

Co-Creating Conditions for an Inclusive Workforce

Regional Convening

Detroit, MI

June 2024



Acknowledgements

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Kicking Off the Day

It is a sunny June day in Michigan, and there is a buzz in the air. The Urban Manufacturing Alliance (UMA) has come to Detroit to bring stakeholders together from across the country for a two-day, on-the-ground event with the goal of creating space for discussion about the issues facing the American manufacturing industry. In past years, Pittsburgh, Seattle, Baltimore, and Houston have all hosted. This year, it's Detroit's turn. It seems fitting that the first day will be held at the iconic Carhartt building, where a larger-than-life mural of industrial workers welcomes all into the historic Cass Corridor.

UMA (*a national organization transforming manufacturing ecosystems into drivers of just & equitable development that puts communities first*) convenes a broad range of stakeholders just about once a year. This year, there are attendees from over 15 states on-site for discussions about the opportunities, barriers, and issues faced by the manufacturing industry and workers within it. The day's focus is on co-creating the conditions for an inclusive workforce; a current and critical issue for both employers and employment seekers.

Tanu Kumar, a Co-Director of UMA, said, **“We chose this focus because we believe that right now manufacturing is not really like any other industry. It really is well-positioned to disrupt the systemic barriers that we have seen in**

our workforce and provide pathways to good quality jobs for underserved communities. We are at a moment in time when there are shifts in technology, huge federal investments, and a growing recognition of the need to fill a workforce gap.”

In manufacturing, no matter the sector or position, there are overarching issues that affect



everyone. A projected 4 million jobs will go unfilled by 2034, which is partially a result of the lack of available skilled labor. Current subject matter experts are also aging out and retiring, and the federal investment money that seems to be everywhere is often just out of reach for small and medium-sized business owners. Filling out applications for grants, dedicating time to pursuing them, and then collecting data to fulfill

reporting requirements is a full-time job, and in an industry where everyone is doing many things at once, it may be nearly impossible to make time for it.

Looking for a solution, national stakeholders convened in the building that hosts the flagship Carhartt store, as well as the Carhartt Workshop and the non-profit organization ISAIC (*the Industrial Sewing & Innovation Center*). The Workshop, which opened in 2020, is a community space where Detroit residents can borrow over 1,000 types of tools for free, as well as receive training or attend community events. ISAIC provides a nationally licensed training program and year-long apprenticeship for industrial sewists. Since its establishment in 2020, ISAIC has assisted Carhartt in bringing back some of their extensive production to Michigan. Here, apprentices and experts craft the iconic Carhartt beanie together.

At the event, ISAIC's Director of Programming, Ellie Schneider, shared: **"We are passionate about manufacturing and we want to continue to bring it back to the US, but we know that it needs to change dramatically in order to be more sustainable and better for both people and the planet. New technology and innovation can help us produce more efficiently, more sustainably, and also create better wage, higher-skill opportunities for the workers in that factory."** Over the rest of the day participants listened to speakers, completed hands-on activities, and conversed about a multitude of topics.

No matter the topic being discussed, Ellie's words echoed: there is opportunity, however the industry desperately needs to change. There are benefits just on the other side for everyone involved, including workers seeking higher-paying, better jobs, and employers who are desperate to train and hire.



Jeannine Gant, the DEIJ Officer from the Global Epicenter of Mobility (and a lifelong Detroit) spoke next, sharing how earning the Build Back Better Regional Challenge grant in 2022 changed their organization. As a recipient of the grant, the GEM Coalition (which supports 11 counties in the Detroit region) received over \$52 million for training, direct assistance to manufacturers, and financial backing for start-ups in the mobility sector, which covers electric and autonomous vehicles, and the technology to support those sectors.



“This is the time to have these conversations about equity and inclusion in our workforce. For some people these are new conversations. Let’s make sure we are intentional, that’s how we create the conditions for an inclusive workforce. Everyone is looking to us for best practices and solutions that can be shared across the country because this is literally the only way our economy is going to thrive. If we do the work the right way, in a way that’s inclusive and not excluding anyone, we can create a sustainable strategy for our region & ecosystem.”

Erin Sheehan, State Network Manager for the National Skills Coalition spoke to the group next. The National Skills Coalition is a national nonprofit that was created over 20 years ago to bring together a broad range of stakeholders and organizations involved in the workforce sector so they could engage in advocacy together. Their perspective highlighted some of the issues and

opportunities seen within their ecosystem as grant recipients began forming a plan on how to use the investment.



“New federal infrastructure funds are a huge opportunity to transform the workforce. Investments like the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA), the CHIPS and Science Act, and the American Rescue Plan (ARPA) are flexible dollars, and states have the opportunity to do a range of workforce development activities with these funds. Overall, \$2 trillion are being invested, giving us the opportunity to transform our cities and states and place millions of workers into better jobs, particularly in areas where we have seen a loss of manufacturing jobs.”

