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# MUS Connector

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



## **With Gratitude to Our 2026 MUS Connector Sponsor**

Midwest Urban Strategies is proud to recognize the Foundation for Talent Transformation as first annual sponsor of the MUS Connector in 2026.

Led by Executive Director [Eric Shepherd](#), the Foundation equips individuals and workforce partners with thoughtful, science-backed tools that strengthen career readiness and resilience. We're honored by this partnership and encourage readers to explore their [work](#).

We are grateful for their investment in this publication and the field it serves, and we invite our readers to learn more about the Foundation's work and explore opportunities for collaboration. [Read More](#)



**January 2026 Edition**

## *Welcome* to the January 2026 Edition of the MUS Connector!

The new year brings fresh momentum, renewed commitments, and an open door to the possibilities ahead. As we step into 2026, the MUS network continues to demonstrate how coordinated workforce systems create opportunity, strengthen communities, and expand pathways to meaningful careers.

January's theme, New Beginnings and Career Exploration, reflects a moment when people feel ready to reset, make a change, or take a first step toward new possibilities. This is also a time when Workforce Development Boards help people turn that sense of possibility into real movement by offering career assessments, coaching, training referrals, and access to job information that supports worker mobility. Across our communities, MUS members continue to open doors, share resources, and remove barriers so individuals can explore their options with confidence and move toward training, employment, and long term stability.

This month we also launch our [MUS Connector Reader Feedback Survey](#), inviting readers to share feedback and insights. Your input helps us continue delivering content and news that matter most to you. **Everyone who participates will be automatically entered into a drawing for a \$25 Amazon gift card.**

Also new this month is the start of our first [Subscriber Referral Drive](#). We will hold this drive from January through March 2026. Each month we will select one **winner to receive a \$25 Amazon gift card. At the end of the three-month drive, the person who refers the most new subscribers overall will receive a free admission to the 2026 Summer Convening.**

Lets start 2026 grounded in collaboration, storytelling, and with the belief that WorkforceWorks when people, systems, and ideas move forward together.

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## MUS Policy Perspective

As the end of the calendar year approaches, Congress still has several unresolved issues that will likely need to be addressed in the new year. As part of the broader deal to re-open the government in mid-November, Congress fully funded a portion of the government

including the US Department of Agriculture, Legislative Branch, and Department of Veterans Affairs. The rest of the government, including the Departments of Education and Labor, are only funded through January 30, 2026.

As funding negotiations continue, Congress also must confront the expiring enhanced Affordable Care Act (ACA) healthcare subsidies. Congressional leaders in both parties have offered various proposals ranging from a straight-forward extension, extensions with income limits, and then involving federal funding to Health Savings Accounts to help counteract increased premiums.

These varying levels of uncertainty are also having an impact to the broader economic conditions. Recent data suggests that the unemployment rate has risen to

its highest level, 4.6%, in the last four years. That is still a low unemployment number so the emphasis on workforce development and connecting the right talent to growing and emerging industries will also continue.

As Congress formally begins its Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Reauthorization effort, [Read More](#)

Do you have a Success Story to share with MUS? Please feel free to send us your region's 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

Workforce Pell Grants were authorized for expansion in July 2025, with the first awards scheduled to begin July 1, 2026.

**Workforce Pell Revisions**

### **Moving Forward Together: Steady Leadership, and the Workforce Year Ahead**

As we welcome 2026, I find myself reflecting on what “new beginnings” truly mean for our workforce system. In many ways, this moment feels different from other turns of the calendar. Across the country, states and local systems are entering the year with new flexibilities, new expectations, and new pressures to modernize how we deliver workforce services. Change is in the air, and it is moving quickly.



In the midst of this shifting landscape, one thing remains steady: the essential role of local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and the power of regional collaboration. While policy updates may reshape the options available to states, it is the relationships, insight, and lived experience of our local WDBs that anchor workforce development in real communities and stand beside employers and job seekers across their regions.

