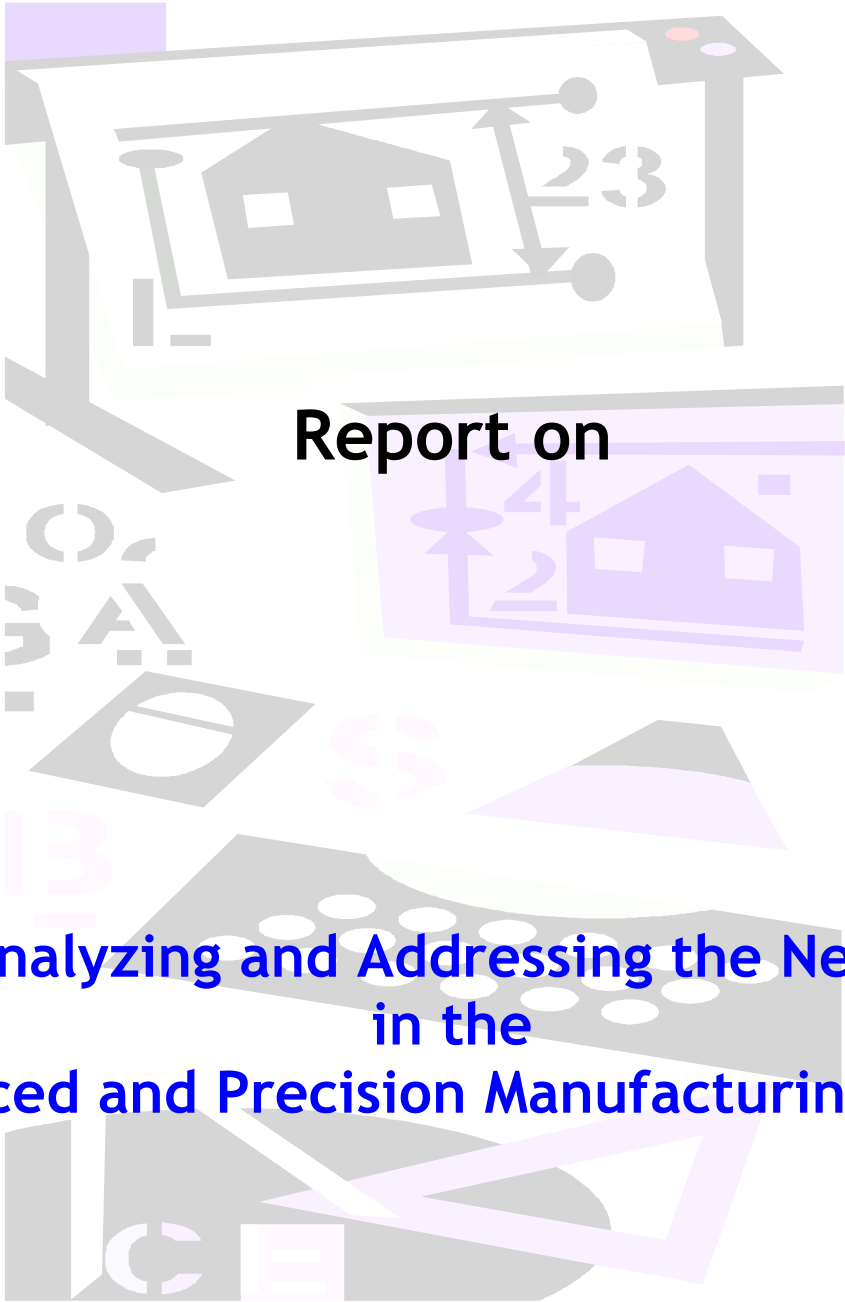


# Center of Workforce Innovations, Inc.



**Report on**

## **Analyzing and Addressing the Needs in the Advanced and Precision Manufacturing Cluster**

# High Growth Industry Cluster: A Pilot Program for Advanced Manufacturing Center of Workforce Innovations Report

December 2005

## The Background and Project Impetus:

Over the last three years, the Center of Workforce Innovations, Inc. (CWI) has conducted a strategic planning process to identify the critical trends in our labor market. The analysis has included discussion groups, surveying, focus groups, and one-on-one interviewing of all pertinent facets of the stakeholder communities. Stakeholders were defined as professionals, economic development, community leaders, private sector, and industry experts. Through the use of the DWIA funds we were able to delve more deeply into the issues and workforce development gaps within the Advanced and Precision Manufacturing cluster with the expectation of helping local employers increase their competitive advantage.

The project was initiated by an industry expert who served as the facilitator and promoter. Our intent was both root cause oriented and solutions driven. This meant that early on employer networks had to be formed in a legitimate way to ensure that the key issues facing advanced manufacturers were articulated, clearly documented, and validated with enough employers to recommend solutions.