Although grant money is flexible and states can do a wide range of things with these funds, it can be hard to track and understand success unilaterally, as well as the best way to approach

using the money. Collecting data on the effectiveness of programs & their outcomes can be tricky, as not all outcomes properly account for supporting and including marginalized communities. Job placement and retention isn't always the end goal for some organizations and opportunity seekers. It can be tricky to seek 'one size fits all' solutions when factories and the people's needs within them can be so wildly different. Another barrier is also clear - as funds flow down into the state and local levels, work is still happening in silos. Although stakeholders are beginning to come together, work is still often happening separately or being duplicated, and the critical input from workforce development advocates and the employees in the industry is sorely lacking.

Learning into Action

Live Skills Simulator

To demonstrate that concept, Education Design Lab (a national nonprofit based out of Washington, D.C. that collaborates with educators, employers, and workforce specialists to create learning experiences) led attendees through a live skills simulator. Participants were separated into groups playing the roles of opportunity seekers, employers, learning providers, and workforce centers. Everyone was given an envelope with their backstory, which included opportunities, barriers, and goals. Participants went straight to work, and the learning was nearly instantaneous.

“As an employer, I couldn’t find anyone with the correct training or the necessary certifications, and I have a lot of openings. Some of these jobs need extremely specific skills and I can’t find the right person.”

As the simulation continued, learning providers started working directly with employers. They began partnerships with workforce organizations to provide things like transportation for their students who didn’t drive, part-time shifts for those with children, tuition reimbursement or options for upskilling, and more. Job seekers declined offers from employers that they considered ‘low-value,’ or didn’t offer them much. Positions with little to no advancement or opportunity for training had no luck hiring. Organizations that offer wraparound services

“As a job seeker, I realized that it’s hard finding your own opportunity without organizing.”





like transportation stipends, paid training, and flexible schedules had significant interest from job seekers, while those that were unable to offer anything struggled.

During lunch, the buzz was palpable. Excited conversations were happening at every table, and bringing the room to order for the afternoon breakout panels took a few tries. There would be two rounds of breakout sessions, occurring simultaneously throughout the Carhartt and ISAIC spaces.

“I was a job seeker, and ONLY received my job because of the connection that was made. Once I started working with workforce organizations, I had an advocate working for me, and that was the only way I was able to access.”

“I was an employer with money and tools to build an apprenticeship; the challenge I kept running into was that I did not have enough data on the quality and efficiency of the programs we were investing in. Money goes to both great programs and maybe not so great programs, but because there is no standardized database in place, it’s hard to know. They may say that they want to diversify, but what does that really mean?”



Deepening our Work Afternoon Breakout Sessions

Helping Employers Build Supportive Workplaces

Facilitated by

Beth Hahn, The Ohio Manufacturer's Association (OMA) and

Jacklyn Salazar, Global Epicenter of Mobility (GEM) & Southeast Michigan Community Alliance (SEMCA)

Jacklyn Salazar & Beth Hahn led a discussion about helping employers build supportive workplaces. Both are recipients of the Build Back Better grant and are currently working with industry sector partners to support sustainability and mobility efforts. The OMA, which started over 100 years ago, has been focused on how to support the landscape and figure out how to scale solutions that are working for all of the widely range communities they serve. SEMCA & GEM serve a similar role in Michigan. The two discussed the similar needs in the region, such as hyper-local, community-based approaches in the workplace that serve those within them. They both focus on people of color, veterans, and women.

The rising need for labor has also pushed employers to work with non-traditional groups, such as part-time, working parents or people with disabilities. There has been success empowering marginalized communities

with access to opportunities for upskilling, certifications aligned with existing career paths, and flexible schedules that allow more people to participate in the workforce. The most important thing to ask ourselves remains - are these systems accessible for those that would most benefit? If an employer is hiring from within a marginalized group, they must also ensure that they know the barriers their employees will face, and are willing to work around them. If an employer wants to hire those with disabilities, but will not change their policies to accommodate them, it is not sustainable or beneficial for either party.



Afternoon Breakout Sessions

Designing Inclusive Workforce Programming

Facilitators

Bonnie Fahoome, Design Core Detroit and

Dr. Sarah Crane, University of Michigan Economic Growth Institute

Teaming up to lead a session about Inclusive Program Design, Bonnie Fahoome and Dr. Sarah Crane started by providing an overview of both Michigan-based organizations. In addition to their location, the groups share similar missions. Both aim to strengthen their communities. Both convene and learn within their network with the



intent to ensure that the communities they serve are strong and informed. They aim to create equity, and believe others should too. Although there are also important differences between the two organizations, coming together to support the new manufacturing industry makes complete sense.