This year, many systems will be navigating new forms of flexibility in service delivery, expanded pathways for innovation, and increased expectations around data quality and performance. These changes bring both possibility and responsibility. They ask us to think differently, work more intentionally, and stay deeply connected to the needs of workers and employers in every community we serve.

The pace of this change reminds us that workforce systems cannot afford to move in isolation. Shared information, shared strategy, and shared focus will be key to ensuring our regions are prepared for what lies ahead. [Read More](#)

"We are made strong by the difficulties we face, not by those we avoid."

Gloria Steinem

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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

Tracey Carey – MUS Executive Director



## New Beginnings From Our MUS Membership Director

Welcome to 2026! I don't know about you, but stepping into this new year feels a bit like taking a deep breath after a fast and wild 50-yard dash. Because let's be honest, 2025 was a lot.

Between the shut down, major executive orders, shifting federal priorities, and legislation flying at record speed, the public workforce system had to stay on its toes. We saw everything from restructuring of federal workforce programs to new national pushes around skilled trades, innovation, and AI readiness. While these policy waves started in D.C., they absolutely made ripples that reached every one of our local communities.

Some days it felt like every time we turned around, something new was happening, a new executive order, a new guidance memo, and new legislation. Change wasn't just happening; it was happening quickly.

### **And when that kind of shift hits, we really have two choices:**

1. Get stuck in uncertainty or
  2. Take a breath, roll up our sleeves, and figure out how to meet the moment.
- At MUS, we chose door number two.

Last year, we didn't wait for things to settle; we got proactive. Our participation in Workforce Works! helped ensure the voices of our members were part of national conversations, not reacting to them from the sidelines. We joined [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– MUS Membership Director

“Community  
is how we  
survive  
change.”

Audre Lorde

## The Workforce Behind the Workforce: Career Opportunities for Early Childhood Educators

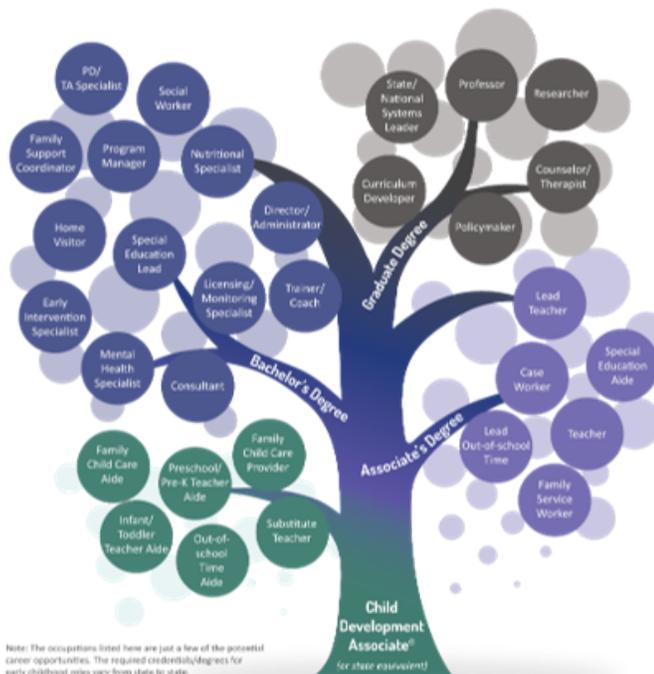
Access to child care enables parents to work and pursue further education and training, making early childhood education (ECE) providers the workforce behind the workforce. Child care availability depends on the supply of qualified early educators. Limited ECE classrooms force many parents, particularly women, to reduce their hours, turn down job opportunities, or leave the workforce altogether.

This creates a self-perpetuating cycle: a lack of ECE professionals leads to fewer child care options, which in turn shrinks the available labor pool. Child care is labor-intensive and requires highly skilled early childhood educators to address the safety, health, and optimal development of children in care. This creates a longstanding challenge in the recruitment and retention of providers in the ECE industry: low wages and a lack of benefits.

