

Critical Workforce Needs

The Greater Cincinnati region is currently facing a critical workforce challenge: our employers are struggling to meet their need for a skilled workforce, and far too many of our residents have insufficient skills and preparation to enter, advance and succeed in the labor market. This gap between employers' needs and worker preparation limits our region's ability to attract, retain and grow companies, and results in one of the highest poverty rates in the nation. The Greater Cincinnati Workforce Network (Workforce Network) was developed to address this need.

What is the Greater Cincinnati Workforce Network?

The Workforce Network is a regional partnership convened by The Greater Cincinnati Foundation (GCF) to align the financial resources of the region's workforce training and education programs in order to meet employers' demand for skilled workers. At the same time, it will provide opportunity for additional education, training and advancement for low-skill, low-wage workers.

For the first time, local and state government agencies, publicly-funded workforce investment boards, employers, chambers of commerce, high schools, technical schools, colleges and universities, nonprofit service providers and philanthropic funders have joined together to develop a comprehensive approach to workforce development in the region.

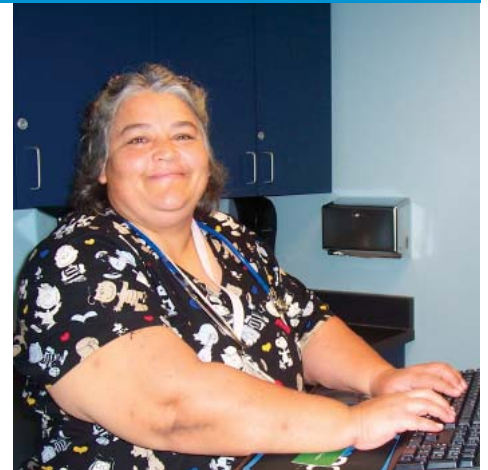
Why is this effort important to our community's future?

Shifting to knowledge-based economy

Our region's economy has shifted from a once-prominent manufacturing base to one that requires highly-skilled, specially-trained workers. Recent estimates indicate that the Cincinnati region is projected to add 103,600 new jobs from 2004-2014, with the fastest growth occurring in occupations requiring education beyond high school. Health care is the sector that is expected to produce the largest number of jobs; careers like nurses' aides, lab technicians, registered nurses, respiratory therapists and surgical technicians all require specialized training and/or education beyond high school.

The education gap

Our region is not prepared to meet this projected demand for skilled workers. One-in-six Cincinnati adults lack a high school diploma or GED. Nearly half of the region's adults lack education beyond high school.



"I started out as a divorced woman on public assistance," Karen Goodman said.

Today, with training and support from the Health Career Collaborative (a Workforce Network partner), she is a patient care assistant at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and is working on her associate degree in nursing.

The mother of five said the support from her program and employer has helped her overcome barriers.

"I know I can do it," she said.



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Reducing the poverty rate

The gap between employers' needs and worker preparation has produced one of the highest poverty rates in the country and results in companies moving to other parts of the country in search of qualified workers.

Also, having an associate degree can transform a career as well as double a person's earning potential. This allows workers to be in a more financially stable position and lays the foundation for a bachelor's degree.

Developing career pathways

Our current workforce system is failing to meet the challenge of preparing workers for specific jobs in growth industries. While some programs are achieving results, the system as a whole is fragmented and not sufficiently driven by specific employer and industry needs. In other words, workers' education and training must be carefully aligned with real job qualifications and opportunities.

What Will the Workforce Network do?

Align workforce resources and strategies

Create a regional partnership among public agencies, employers, philanthropic organizations, service providers and educational institutions to expand, pool and align resources to achieve better results in preparing workers for jobs.

Close skill gaps in key growth industries

Work with employers and educational institutions to expand an existing health care career pathway, and launch two new career pathways in specific industries with projected job growth important to the regional economy.

Build the capacity of the regional workforce system

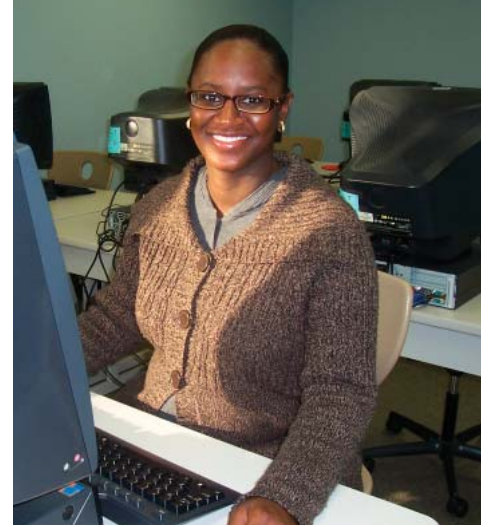
Improve and coordinate support services that help unemployed, low-skill, and hard-to-employ workers prepare for, enter, advance, and succeed in the labor market. Develop a common data collection system to track results and evaluate strategies.

Advance policy change

Advance critical policy reforms within the regional workforce development system, and at the local, regional and state levels.

How will GCF support the Workforce Network?

The Workforce Network is a three-year, \$2.25 million plan. GCF was instrumental in securing a three-year, \$450,000 grant from the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, a consortium of national foundations and the Department of Labor. GCF is securing additional dollars from local funders towards a total \$1.8 million local match for the national grant.