Attendees went through exercises to assess internal privilege, before diving into a discussion about what typically holds back equity in most programs. Issues named, like a lack of collective

buy-in, lack of standardized expertise, and unclear strategies can cause serious issues. There are ways to mitigate these issues, but inclusive design must be at the forefront of any plan. Data is also key, but having a standardized and unilateral system that is easy to access is still a ways off. Those that do have data collection processes in place do not always share their metrics or processes. A standardized and accessible system that the industry buys into is critical to the future of equity and inclusion.

Bonnie introduced Design Core's Inclusive Design Training Program (IDTP). Their principles, which can be used to support inclusive design, offer pillars for employers who are looking to expand accessibility to their programs and open positions. Mottos such as "process matters just as much as the outcome" and "seek expertise from a range of resources" encourage manufacturers to consider how things have traditionally been done. Dr. Crane and the Economic Growth Institute have also contributed valuable research to the cause - their work in creating a framework to understand disenfranchised communities will allow open discussions about the barriers within those communities.

Afternoon Breakout Sessions

Engaging Worker Voice to Increase Job Quality

Facilitated by

Kimberly Faison, Detroit Future City (DFC) and

Meaghan Kennedy, Orange Sparkle Ball (OSB)

A popular session, the breakout, “Engaging Worker Voice to Increase Job Quality,” was led by Kimberly Faison and Meaghan Kennedy. After the morning’s role-playing exercise, it would be an enthusiastic session. Kimberly and Meaghan began by introducing their organizations, and how they came to be invited to lead this session. Detroit Future City (DFC), one of the organizations in the GEM Coalition, is a policy advocate and think tank that is focused on the future of Detroit. Orange Sparkle Ball (OSB) is, as Meaghan calls it, ‘a generalist,’ that brings together stakeholders to create pathways to solutions. Both share similar missions; they are working towards innovation and real-world solutions that will benefit the people in the ecosystems they serve, while forging a sustainable future for those in their networks.

In 2024, after receiving the Real World Deployment Grant, OSB convened partners to fund a long-planned pilot program of autonomous robots for compost pickup. Currently ongoing in Detroit’s Corktown neighborhood, the fleet follows specified routes to pick up food waste that can be used for composting. OSB acted as the convener, bringing together Ottonomy (a robotics company), Scrap Soils (a Detroit-based startup), and Brother Nature Produce (a Detroit-based farm). There is extreme interest in autonomous technology as it advances, however, it is typically targeted at producers and consumers. Applying some of this technology to civic issues could change the lives of an entire community. This is where organizations like these come into play - they will support the pilot, learn from the results, iterate again, and share what worked with the larger community. If it brings jobs or new technology to the community, DFC can help with training and upskilling a workforce to sustain that industry. Roles like these are critical to any future job force; understanding and sharing what works and what doesn’t builds community expertise, as well as allows the subject matter experts to focus on their work.



Best practices for capturing and sharing information were shared. The idea of a mini-toolkit for employers comes up; communication and accessibility was the theme of the day. The thought goes: Small & medium-sized manufacturers are often wearing multiple hats. Learning, piloting, and maintaining a new system without any feedback externally or support is a lot. Organizations like DFC, GEM, and OSB can help facilitate this. They also step in wherever else it's needed; whether it's with a startup getting connected to a manufacturer, developing a workforce, or understanding the impact of programs. Flexibility is critical, as each day can bring totally new challenges. For workers, these organizations support the creation of a healthy and sustainable industry, with common standards for quality jobs, training, and more. And, these organizations need to hear from the workers inside the industry; there needs to be transparency and consistency. Workers lending their voices will have the opportunity to help create a stronger, better industry for them. There needs to be a safe, consistent space to voice these findings as well as a support partner to ensure they are implemented. The session ends on a hopeful note - the technology that could make this happen exists. Being able to use shared documents online, hop on a video call with stakeholders across the country, or see real-time data, all of that is already within our grasp.



Afternoon Breakout Sessions

Measuring Impact of Regional Workforce Initiatives

Facilitated by

David Van Siclen and **Matt Bogoshian**, American Manufacturing Communities Collaborative (AMCC)

Another session, led by David Van Siclen and Matt Bogoshian of the American Manufacturing Communities Collaborative (AMCC), took place in the meeting space at ISAIC. Shielded from the sounds of the factory by leafy greenery, participants listened to an overview of the American Manufacturing Communities Collaborative and why it was formed. AMCC aims to strengthen American manufacturing with organizational support based on best practices from aligned communities. Established in 2018, AMCC focuses on six key components for sustainable development, some of which are training, innovation, infrastructure, and operational improvement. Using these pillars, they work within regions to help map the ecosystem as well as better understand the ecosystem's strengths and opportunities. What they learn becomes best practices, and is amplified within the network so other organizations benefit.

