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MUS Connector

*A Newsletter made by Workforce Development Stakeholders
for Workforce Development Stakeholders*



October 2025 Edition

Welcome to the October 2025 Edition of the MUS Connector!

At its foundation, workforce development is about people and partnerships. Workforce Development Boards serve both employers and job seekers, ensuring that businesses have the talent they need while individuals have access to training and opportunity. This dual-customer focus is what makes our system effective and indispensable.

Boards are rooted in their local and regional markets, tailoring services and strategies to meet unique community needs. These local solutions create a national impact, proving that when communities are resourced and empowered, they deliver outcomes that matter.

And partnerships make it all possible. By coordinating and braiding resources with employers, nonprofits, and community allies, workforce development delivers results, turning vision into action and potential into success.

This month, the MUS Connector lifts up stories of collaboration that show how partnerships advance workforce goals, drive innovation, and strengthen

communities. Together, we are showing that Workforce Works!! and partnerships are how it works best.

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The MUS Policy Perspective

As we approach the end of the federal government fiscal year, September 30, 2025, Congress is staring down another potential shutdown. Congressional Republicans and Democrats are at a crossroads given that they have not agreed to overall spending levels for the upcoming 2026 fiscal year. They are back at a point of discussing a short-term funding patch, to prevent a government shutdown, while they negotiate broader funding levels for the entire federal government, including the Department of Labor and Education.



In order to pass a Continuing Resolution (CR), the legislative vehicle to temporarily fund the federal government, Democrat votes will be necessary in the Senate (60 votes needed to break a filibuster) and may be needed in the House where the margin is extremely thin (House Republicans can lose 2 votes without needing Democrat votes). Democrats are demanding that the funding extension also include a longer-term extension for healthcare subsidies which are set to expire December 30, 2025.

These healthcare subsidies were expanded during COVID and provide financial relief for lower income individuals who purchase healthcare through Affordable Care Act marketplaces. Combined with the Medicaid coverage changes in the One, Big Beautiful Bill, Democrats are very concerned that the expiration of the subsidies will result in a broader healthcare access and affordability crisis. A significant part of the political and practical 'math' is that extending the subsidies would cost about \$400 billion over ten years – an expensive policy ask.

Unfortunately, funding for workforce and education programs is now wrapped up in this debate. [Read More](#)

Submit your Workforce Development Success Stories [HERE](#)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Chris Andresen serves as a Partner with the Dutko GR team. He works extensively with MUS and other workforce development clients to identify policy opportunities and threats and advises on legislative and executive strategies.

Chris Andresen
Partner, Dutko Government Relations



The Power of Collaboration in Workforce Development: Workforce Works When We Work Together

Workforce development is not something that happens in isolation. At its core, it is led by Workforce Development Boards (WDBs), who convene employers, job seekers, training and education providers, and community

organizations, around a shared goal of creating opportunity. When these strengths are combined, the result is stronger systems, stronger communities, and better outcomes. As a membership organization, we see every day how collaboration transforms possibility into reality. Partnerships are the foundation that makes workforce development work.

Workforce Development Boards Serve Both Employers and Job Seekers

Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) are unique in their dual focus. They serve both job seekers and employers, ensuring that businesses can find the skilled talent they need and that individuals have access to training, career pathways, and meaningful employment. This balance between supply and demand is what makes the public workforce system so effective. It is also what makes partnerships indispensable. When WDBs collaborate regionally with employers, training vendors and community organizations, solutions are better aligned with industry needs and individuals are better prepared for success. [Read More](#)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Tracey leads our consortium of urban workforce boards, leveraging millions in investments to drive strategic partnerships, economic and business growth elevating transformational workforce innovation across the country.

Tracey Carey – MUS Executive Director



MUS Members Are Building Partnerships for Community and Economic Development

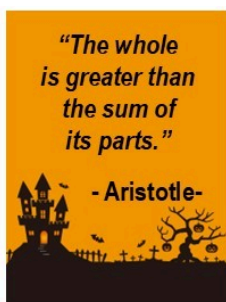
When people picture “economic development,” they often imagine towering cranes, ribbon cuttings, and groundbreaking ceremonies. These visible milestones matter but at Midwest Urban Strategies (MUS), we’ve learned that the real engine of regional prosperity is quieter, deeper, and more enduring. It’s built on partnerships: connections that unite workforce boards, educators, employers, community organizations, and civic leaders around a shared vision for growth.