When you picture a job in ECE, do you picture teachers in a classroom with small children? Teaching is one of many opportunities for anyone interested in educating and caring for our youngest learners. When my colleagues and I talk about the variety of ECE careers with employers, workforce boards, and even ECE center directors, several questions keep popping up:

- Can workforce development programs like Registered Apprenticeship be adapted for an industry like ECE?
- What could a fulfilling career in ECE look like?
- Is there a productive pathway to higher-paying occupations with benefits?

[Read More](#)



“The work that nurtures human life is the work that sustains society.”

Joan Tronto

## 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:

Workforce Partnership

### Executive Leaders Name/Title:

Keely Schneider  
Executive Director

### Website:

[www.workforcepartnership.com](http://www.workforcepartnership.com)



### Tell us about your organization's mission and the communities you serve:

Workforce Partnership serves as the Workforce Development Board for Johnson, Leavenworth, and Wyandotte counties in the Kansas City metro area. The organization connects employers with talent and supports individuals in accessing pathways to sustainable employment. Its work spans urban, suburban, and rural communities, with a focus on building aligned workforce systems that advance economic mobility and meet local employer needs.

### Designing Pathways Forward Across Kansas

As workforce systems look ahead to the year in front of them, many regions are asking how to better align opportunity, stability, and long-term career growth. For Workforce Partnership in Kansas, that question is being answered through intentional collaboration and system-level design that centers both people and employers.

Serving as the Workforce Development Board on the Kansas side of the Kansas City region, Workforce Partnership connects individuals and businesses across urban, suburban, and rural communities. Under the leadership of Executive Director Keely Schneider, the organization focuses on building workforce systems that are coordinated, responsive, and grounded in economic mobility.

One of the most significant efforts underway reflects this approach at scale.

Workforce Partnership currently leads a 13-member consortium called the Returning Citizen Consortium (RCC) that has been working over the past year within a collective impact model to transform how the State of Kansas supports justice-

involved individuals returning to Kansas communities. The RCC brings together local workforce development boards, the Kansas Department of Corrections, business leaders, community organizations, and educational institutions in a coordinated effort that leverages collective expertise and resources. Included in RCC's members are individual community leaders with the lived experience of incarceration, to ensure our work was grounded in the realities facing justice-involved individuals both pre- and post-release. [Read More](#)

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

ABOUT  
WORKFORCE  
PARTNERSHIP:



WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIP

JOHNSON • LEAVENWORTH • WYANDOTTE

Workforce Partnership is the Workforce Development Board serving Johnson, Wyandotte and Leavenworth counties in the Kansas City metro area. They bring together employers, educators, and community partners to connect job seekers to training, career pathways, and employment opportunities that strengthen regional talent pipelines and support long-term economic mobility.



Photo: panelists at the Workforce Council of Southwest Ohio's Sept. 26 briefing

**MUS WorkforceWorks!!**

**The Workforce Council of  
Southwest Ohio Advocates for  
Stronger Apprenticeship  
Pathways**



**Workforce Council  
of Southwest Ohio**

The [Workforce Council of Southwest Ohio](#) released its position paper, “[Strengthening Pre-Apprenticeship and Apprenticeship Pathways in Southwest Ohio](#),” following a Sept. 26 briefing that convened employers, educators and elected officials to address the region’s workforce challenges.

The briefing, co-hosted with [Easterseals Redwood](#), highlighted the growing demand for earn-and-learn models that combine paid, on-the-job training with classroom instruction. According to [ApprenticeOhio](#), Hamilton County currently has 35 sponsors supporting 2,785 apprentices in industries such as construction, healthcare, and manufacturing. Research shows that program completers gain nearly a six-figure lifetime earnings advantage over similar non-participants.

Pam Green, president and CEO of Easterseals Redwood, said, “In today’s tight job market, employers are struggling to find and keep skilled workers. As older generations of the workforce prepare to retire, there aren’t enough younger workers to fill their spots. Apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships offer a powerful advantage by allowing people to earn while they learn, gaining skills for in-demand careers without the burden of student loan debt.”