The project was launched out of the CWI office but soon moved closer to a location on the fringe of Lake Michigan and the Port of Indiana which is a hub for this cluster. Though located within one of the key corridors for manufacturing, the Project Team Members met with qualifying businesses throughout the six county area, with slightly heavier emphasis in Porter and La Porte Counties. No stone went unturned as the project gathered data on available labor force, training needs, qualities of the emerging workforce and career paths for existing workers.

## Achievements:

The project made a commitment to accomplish seven key outcomes. The outcomes set the context for the networking, linkages, and employer contacts that took place. These outcomes are briefly outlined below:

- ◆ Establish a method and database to gather the pertinent data and then assimilate data to recommend solutions.
- ◆ Market WorkKeys and garner agreement for 50 job profiles.
- ◆ Triple the use of the Community Workforce Compact career awareness website from 6 schools to 12.
- ◆ Publish career cluster summaries and distribute.
- ◆ Design and implement Workforce Enhancement Action Planning process to assist with employer solutions.

- ◆ Provide Just in Time Training for WorkOne staff on the cluster reports to create an overall understanding of the information contained and how to best use this information in their career counseling.
- ◆ Identify at least 1 new program that will improve the preparation for entrance into the manufacturing cluster.

CWI is pleased to say that all seven goals were met or exceeded and have been further documented in the spreadsheet represented as Attachment A.

Chart 1 represents some of the factors and challenges facing some of the companies who were interviewed as part of this project. Issues cited and frequency of response included: problem filling vacancies, upcoming changes to business and customer base, a need for upgraded infrastructure, and an overall need for leadership development.

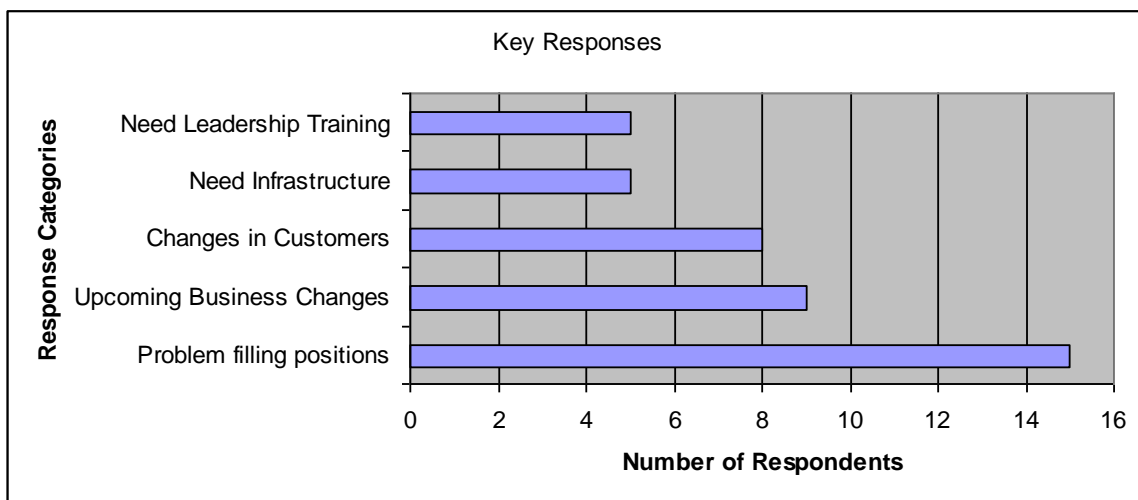


Chart 1

Chart 2 demonstrates the breakdown of referrals made for 38 of the Advanced Manufacturers interviewed during the course of this project:

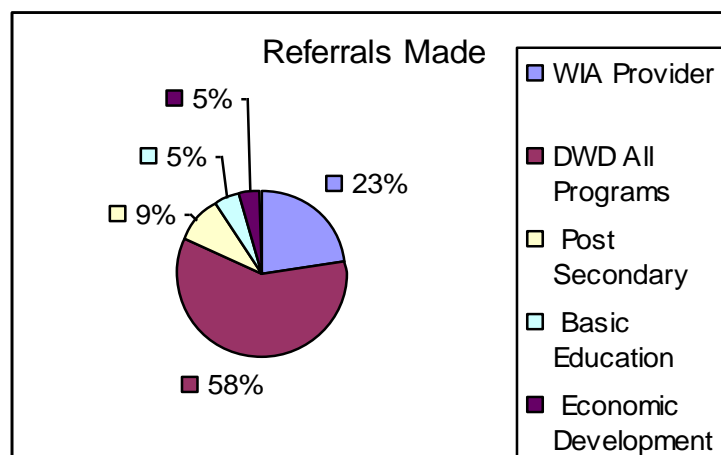


Chart 2

## Lessons Learned:

The project experimented with a number of approaches and methodologies with this group of manufacturers. Project staff had to be agile and willing to make changes to processes, procedures and approaches without creating re-work scenarios. Those approaches which proved successful were subsequently used to launch Phase II, *Business Solutions at Work*, and also have become fully embedded within the Strategic Skills Initiative. Below are several issues that emerged from this work and how the project found solutions or made compromises to turn challenges into assets.