This month, we're spotlighting how those connections come to life, who's at the table, and why this work is more urgent than ever.

MUS began with a simple but powerful idea: if workforce boards across the Midwest collaborated, we could respond more quickly to employer needs, create stronger pathways for jobseekers, and attract resources that no single board could secure alone. That idea has grown into a vibrant network stretching from Chicago to St. Louis, Detroit to Milwaukee with affiliate ties reaching beyond the region and beyond workforce boards to include aligned partners in education, philanthropy, government, and industry. The footprint is bigger, and so is the momentum.

If you've attended one of our convenings, you've seen this in action. Partnerships don't begin with a formal MOU, they begin with conversation: during a panel discussion, over coffee, even on the bus between site visits. The seeds of innovation are planted when people gather, listen, and share. [Read More](#)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

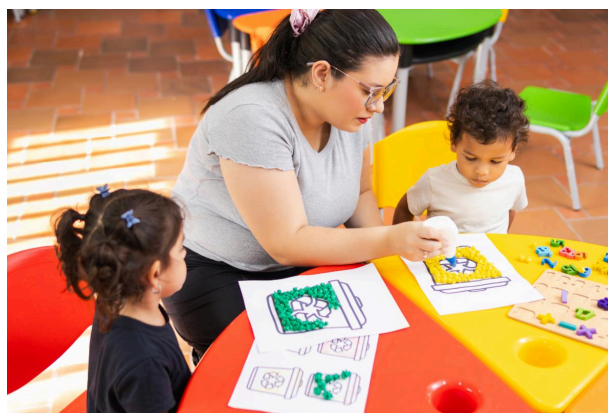
Kellie Landaker is our Director of Membership and unofficial Wellbeing Warrior! She envisions a world where everyone deserves equitable treatment, freedom from trauma and violence, fair wages, and a fair shot at wellbeing. Kellie brings that lens to our membership and to our work.

Kellie Landaker— Membership Director



The Workforce Behind the Workforce: Expanding Opportunity with YWCA Metro St. Louis

Early childhood educators and child care providers are *the workforce behind the workforce*. When child care is unavailable or unreliable, it not only limits parents' economic mobility but also reduces their workforce participation across all industries, exacerbating labor shortages and slowing America's economic growth. Nationwide, child care disruptions cost working parents an estimated \$78 billion (B) annually in lost earnings and productivity, businesses \$23B in reduced revenue and recruitment costs, and taxpayers \$21B in **lost tax revenue**. Without accessible, high-quality child care, working parents face a significant barrier to workforce entry and advancement. Unfortunately, on average, more than 160,000 ECE worker vacancies



are projected each year through 2033, translating to tens of thousands of empty ECE classrooms nationally.

Like many ECE providers, YWCA Metro St. Louis in Missouri struggled to recruit and retain early educators, leaving classrooms empty and families without care. The YWCA is a leading provider of high-quality education, childcare, and family support services for income-eligible families. It is the largest provider of Head Start services in the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County, serving over 1,200 children across their network of 21 centers and community partners.

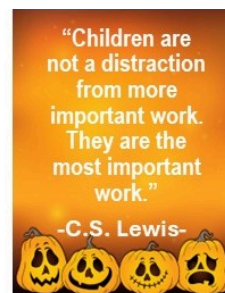
In 2023, in response to this challenge, the YWCA, under the direction of Stacy Johnson, Chief Early Education Officer and Head Start Director, launched the **Successful Pathways®** Registered Apprenticeship (RA) program to build a sustainable pipeline of early educators in partnership with the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development. YWCA's Early Education and Workforce Development program combines Successful Pathways® with **CREED** (Career Readiness, Economic Empowerment, and Development) to empower low-income women and single mothers to achieve financial independence and career advancement while strengthening their families and communities. [Read More](#)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marjorie D. Cohen, Senior Subject Matter Expert for Early Childhood and Registered Apprenticeship, is driving toward the day that all childcare is high-quality and accessible, and ECE providers are compensated commensurate with their immense worth to society.

Marjorie D. Cohen, MPP
Senior Subject Matter Expert



Member Spotlight:

Organization Name:

KentuckianaWorks

Executive Leaders Name/Title:

Michael Gritton, Executive Director
Tera N. West, Deputy Director

Website:

www.kentuckianaworks.org

Tell us about your

organization's mission and the communities you serve:

KentuckianaWorks, the workforce development board for the Louisville region—including Bullitt, Henry, Jefferson, Oldham, Shelby, Spencer, and Trimble counties—is funded primarily by the U.S. Department of Labor, WIOA, and Louisville Metro Government. Our mission is to engage employers, educators, and job seekers with resources that build a stronger community through meaningful work. Guided by our vision of a fully prepared workforce aligned with employer needs, we prioritize racial



equity, career pathways to middle-class wages, and workforce alignment by equipping students and adults with the skills that local employers require.

