa’s ability to bring together the leaders of colleges and businesses has been key to its success and its longevity. I-AM’s sector strategy made college-business partnerships “much more robust and more substantive,” said ABI president Mike Ralston, noting that community college presidents and the presidents and CEOs of companies continue to attend meetings together on a quarterly basis, convened by Elevate staff. Those leaders support and encourage meetings that occur locally, organized by business outreach staff at each college. These meetings are focused on the specific needs of local employers, and engage employers in the programs of each college, through activities such as speaking with students, conducting interviews, providing internships, and informing curriculum. The level of leadership engagement has helped ensure Elevate Iowa’s success.

ELEVATING THE VISIBILITY OF ADVANCED MANUFACTURING

Communication plays a big role in ensuring that Elevate Iowa will be sustainable. Embracing its mandate to elevate the visibility of the advanced manufacturing sector, Elevate Iowa has developed a strong, multifaceted external communication program.

TAACCCT funds covered the cost of Elevate Iowa's early public awareness initiatives, but ABI was committed to an ongoing effort to let people know about opportunities in manufacturing. After the grant period ended, the business association agreed to support all of Elevate Iowa's outreach platforms, including its [website](#) and social media channels.

One way Elevate Iowa seeks to raise awareness of manufacturing is by promoting Manufacturing Day, an annual celebration of modern manufacturing that falls on the first Friday of October. The National Association of Manufacturers and the Manufacturing Institute encourage manufacturers across the country to mark the occasion by opening their doors to the public, and Elevate Iowa gets involved by collaborating with the Center for Industrial Research and Services at Iowa State University to plan events across the state. To encourage community colleges

to participate, Elevate Iowa offers a Manufacturing Day toolkit that includes a boilerplate press release that individual schools can customize and a poster with the Elevate Iowa brand.

Another important element of Elevate Iowa's public awareness initiative is the Elevate Ambassador program, through which employees of manufacturers represent their companies and the manufacturing sector as a whole.

Guiding Principle for Dissemination

Scaling of transformative change will occur when dissemination is led by individuals with deep knowledge of their settings. —OCCRL

I-AM's use of ambassadors to engage employers and the public across the state reflects the principle of dissemination, one of the OCCRL's Guiding Principles for Scaling Transformative Change.

See <https://occrl.illinois.edu/docs/librariesprovider4/tci/guiding-principles/dissemination.pdf?> for more information.

A requirement of ambassadors is that they have attended or are familiar with community colleges in their region. Ambassadors bring that awareness and knowledge of the opportunities in manufacturing to community events, where they encourage the people they meet to consider careers in advanced manufacturing. As of October 2018, the program had more than 500 ambassadors.

Events are also a big part of Elevate Iowa's communication efforts. Since 2012, Elevate Iowa has organized more than 700 events, including the employer/college meetings described earlier, economic development group meetings, ambassador training sessions, and the Iowa Advanced Manufacturing Conference.

CONCLUSION

Career opportunities in manufacturing continue to grow, according to Ralston, who said he believes Elevate Iowa's mission to improve the perception of advanced manufacturing and spread awareness about manufacturing careers is more important than ever. Elevate Iowa is now a key component of the state of Iowa's [Future Ready Iowa](#) program, a broader workforce development initiative whose goal is for 70 percent of Iowa's workforce to have education or training beyond high school by 2025. Elevate Iowa staff work with Future Ready Iowa to expand awareness of the career opportunities in manufacturing for those with postsecondary education and training.

The community colleges and employers that came together as Elevate Iowa have built a system with staying power. They continue to work together because they know all participants mutually benefit from the partnership. Employers have seen the rise of strong community college manufacturing programs aligned to their workforce needs, and colleges have seen the positive impact Elevate Iowa has had on the success of their students. Together, they are making their programs more successful and expanding the workforce through a multifaceted visibility campaign that has improved the public's perception and understanding of the opportunities in manufacturing.

RESOURCES ON SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS & SECTOR STRATEGIES

On SkillsCommons

- Employer Engagement Showcase, <http://support.skillscommons.org/showcases/eees/>
- I-AM SkillsCommons repository, <https://www.skillscommons.org/handle/taaccct/479>.
- I-AM Final External Evaluation Report, <https://www.skillscommons.org/handle/taaccct/9657>.
- I-AM success story videos: <https://www.skillscommons.org/handle/taaccct/9078>.
- A partnership between SkillsCommons and the Ohio Manufacturers' Association led to this showcase of curated resources of particular interest to the advanced manufacturing sector: <http://oma.skillscommons.org/>

On WorkforceGPS

- Career Pathways Toolkit: An Enhanced Guide and Workbook for System Development, https://careerpathways.workforcegps.org/resources/2016/10/20/10/11/Enhanced_Career_Pathways_Toolkit
- Sector Strategies Resources: The Business Engagement Collaborative, <https://businessengagement.workforcegps.org/resources/2016/08/16/15/22/Sector-Strategies-Resources>

From OCCRL's Transformative Change Initiative

- Evaluation of Employer Engagement, <https://occrll.illinois.edu/docs/librariesprovider4/tci/employer-engagement.pdf>
- Collaborating on a Sectoral Approach to Strengthen Workforce Training, <https://occrll.illinois.edu/docs/librariesprovider4/tci/strategies-for-transformative-change/air-washington.pdf>

Other Resources

- *Next Generation Sector Partnerships Training Manual*, <http://www.nextgensectorpartnerships.com/toolkit/>
- The Aspen Institute's Economic Opportunities Program's Workforce Strategies Initiative, <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/workforce-strategies-initiative/sector-strategies/>

ENDNOTES & CREDITS

1. TAACCCT stands for Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT). This program provided nearly \$2 billion over a seven-year period to help U.S. community colleges to deliver industry-aligned credentials for unemployed and underemployed adults.
 2. “Something More—Eastern Iowa Community College (EICC),” Elevate Iowa, June 6, 2016, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YpJ0KY4LPI&feature=youtu.be&list=PLCa-Lz2eVlkPJvUT7sUN8A0WOHR6Yezgn>.
 3. TAACCCT stands for Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT). This program provided nearly \$2 billion over a seven-year period to help U.S. community colleges to deliver industry-aligned credentials for unemployed and underemployed adults.
 4. “Career Pathways Toolkit: An Enhanced Guide and Workbook for System Development,” Career Pathways, WorkforceGPS, published April 18, 2017, https://careerpathways.workforcegps.org/resources/2016/10/20/10/11/Enhanced_Career_Pathways_Toolkit.
 5. *Competency Models In Action: Using Competency Models to Align Curricula with Advanced Manufacturing Industry Needs* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 2015), https://www.careeronestop.org/CompetencyModel/Info_Documents/Kirkwood-CaseSummary.pdf.
 6. “Success Story Videos for I-AM Grant (Elevate Iowa: Manufacturing Success),” SkillsCommons, 2016, <https://www.skillscommons.org/handle/taaccct/9078>.
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