The position paper identifies key challenges and opportunities, including employer engagement barriers, transportation hurdles created by Ohio’s new under-21 driver training law, and the underrepresentation of women and people of color in apprenticeship programs. [Read More](#)

#### ABOUT WORKFORCE COUNCIL OF SOUTHWEST OHIO



The Workforce Council of Southwest Ohio is an independent, nonpartisan organization focused on workforce development and innovation in Cincinnati and Hamilton County, Ohio. We oversee and implement the local area’s Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds and collaborate with regional partners to strengthen the area’s workforce ecosystem.

### **New Beginnings: Building Workforce Momentum for a Strong Year Ahead**

As we move into a new year, I am increasingly focused on the impact I believe must be made within the workforce development and reentry space. Justice-involved individuals continue to face deeply rooted barriers that extend far beyond securing a job. If we are serious about creating change, we must move past surface-level solutions and commit to approaches that address the full human experience—behavior, mindset, accountability, and purpose.



From my vantage point as CEO of Visionz Group, I see a growing need for training that prioritizes life and soft skill development alongside employment readiness. Technical skills matter, but they are not enough on their own. Sustainable workforce momentum is built when individuals are equipped with communication skills, emotional intelligence, conflict management, and the ability to make sound decisions under pressure. These are the skills that determine whether someone stays employed, advances, and contributes positively to their workplace and community.

The impact I believe we must make is forward and intentional thinking. We need to challenge outdated models that focus solely on placement numbers without addressing behavioral readiness or long-term stability. Success should be measured by transformation—by increased self-awareness, accountability, and the ability to navigate real-world challenges. When individuals understand their value and take ownership of their growth, the ripple effects are felt across families, employers, and neighborhoods. [Read More](#)

“People are capable, at any time in their lives, of doing what they dream of.”

Paulo Coelho

#### 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



## NEW BEGINNINGS: Strengthening Partnerships for a New Year of Workforce Impact

As we enter a new year, NEW BEGINNINGS reminds us that fresh opportunities emerge when we choose to collaborate in new ways. Today’s workforce development landscape is evolving rapidly, driven by technology, employer demand, and the urgent need to create more accessible pathways into high-growth careers. Now more than ever, our impact depends on building strong, intentional partnerships that meet the needs of job seekers and employers alike.



At Skilltrade, we believe deeply in the power of partnership. The support and leadership of Midwest Urban Strategies (MUS) has played a meaningful role in helping us connect with new collaborators across the region. MUS continues to serve as a convener, a catalyst, and a trusted bridge between training providers, workforce boards, and employers who share a common mission: ensuring people have access to quality training that leads to real opportunity.

Looking ahead, I am especially excited about expanding relationships with CAEL, an organization that has long championed adult learners and innovative education-to-employment pathways. [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

The best teamwork comes from people who are working independently toward one goal in unison.”

James Cash Penney



## Reflect. Decide. And Embrace 2026!

The start of a new year is a natural time to pause and think. People look back at what worked, what did not, and what they want more of in their lives. At the same time, the new world of work reminds us that career journeys are not one-time decisions. To be ready for new opportunities, people need to keep

building their skills and growing their networks throughout their lives.

This time of reflection often brings new energy and hope for the future. For many people, especially those facing job changes, financial pressure, or uncertainty, these thoughts turn toward learning new skills, meeting new people, and finding better work. The beginning of a new year is a strong moment to pause, reassess, and explore new options, including certifications, college courses, apprenticeships, and skill-based training that lead directly to employment.

Career exploration is not just about choosing a job. It is about removing obstacles and finding work that fits a person’s strengths, interests, and way of working. When people understand what works best for them, they are more likely to succeed and stay engaged. For employment support programs, this moment matters. When individuals reflect before they act, they are more likely to choose training and job opportunities that lead to steady work, good wages, and long-term success rather than short-term jobs that do not last.

### Reflection Comes First

Career changes work best when people start by understanding themselves. Without this clarity, job seekers can feel overwhelmed by too many choices or unsure about what direction to take. Taking time to reflect helps people narrow their options and feel more confident in their decisions. [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

“Faith in human potential is one of the strongest forces of social change.”