Building Stronger Futures Through Workforce Alignment in Louisville

For more than two decades, Michael Gritton has led KentuckianaWorks with a steady hand, guiding Louisville's workforce development board through growth, diversification, and change. Under his leadership, the team has tripled in size and strengthened its ability to connect talent with opportunity across Bullitt, Henry, Jefferson, Oldham, Shelby, Spencer, and Trimble counties. Alongside Deputy Director Tera N. West, he continues to champion the organization's mission of engaging employers, educators, and job seekers with resources that build strength and hope through the dignity of work.

That mission came into sharp focus last year when KentuckianaWorks, together with nine other workforce boards in Kentucky, secured support from the state legislature through House Bill 1. For the first time, state resources were dedicated to helping young adults connect to quality jobs. With a goal of placing more than 3,000 young people into meaningful work by 2026, the initiative reflects the organization's drive to build career pathways that are sustainable, responsive, and life-changing.

[Read More](#)

Check out our New Member Spotlight on Our Website: [HERE](#)



ABOUT KENTUCKIANAWORKS

KentuckianaWorks is the workforce development board for the Louisville region, connecting adults, youth, and employers with training, career services, and resources that build skills, strengthen talent, and create pathways to meaningful work



WorkforceWorks!! MUS Member Initiative: Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership

Midwest Urban Strategies is proud to highlight our member, George Wright, CEO of *The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership*, recently featured in *CIO Views Magazine*. The article, "*Leading with Purpose to Redefine Workforce*

Development and Shape the Future of Work," explores Wright's vision for a workforce system that is responsive today and prepared for tomorrow.

Wright emphasizes that workforce development must be proactive and innovative in a labor market where many of the jobs of the next 5–7 years don't yet exist. Systems must remain flexible and meet the diverse needs of multiple generations — from Gen Z to Boomers — all at once. He also underscores that true success cannot be

measured by statistics alone, but by how strategies transform households, strengthen neighborhoods, and create lasting economic mobility.

The feature highlights Wright's focus on aligning public and private sector priorities, staying agile in a rapidly changing economy, and mentoring future leaders by encouraging them to "jump out of the jar" to stop limiting beliefs. His leadership offers an inspiring model for how workforce development can drive impact that lasts far beyond job placements.

We invite you to read the full article and celebrate the important work George Wright and The Partnership are leading to shape the future of workforce development.

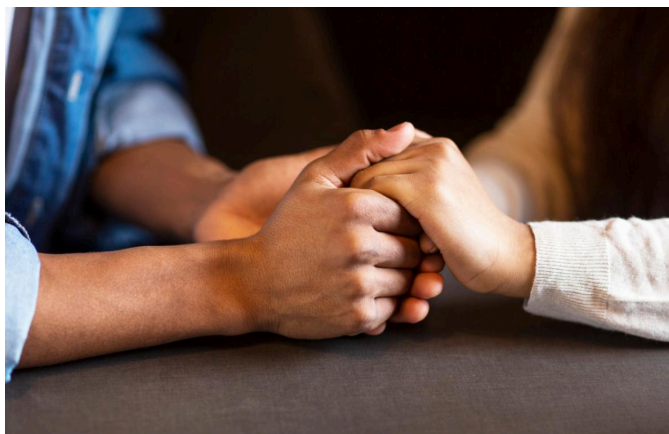
Read the full article: [HERE](#)



ABOUT CHICAGO COOK WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIP

The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, a nonprofit umbrella and designated administrator of federal workforce funds for Chicago and Cook County, manages 70+ community organizations and job centers while also overseeing corporate and philanthropy-funded initiatives serving youth and adults.

Redefining Reentry Preparation Using Trauma-Informed, Researched Based Programming



For many individuals, reentry is one of life's most defining transitions. Leaving incarceration means stepping into a world that often looks and feels entirely different from the one left behind. Success in this moment depends on more than securing employment. It requires resilience, self-awareness, and the confidence to navigate relationships, responsibilities, and community life.