Rashida Wilks-Koundoul said she always loved school and was at the top of her class.

"I went to college after high school. I didn't have a support system and did horribly," she shared.

Rashida began working full-time and felt stuck in her warehouse job, "doing backbreaking work."

But working with the Health Careers Collaborative (a partner of the Workforce Network) gave her the opportunity to change her life.

Today, she has a health unit coordinator certificate and earns five dollars more an hour than at her last job. She is a health unit coordinator at University Hospital, where she has health benefits and a 403(b).

Her next plan is to receive an associate degree as a surgical technician.

"I now know my options are endless," she said.

GCF also committed \$300,000 toward the match and serves as convener and fiscal agent for the Workforce Network, on behalf of its partners. GCF provides in-kind office space and support for the Workforce Network's Executive Director Ross Meyer.

How will the Workforce Network measure success?

Short term

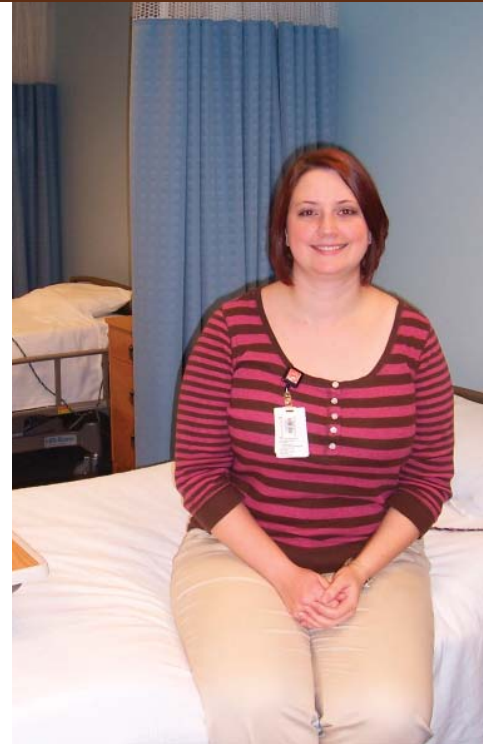
The Workforce Network will prepare at least 1,500 low-skill adults for better jobs in priority growth industries by 2011. At least 30 employers will have increased capacity to recruit, train, retain and advance employees to mid-level skill jobs.

Long term

During the next three years, the Workforce Network will work to identify a permanent "home" and create a strategy to continuously improve and align the region's workforce policies, practices and resources to meet employers' long-term needs.

How can I get involved?

The Workforce Network is a broad-based regional stakeholder group. Anyone interested in workforce and training issues is welcome to get involved in one of its work teams. Please contact Ross Meyer, Workforce Network executive director, for more information at meyerr@gcfdn.org. You may also visit www.cincinnatiworkforce.org



Sara Leigh, a wife and mother of one, is earning her associate nursing degree through her job at the Health Alliance.

"Without the program I am involved in, I really don't think it would be financially possible for me," she said. "We scrimp and save just to get by now; I wouldn't be able to pay for schooling too. The hospital pays my tuition up front, so the only out of pocket expense I have is my lab fees and books."

She admits it is difficult juggling everything.

"My husband and my daughter are what motivate me to stay in school. I want us to have a good life and I want my child to have every opportunity she deserves. I see my education as the key to that."



All of these women have had the opportunity for career advancement, thanks to the Health Careers Collaborative, a partner of the Workforce Network.

Success story

The Health Careers Collaborative of Greater Cincinnati is an innovative career pathway program that serves as a model for the Workforce Network. A partnership of local health care employers, educators, the workforce investment system and community agencies, its goal is to alleviate occupational shortages in health care. At the same time, it will provide career opportunities for under-employed individuals in the community, promote low-wage current workers and increase diversity in the workplace.

Partners

Partners of the Health Careers Collaborative include: Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center; The Health Alliance; Great Oaks Institute of Technology and Career Development; and Cincinnati State Technical and Community College. Community partners include: Dress for Success, Mercy Neighborhood Ministries, Super Jobs One Stop Center and Greater Cincinnati Health Council.

Key elements of success

The following strategies have made the Health Careers Collaborative a success. Similar strategies will be used by the Workforce Network as it expands the health care career pathway, and develops similar career pathways in other priority industries:

- Employer-driven process.
- Tuition pre-payment for current employees
- Funding for developmental education, as well as for-credit certificate and degree programs.
- Convenient class locations and schedules for working students.
- Flexible work hours to allow employees to attend classes.
- Funding for capital and operations for training facilities and faculty.
- Supportive services to assist with transportation, child care and job coaching.
- Job readiness and soft-skill training for entry workers.
- Innovative curriculum that is responsive to employer needs.
- Transferable credits and articulations between educational institutions.
- Multiple entry and exit points along pathway.

Expansion plan

Building off of this success, other health care employees, educational institutions and community-based organizations are planning to join the Health Careers Collaborative for a more regional, systematic partnership.

Health Careers Collaborative Outcomes to date

Entry-level workers

1400+ individuals completed certificate programs

88% completion rate

82% job placement rate

\$12.15/hr average wage,

88% with fringe benefits

Existing workers

130+ associate degree students

3.25 average GPA (2.75 comparison)

89% retention rate (35% comparison)

Advance from a \$12/hr job to a \$22/hr career