Mary McLeod Bethune

## Creating New Beginnings: Navigating Career Transitions in Workforce Development



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
**WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT  
PROFESSIONALS**  
CONNECT, ADVANCE, INNOVATE

A new year naturally invites reflection. For workforce professionals, it is a moment to pause and consider how roles are evolving, where growth is possible, and how to increase impact within a complex and changing workforce system. Career transitions, whether stepping into leadership, expanding responsibilities, or reimagining one’s role, often begin with intentional choices rather than dramatic change.

### Start with Reflection and Clarity

New beginnings are most effective when they are rooted in thoughtful reflection. For workforce professionals, this means taking intentional time to assess current skills, leadership strengths, and areas for growth. Reflection allows professionals to better understand how their experiences align with evolving workforce needs and where they can add the greatest value. Clarifying professional goals also helps individuals make more informed decisions about career transitions, whether that includes moving into leadership, taking on cross-functional responsibilities, or deepening expertise in a specific area of workforce development.

Structured reflection tools, such as [NAWDP’s Career Catalyst Assessment and Worksheet](#), can support this process by offering a clear framework for evaluating competencies, interests, and career direction. By encouraging purposeful reflection, workforce professionals are better equipped to set realistic goals, pursue targeted development opportunities, and engage in more meaningful conversations about growth with supervisors and peers. This clarity benefits both the individual and the organization by aligning professional development with organizational priorities and system-wide goals.

### Strengthen Your Professional Foundation

A strong professional foundation is essential for navigating change and stepping into roles with greater responsibility and influence. As workforce systems become more interconnected and complex, professionals are expected to balance program knowledge, compliance, partnership development, data-informed decision making,

and leadership. Strengthening this foundation enables professionals to adapt while maintaining consistency, quality, and accountability across services. [Read More](#)



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amanda Grigsby serves as the Director of Marketing and Communications for the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals (NAWDP), where she leads the strategy behind telling the stories of those who power workforce development.

Amanda Grigsby – Director of Marketing and Communications, NAWDP

“Leadership development is not a destination, it is a practice.”

Herminia Ibarra



### **New Beginnings, Tough Feelings: Practicing Active Listening with Young People**

New beginnings don't always feel like a clean slate. For many young people in workforce programs, a “fresh start” comes with a mix of hope, anxiety, self-doubt, and pressure. Sitting down for a career assessment or first coaching session can surface questions like: *What if I fail again? What if I'm not cut out for this? What if this is my last chance?*

In these moments, what often matters most isn't having the perfect resource or the right next step. It's how the adult in front of them responds to their feelings.

Most of us were never really taught how to respond when someone shares something hard. We worry about saying the “wrong” thing. We might feel personally triggered, uncomfortable with silence, distracted by our own workload, or afraid of opening a “Pandora's box” we don't know how to close. So we reach for what we've seen modeled: trying to fix it, cheer someone up, or move on quickly.

The research on empathy tells a different story. When someone feels genuinely heard, it helps lower their anxiety, strengthens connection, and gives us more accurate information about what they're going through. It can even make it more likely that they will make a change or follow through. That's especially important when we're trying to support young people in making big decisions about school, training, or work. [Read More](#)

“When we listen generously, we help people listen to themselves”