That is why the timing of preparation matters. Traditional job-readiness efforts often begin after release, but by then, the challenges of reentry have already begun. Pre-release training allows individuals to start building skills, habits, and mindsets before they walk out the door. This early intervention can make all the difference, helping participants return to their communities with a plan and the tools to put it into action.

Effective reentry programs are not designed in isolation. They are built on the lived experiences of those who know the journey best. Through outcome-based workforce development programming and the guidance of peer mentorship, trauma-informed approaches are created that respond to real needs.

Outcome-based trauma-informed workforce development programming begins with the understanding that incarceration does not erase trauma, nor does it define a person's potential. It is centered on building self-awareness, emotional intelligence, interpersonal communication skills, and soft skills mastery, alongside the guidance of peer mentorship. Participants not only prepare for employment but also develop the ability to process experiences, manage stress, and build healthy connections that sustain success on the job and in their communities. By grounding the process in lived experience, peer mentorship helps participants see what is possible as they prepare to leave prison, reinforcing skills that support lasting success after release and reducing the likelihood of recidivism. [Read More](#)

*"Give light
and people
will find
the way."*

-Ella Baker-

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Chris is a visionary leader and founder of Visionz Group, empowering youth and adults through soft skills development to succeed, lead, and thrive across business, education, and community spaces.

Chris Rivers
CEO, Visionz Group



Building Partnerships for Community Development: Braiding Resources for Greater Impact

In today's workforce landscape, no single organization can solve the challenges we face alone. Employers need skilled talent to meet growing demand, while job seekers need accessible pathways into stable careers. Workforce Development Boards sit at the center of this dynamic, but true progress requires a collective approach, one that blends funding streams, aligns services, and builds trust among partners.

Braided funding is one of the most powerful tools we have. By combining WIOA dollars, state grants, employer investments, philanthropic contributions, and wraparound supports, communities can stretch resources further and design

programs that meet people where they are. A grant might cover tuition, while an employer subsidy provides paid on-the-job training, and a community nonprofit offers childcare or transportation assistance. Each strand alone is valuable, but when braided together, they create durable pathways that open doors for job seekers and meet urgent workforce needs.

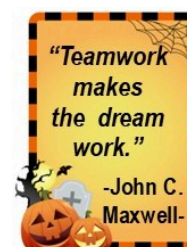
This approach also makes innovation possible. When partnerships are rooted in collaboration rather than competition, we can pilot hybrid training models, leverage new technologies, and rapidly respond to local employer needs. We've seen firsthand how partnerships between workforce boards, training providers, and employers not only close skill gaps but also build confidence in the system as a whole. Communities thrive when resources are aligned toward a common goal. [Read More](#)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Sandy is the Vice President of Workforce Development at Skilltrade, driving innovative training solutions and partnerships to empower underserved communities with access to high-demand healthcare careers

Sandy Mead – VP of Workforce Development, Skilltrade



Tomorrow Works Together

The future of work is unfolding before our eyes. Automation, robotics, and artificial intelligence are transforming industries, reshaping career pathways, and redefining the skills needed for success. For workforce development, this is both an incredible challenge and a once-in-a-generation opportunity. How we respond will determine whether communities merely adapt to change or thrive in it.

No single organization can prepare a community for this future alone. Prosperous geographies are powered by ecosystems and micro-ecosystems such as networks of schools, employers, workforce boards, and nonprofits that interconnect through trust, vision, and synergy. Each brings unique core competencies, and when those strengths are combined through cooperation and collaboration, the results are multiplied. By contrast, competition and siloed efforts drain energy and limit impact.

Partnerships are the bridges that allow us to create a future where every individual can prosper, even in a rapidly changing economy.

How Collaboration Advances Workforce Goals

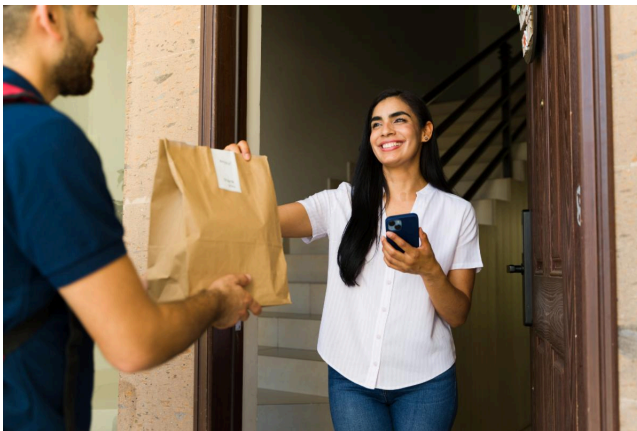
Workforce development is not just about filling jobs today; it's about shaping the workforce of tomorrow. A workforce board collaborating with a community college to design healthcare pathways is more than training; it's preparing professionals for a sector being reshaped by digital health and AI-powered tools. The college provides technical training, while the workforce team offers career coaching and resilience training. Together, they empower learners to adapt, excel, and thrive in a tech-driven future. [Read More](#)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Eric Shepherd, leader of the Foundation for Talent Transformation, helps individuals develop self-awareness, resilience, and life skills through expert guidance, free assessments, and AI-enabled assistants.