The group listened attentively as the team from AMCC discussed some of the complex issues surrounding the revitalization of the US manufacturing industry. The lack of a standardized data governance structure is an issue. With the focus on regional industry, everyone participating must be on the same page. Training, data collection, and impact

reporting should all be standardized. This would save a huge amount of time and effort in developing processes in silos that cannot be used interchangeably. For the same reasons, understanding the other organizations and resources in the area will be critical. The huge labor gap already puts us behind; duplicated or ineffective work means waste. Waste means failure. Failure is a domino effect that ripples throughout the ecosystem. It seems delicate, but doable.

Excited to get started, participants worked together to create imagined headlines for the future. What might the manufacturing industry look like in 2050? What tools do we need to develop now to make that happen? Participants nailed down what might be a helpful tool – creating a shared, regional, agreement about how, when, and why to collect data. This could also outline how the data would be used. Having an idea for a framework ready to go increases buy-in and trust from both workers and organizations. The idea is simple, but in planning for the future, even a simple idea merits full consideration. Participants left the session with visions of the future in their mind. In true manufacturing fashion, once we have a full vision of what we want, we can reverse engineer almost anything.

Afternoon Breakout Sessions

Changing Perceptions of Manufacturing in our Communities

Facilitated by:

Andrew Crowe, New American Manufacturing Renaissance and
Tanu Kumar, Urban Manufacturing Alliance

In the last breakout session of the day, there was only one person who could bring the enthusiastic crowd to rapt attention. Andrew (Drew) Crowe, founder and face of the New American Manufacturing Renaissance Tour, shared his own story about the opportunities manufacturing can provide. With nearly insurmountable odds stacked against him at a young age, Andrew found a thread of hope in a position at a machine shop. Understanding the enormous potential available for willing learners and seeing the huge labor gap, he got to work learning. His career pathway took him in many directions, including through management, higher education, and finally, to a role educating the public about his journey and the opportunities marginalized communities can find within the manufacturing industry. He now speaks to crowds around the US, bringing his own DJ and videographer along. The crowd listened attentively to Andrew describe the issues he faced and what he does now; traveling to speak to almost every group imaginable about the opportunities in manufacturing.

The excitement about what The New American Manufacturing Renaissance does is palpable. In April of 2024, there were over 500,000 manufacturing jobs available. By 2034, that

will become nearly 4 million. There aren't many standardized paths into the industry, and although there are positions open that could be life-changing, the people who could most benefit are often left out. Standardized training paths into the manufacturing industry with high-quality careers for those who most need them are necessary for us to have a fighting chance at filling those roles. This is not just logical, but also ethical. The work to communicate the new and existing opportunities and paths



into the industry to jobseekers is critical. There is also a strong need to amplify the message that conditions in manufacturing are improving for those within it. Why would an 18-year old entering the job markets for the first time take a job at an organization that doesn't pay well, offer upward mobility, or the chance to learn new and in-demand skills? Drew acts as a critical go-between, speaking to potential opportunities as well as holding employers accountable to the communities they serve. If an organization wants to support single parents but does not allow flexibility for things like picking up children from school, it is not a sustainable solution for either party.

“What I’ve seen working is collaboration, number one, and number two, stacking offerings. We don’t want to cling to systems that were made in traditional times. A lot of our manufacturing practices have been built around 2 parent households where the father can support the whole home with one income, and the wife will do the childbearing at home. We need to look at systems to see how we can remix or change these to better suit people in their lives these days?” -Drew Crowe

Ending the Day

After discussions ended, attendees went on a guided tour of the ISAIC production space where they had the opportunity to network and see the Carhartt production line, new innovation projects, and the classroom where students learn industrial sewing. New acquaintances enthusiastically gathered to discuss findings and opportunities for partnership. One attendee spoke about their experience dealing with employers and training providers and the frustration that comes along with it. “There are barriers to these jobs for those who would benefit tremendously from a pathway and advancement in this industry. There are simple fixes for some of these issues, but they have to have the support and buy-in from the industry, who has to be shown that they work.”

The day ended on a high note. There was an excited hum of conversation as attendees spoke with new acquaintances, shared their experience during the day, and exchanged business cards. The atmosphere in the ISAIC space is filled with a palpable sense of optimism and hope. The day feels like a positive step. Even if we aren’t individually quite sure of the next moves, at least the players are mostly on the board, and we are willing to learn the game. Join us as UMA and our network transform manufacturing ecosystems into drivers of just & equitable development that puts communities first.



Follow the Urban Manufacturing Alliance for more coverage on this convening, as well as information for future events: urbanmfg.org.



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