Rachel Naomi Remen

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

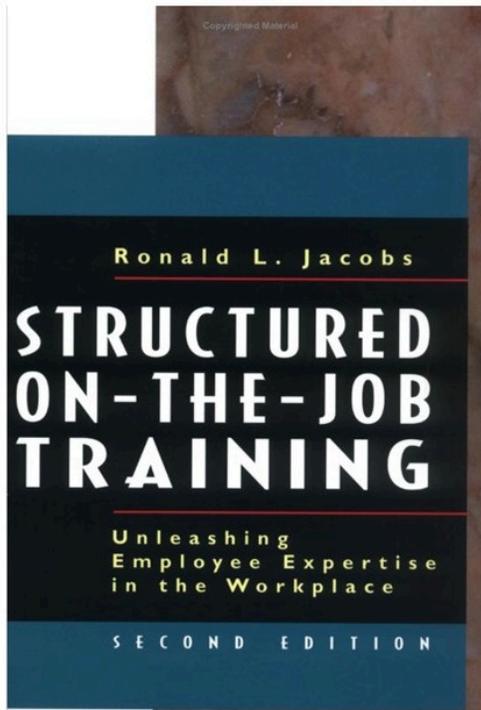
Elise Schuster is the Co-Founder and Executive Director of OkaySo where they work to improve the health and well-being of young people across the United States by increasing their access to safe, trusted spaces.

Elise Schuster  
Co-Founder and Executive Director of OkaySo



## MUS Learning Lab: Apprenticeship Outcomes We Don't Discuss Much: Trainee and Trainer Confidence

In this article, I wish to share some reflections when discovering an important and often overlooked apprenticeship program outcome: trainee and trainer confidence. Our upcoming MUS Learning Lab on January 20 will focus on understanding and implementing competency-based apprenticeships. We believe there is emerging interest in competency-based apprenticeships these days, in contrast to time-based apprenticeships, consistent with greater emphasis on program accountability. We're hopeful the Learning Lab will help generate dialogue about the topic.



Ron Jacobs, author of **Structured On-the-Job Training**, offers a practical framework for building skill-based training and apprenticeship programs.

While it's too early to report outcome data from the current project, we will share a

wealth of results from over forty years of examining structured on-the-job training, a key aspect of competency-based apprenticeships. For the most part, my focus has been on evaluating S-OJT from the business perspective: calculating ROI ratios, reduced time to proficiency, reductions in error rates, and the like. In fact, if you're interested in outcomes from that perspective, I refer you to my chapter in ATD's Handbook for Measuring & Evaluating Training, 2nd Edition (2025), that describes a case study how S-OJT was used in a construction company to reduce errors in concrete work, leading to a reduction of rework cost.

However, of importance in this article are reflections about outcomes we discovered from the trainees' perspective. A number of years ago, we did a relatively large project in Kuwait, developing an S-OJT program for new-hire petroleum engineers (Jacobs & Bu-Rahmah, 2012), which turned out much like an extended apprenticeship program. A refinery is a high-risk environment, in which making an error might lead to critical safety and health incidents. Following implementation, I was asked later on to gather some evaluation information for the organization. [Read More](#)

Register for this Learning Lab: [HERE](#)



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

After a distinguished academic career at Ohio State University and the University of Illinois, Ron Jacobs, Ph.D., is now principal of SiTUATE, LLC., a consulting firm that focuses on innovative work-based learning and performance solutions.

Ron Jacobs, Ph.D., Principal, SiTUATE, LLC.

“Mastery is not a function of time spent, but of competence achieved.”

Benjamin Bloom

## Seed Fund Spotlight: Investing in Early Childhood Workforce Solutions



The [YWCA Metro St. Louis Head Start](#), a National Program of Excellence serving over 1,200 children, faced the crisis of too few qualified early educators. In response, Stacy Johnson, Chief Early Education Officer and Head Start Director, launched the [Successful Pathways<sup>®</sup>](#) RA program, a bold initiative that’s now fully staffing classrooms and inspiring a waitlist of eager apprentices.

In October 2025, Midwest Urban Strategies, in partnership with the [Early Childhood Workforce Connector](#), hosted the Early Childhood Education Registered Apprenticeship Accelerator at [YWCA Metro St. Louis](#). The event created space for workforce development, education, and industry leaders to come together around a working early childhood education apprenticeship model. The accelerator was supported by sponsors [Teachstone](#) and [District 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund](#).

During the accelerator, attendees toured Head Start centers and observed Successful Pathways<sup>®</sup> in action, gaining insight into how apprenticeship models can support providers, families, and local economies. Programs showcased through the accelerator reflect the type of early education workforce innovation that helped inspire the creation of the MUS SEED Fund (Supporting Early Educators Development), established to sustain and scale solutions as flexible funding becomes increasingly limited.