Eric Shepherd
Executive Director, Foundation for Talent Transformation



Partnerships Around the Nonstandard Labor Market: New Income for Workforce Agencies?

Labor market policies tend to see working age adults as either in a "good job" with regular hours or needing help getting into one. I have spent years within workforce agencies focusing on a gray zone

between job placements and unemployment; breadwinners who seek work, but not a job. Could workforce agencies extend their services, standards, and income sources by taking a lead in this part of their labor market?

Our service users are called "*gig workers*," "*involuntary partially employed*" or "*under-the-table workforces*," But my team and I just think of them as "work-seekers with complex lives." If you have a medical issue that fluctuates day-to-day, ever-changing family caregiving commitments, complex parenting arrangements, or ad-hoc partial employment you enjoy, traditional scheduled-hours employment often can't meet your needs. You need hours of work that change around your unpredictable day-to-day availability.

Official data on workers in contingent and nonstandard jobs is inadequate. But a figure of 36% of US adults reliant on at least some irregular employment was

independently arrived at in 2019 by both [Gallup](#) and [McKinsey](#). These resourceful individuals are a wasted economic asset. Every time we see someone bicycling with a pizza delivery box on their back, it is worth reflecting on that person's potential; perhaps to work in childcare, logistics, construction, hospitality, retail, security, or other sectors that depend on large pools of flexible labor. [Read More](#)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Wingham Rowan is a former television reporter who ran UK government programs that supported individuals needing alternatives to gig work. He now runs the Beyond Jobs nonprofit project.

Wingham Rowan
Director, Beyond Jobs Project



MUS EVENT: Early Childhood Apprenticeship Accelerator Comes to St. Louis

Midwest Urban Strategies (MUS), on behalf of the [Early Childhood Workforce Connector \(ECWC\)](#), invite you to join us for a special free,

in-person Early Childhood Education (ECE) event, ECE Registered Apprenticeship Accelerator: YWCA Metro St. Louis.

This event will spotlight the successes of The YWCA Metro St. Louis National Accredited Head Program of Excellence and serves over 1,200 children across 21 centers in the St. Louis metro area. Many ECE providers struggle to recruit and retain early educators, leaving classrooms empty and families without care. In response the YWCA, under the direction of Stacy Johnson, Chief Early Education Officer and Head Start Director, launched [Successful Pathways®](#) Registered Apprenticeship (RA) program to build a sustainable pipeline of early educators. Two years later, the program is thriving. Classrooms are fully staffed, and they have a waitlist of eager apprentice candidates ready to begin their career in ECE.

[Read More](#)



ANNOUNCEMENT: Competency-Based Apprenticeship Project with Metropolitan Council in Minneapolis

SiTUATE, LLC., a workforce learning and development consulting firm, announces a two-year partnership with the Metropolitan Council of Minneapolis to develop competency-based apprenticeship programs for two operator positions in the **Wastewater and Water Division**

The project is part of the Metropolitan Council's broader efforts to address looming skills shortages and to use the project as a model on how to develop new employees across its various public entities. The Council required an evidence-based, systematic, and structured program that reliably prepares qualified apprentices to perform successfully on the job. The Council is partnering with the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry and with unions that represent Council employees to establish apprenticeship standards and certified programs for two critical positions, the wastewater treatment operator and the wastewater collections operator. [Read More](#)



Community Spotlight Advertisements

The Community Spotlight is designed to highlight how partnerships move workforce development forward. It is a place to showcase employers, workforce boards, nonprofits, and national allies who demonstrate the power of collaboration in action.

We know that when employers and workforce boards come together with community partners, we create strategies that respond to local needs, deliver stronger results, and build systems that work for everyone.