### Issue:

First, although companies are committed to improvements and willing to share issues, it is difficult for them to prioritize formalized focus meetings over running their day to day operations.

### Solution:

The project first organized the questions and data points then approached employers using any method that allowed them to gather input. This meant the use of one-on-one, groups, telephone and electronic media were all interwoven into the process. Input was assimilated and/or aggregated then re-distributed to gain consensus.

### Issue:

Advanced Manufacturing encompasses more than just the traditionally stereotypical 'rust belt' companies.

### Solution:

We incorporated the obvious companies then by referral, and through the supply chain analysis, added to the original group to make a more integrated representation of needs and ideas.

### Issue:

Employee training needs ranged from the most basic skills to complex, technical skills.

### Solution:

The Business Solutions protocol and forms were developed to ensure that during initial discussions information being gathered from single companies or groups was comprehensive and consistent. The project then sought the expertise of literacy experts in addition to content experts to build the right mix of training.

### Issue:

Employer commitment is high, but time is in short supply. We had to find 'means to the ends' that were creative yet responsive.

### Solution:

The project advocated for "Fast Track" training where by key skill deficiencies were identified and training provided in an accelerated fashion. The "Fast Track" training allowed for minimal down time and did not become a burden on production.

## Sustainability

Attachment A depicts the Key Activities and Key Outcomes outlined in the proposal. It should be noted that all activities were undertaken and all outcomes addressed. 80% of the Key Activities were actually exceeded and 100% of the Key Outcomes were achieved. Yet of greater value than these short term results, are the stretch goals that CWI established through this project and are now embedding into other facets of our work.

CWI knew when launching this project that there was more to be gained than simply a set of project specific outcomes. It was clear that approaches and methods, resources and tools could be tested through the DWIA Advanced Manufacturing project but should be done in a way that would easily be replicated and embedded into work we were doing with other cluster. This being the case below described three added value outcomes that were achieved and now are part of our day to day operations.

First, was a need to systematically gather employer needs and training gaps then use that information in a manner that was beneficial to both the employer and CWI future planning. The *Business Solutions at Work* process was developed including a set of documents and protocols that now allows staff to gather the same types of data regardless of which cluster an employer is a part of.

Second, was to develop a snapshot of resources that were outside the immediate scope of CWI's tool box. This included possible funding for training, local economic resources, educational resources, and government connections. The matrix now has approximately 25 resources including: Business Needs Assessment, Certification, Consulting, Downsizing Assistance, Employee Assessments, Employee Education, Employee Recruitment, Employee Training, Infrastructure, Inspections, ISO and Quality Models, Job Profiling, Leadership Development, Marketing, Permits, Site Selection, Strategic Planning and Technology. Resources are cross referenced to the key questions on the interview guide to ensure that all companies are afforded consistent information and referrals. A second sheet provides pertinent contact information for the key organizations represented on the Service Matrix thus standardizing information from one situation to the next. This resource is now being put into play with all company contacts. Attachment B provides a hardcopy sample of these tools.

Lastly was the need to have staff not only trained to assist employers but also to document answers to questions so that trend analysis could be done. Once the Business Solutions forms and processes were developed a three tier tracking system was put into place. The first tier tracking is an excel spreadsheet used to document single, or one time employer requests for information and referrals. The benefit of this most basic tracking not only allows CWI staff to determine if an employer's needs warrant a visit but also records common questions that our callers are posing so that we remain current and can quickly provide answers.

The second tier involves developing a formal contact record in our web-enabled database. All staff has access to this password protected resource which is also used to maintain our organization's mailing lists, persons engaged in CWI activities, and so forth.

A special feature is the training section. When a company expresses a need for employee training it is recorded in this section of the Contact Database. Here data can be aggregated by category and date range to determine trends and where multiple companies may need similar training.

The third tier of tracking involves a more detailed off line database. Its purpose was to have staff to record more in depth information, track of referrals and their outcomes, maintain contact notes, and document results. Since the web-enabled Contact Database is sometimes accessed by other groups, using this off line approach ensured more confidentiality and security. When information is gathered the staff person determines what is most appropriate for the Contact Database and/or this more tightly controlled tool.

All of these methods of documenting and tracking are being sustained and part of our agency's standard operating procedures.

**In Summary:**

The DWIA project was one of the most important projects within the past two years that provided the impetus for organizing services to our employers. Although it had a more narrow focus to a specific cluster, most all lessons learned and the processes developed have now been replicated and put into overall practice throughout our organization.