The MUS SEED Fund will invest in proven approaches that strengthen child care access, support educators, and stabilize the workforce systems families and employers rely on.

Watch an informational video about the Successful Pathways RA program: [Here](#)

**Donate to SEED Fund**



**SLATE**  
St. Louis Agency on  
Training & Employment

**Member Press Release**

SLATE Awarded ARCHS  
Funding to Support Judicial Circuit  
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**Read Article: [HERE](#)**

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**MUS 2026 Summer Convening**

June 2 - 4, 2026 | Northwest, IN



Pictured: The Beautifull Indiana Dunes National Park Northwest Indiana

**WorkforceWorks!! CONVERGENCE  
NWI – The Urban Rural Connection**



Hosted in partnership with Center for  
Workforce Innovations, our summer 2026  
convening will take place across  
Northwest Indiana, showcasing initiatives  
such as Gary's Work B.I.G., NWI Works  
Opportunity Hubs, and READY NWI  
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## Community Spotlight Advertisements

The Community Spotlight is open to anyone in the workforce development industry who would like to promote their services, programs, or products to a nationwide audience of workforce development stakeholders.

Since the MUS Connector is created by workforce development stakeholders for workforce development stakeholders, this section offers a unique space for organizations looking to reach practitioners, partners, and leaders across the industry.

Advertising in the Community Spotlight also provides a meaningful way to support MUS as a 501c3 nonprofit. To learn more or request a rate card, please contact **Melanie**.

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

Learn more about our Authors by clicking on their headshots.

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 An advertisement for Skilltrade. The top part says "Skilltrade Transforming Healthcare Education Pilot Programs with Externships". Below that is a photo of two medical assistants in white coats looking at a tablet. A circular callout says "\$500 Scholarships \*Pilot Programs Only". Text below the photo says "Industry Recognized Credential Online Career Training: CCMA". A blue banner at the bottom reads "Matching Skilled Certified Clinical Medical Assistants to Top Employers". Below that, it says "Plan your Regions Pilot Today!". At the bottom, it provides contact info: "FOR MORE DETAILS Sandy Mead 734-718-2515 • [smead@skilltrade.com](mailto:smead@skilltrade.com)".

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Next month's newsletter theme will focus on:

**Building Employer-Driven Workforce Systems**

Questions about article submission?  
 We are happy to help!

734-331-8604  
[melanie@midwesturbanstrategies.com](mailto:melanie@midwesturbanstrategies.com)

**2026 Sponsorships-Available Now!**  
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We're still here—offering guidance, technical assistance, and connection.

**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.




EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE CONNECTOR  
 info@ECWConnector.org

Let's Stay Connected.

**MUS IS LOOKING FOR NEW MEMBERS!**



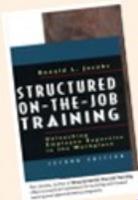
Interested Candidates Please Email:

Kellie Landaker  
 Membership Director  
[kellie@midwesturbanstrategies.com](mailto:kellie@midwesturbanstrategies.com)



**MUS Learning Lab**

**JANUARY 20 @ 10AM (CST)**



Understanding & Implementing Competency-Based Apprenticeship  
 With Author, Ron Jacobs, Ph.D  
 SITUATE, LLC.

[REGISTER HERE](#)



**EVENTS ■ WEBINARS ■ ANNOUNCEMENTS**

## CLASSIFIED SECTION:

**EVENT: MUS Learning Lab: January 20, 10-11am CST., A Discussion about Competency-Based Apprenticeship with Ron Jacobs, Ph.D.** With today's focus on skills and accountability, it's essential for administrators to understand what's needed to successfully implement a competency-based approach. 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](#)

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As the year winds down, may this season bring you time with the people who steady you, moments that spark joy, and the pause you need to enter the new year with confidence and hope.

From all of us at Midwest Urban Strategies, we send our warmest wishes for a meaningful holiday season.



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