We invite our members, partners, and readers to collaborate with us in



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shaping this space. If you are forging new partnerships, driving solutions in your community, or want to lift up the impact of your board or business, the Community Spotlight is an opportunity to share your story and inspire others.

Together, we can make the value of workforce development more visible and strengthen the collective voice of our network.

Please Note: For your convenience, all advertisements are clickable links.

Learn more about our Authors by clicking on their headshots.

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MUS IS LOOKING FOR NEW MEMBERS!



**Interested Candidates
Please Email:**

Kellie Landaker
Membership Director
kellie@midwesturbanstrategies.com

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Next month's newsletter theme will focus on:

Building Sector Partnerships in Workforce Development

Questions about article submission?

We are happy to help!

734-331-8604

melanie@midwesturbanstrategies.com

We Invite Article Submissions

Authors Please
Email Melanie:
[HERE](#)

**GET INVOLVED!
GET PUBLISHED!**

MUS Connector published the
1st of every month to 2000+
Readers and counting!



Let's keep moving forward together.

Even as federal funding sunsets, our commitment to YOU doesn't.

The Early Childhood Workforce Connector will continue supporting our Apprenticeship Partners, now and always.

High quality early childhood care changes lives
and it begins with quality training.



How can workforce agencies expand services
and income streams to meet their needs?

MUS Online Learning Lab

November 12 • 2-3pm CST

Nonstandard and Gig Workers are
a Growing Share of the Labor Market



LEARN MORE: [REGISTER HERE](#)



EVENTS ■ WEBINARS ■ ANNOUNCEMENTS

CLASSIFIED SECTION:

MUS EVENT: October 29, 9 AM – 4 PM plus a networking event from 6:00 – 8:00 PM, Early Childhood Education Apprenticeship Accelerator: YWCA Metro St. Louis. Event will take place at YWCA's Head Start Central Office, 1770 Belt Way Drive, St. Louis, MO. Hosted by Midwest Urban Strategies in partnership with ECWC, this free event brings together workforce, education, employer, and community partners to explore how YWCA's Successful Pathways® Registered Apprenticeship is building a pipeline of early educators and strengthening the “workforce behind the workforce. Register: [Here](#)

EVENT: November 12, 2–3pm CST., MUS Learning Lab - Understanding Nonstandard and Gig Workers are a Growing Share of the Labor Market, How can workforce agencies expand services and income streams to meet the needs of gig workers? Join us for this expert-led session exploring the growing share of the labor market and strategies to better support work-seekers with complex lives. Register: [Here](#)

EVENT: Save the date! MUS Summer Convening 2026 – June 2–4, MUS will bring workforce leaders together for three days of collaboration, innovation, and partnership. Details to come. Questions? Contact Melanie: [Here](#)

ANNOUNCEMENT: MUS Sponsorships Available Now through Summer 2026. Partnering with MUS comes with plenty of benefits and opportunities to build strong connections and partnerships. Inquire within to learn more: [Here](#)

ANNOUNCEMENT: Skilltrade seeks partners to launch new Clinical Medical Assistant Career Training Pilot Programs across the country. Contact Sandy Mead to collaborate and learn more: [Here](#)

ANNOUNCEMENT: The Foundation for Talent Transformation introduces its Well-being Framework in a comparative study of global models. More About Well-being Framework: [Here](#)

ANNOUNCEMENT: Learning Labs are open to all, especially our readers. These online, expert-led sessions bring together professionals from various fields to explore key topics such as labor market statistics, early childhood education, workforce development programs, apprenticeships, and more. The best part? Learning Lab topics are selected by you—our readers and members—ensuring they remain timely and relevant. Sign up to receive an invitation to all MUS Learning Lab: [Here](#)

ANNOUNCEMENT: The MUS Connector would like to feature your success stories! Share your impact and inspire others. Submit your story: [Here](#)

ANNOUNCEMENT: MUS Wants to Hear About Your Workplace Wellbeing Initiatives! We are gathering insights on how our partners support well-being in the workplace. Do you offer initiatives that help employees thrive? Share your strategies and inspire others. Submit your workplace well-being initiatives: [Here](#)

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in the author's articles featured in this newsletter are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Midwest Urban Strategies nor do they represent the views of any federal funding agency. Inclusion of these articles does not imply endorsement by Midwest Urban Strategies.

**Through the MUS Connector, we navigate challenges,
celebrate progress, and build resilience together.**

**If this issue resonated with you,
please share it with others who would benefit!**

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