

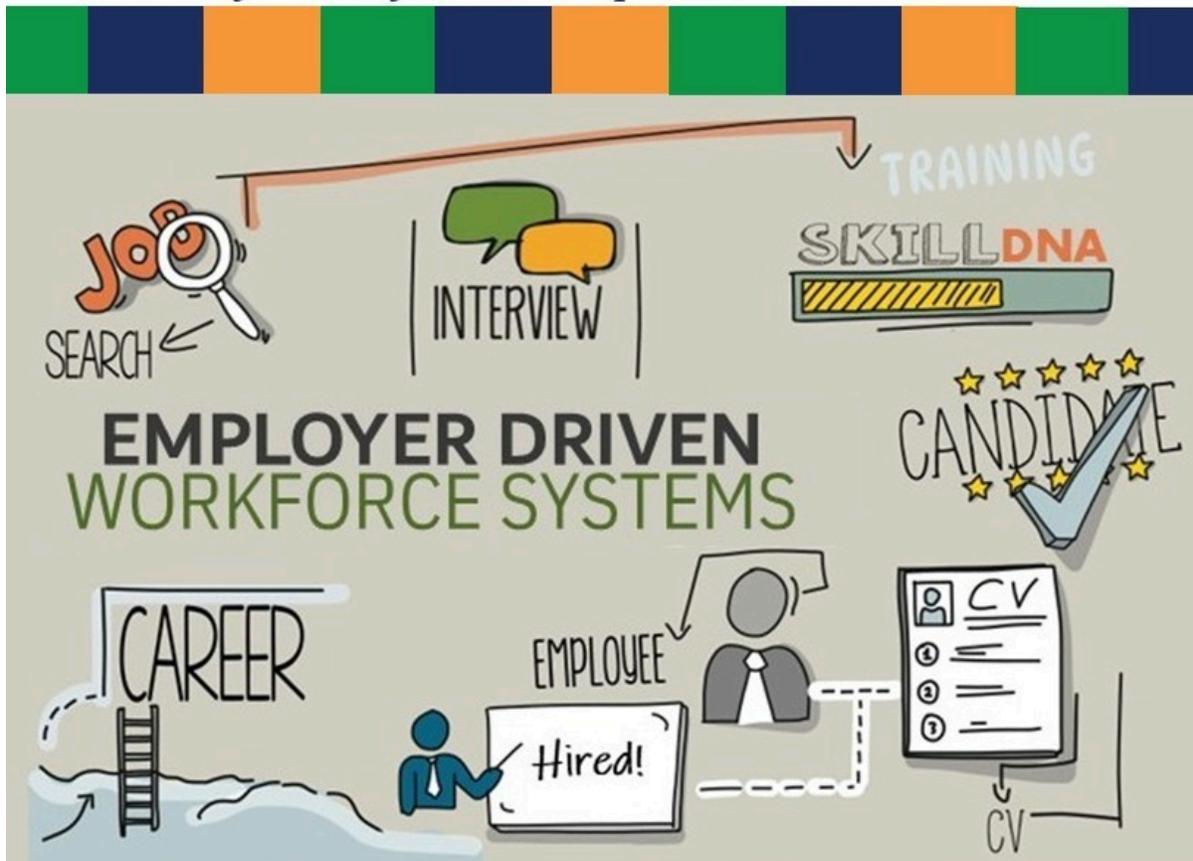
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MUS Connector

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



**The MUS Connector is proudly Sponsored by
The Foundation for Talent Transformation**

The Foundation for Talent Transformation is a pioneering 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to helping individuals thrive personally and professionally while fostering stronger, more connected communities grounded in empathy and understanding. Through innovative tools for self-development, including research-based assessments and AI-powered conversational guides, the Foundation equips individuals and partner organizations to build self-awareness, resilience, and the skills needed for success in a rapidly changing world.



February 2026 Edition

Welcome to the February 2026 Edition of the MUS Connector!

February's theme, Building Employer-Driven Workforce Systems, reflects where workforce practice is being anchored right now across the public workforce system. Employers have long played a role in effective workforce development. What is becoming clearer in this moment is how employer input, system alignment, and outcomes are being defined, demonstrated, and understood across workforce strategies.

This edition focuses on how Workforce Development Boards and their partners work with employers in the design, planning, and delivery of workforce programs. Through examples and perspectives from across the MUS network, contributors illustrate the different ways employers are engaged, how their input shapes programs, and how workforce systems translate that collaboration into pathways that respond to labor market needs while keeping job seekers at the center.

Across this edition, contributors share practical examples of how employer partnerships shape workforce programs and lead to outcomes such as training completion, apprenticeships, on-the-job learning, and employment. These perspectives highlight how collaboration across the workforce system supports people entering and advancing in the labor market.

The February 2026 edition of the MUS Connector is dedicated, in loving memory, to Stacey Fowler

As a founding board member of Midwest Urban Strategies, Stacey Fowler helped shape the organization in its earliest days. She was a champion of innovation, a supporter of bold ideas, and a leader who did not hesitate to roll up her sleeves to help build what did not yet exist. In many ways, the work of MUS today reflects the values she carried: collaboration, justice, and a deep commitment to community.

A pioneer in workforce development, Stacey was a builder of opportunity and a steady, powerful force for opening doors and expanding access across the communities she served. With more than two decades of leadership, including her roles as Senior Vice President of Minority and Small Business Empowerment at the St. Louis Development Corporation and former Director of Workforce Development for SLATE, she brought vision, strategy, and heart to every space she entered. Her human-centered approach paved the way for her natural ability to bridge policy and practice, ensuring systems were effective. She led with clarity and conviction, and just as importantly, with kindness and grace. Those who worked alongside her remember both her strength and her gentleness, her fierce advocacy and her generosity of spirit.



It is in this spirit that the February edition of the MUS Connector is dedicated in loving memory of Stacey Fowler. We honor her leadership, her compassion, and the lasting imprint she leaves on our field and on all of us who continue the work she cared so deeply about. [View on MUS Website](#)

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MUS Policy Perspective

At the beginning of President Trump's second term, his Administration released a budget proposal for the Department of Labor which would have collapsed and consolidated the existing WIOA state/local formula allocations for workforce development activities.

This block grant approach, entitled 'Make America Skilled Again,' would have potentially eliminated the local workforce development system. In addition to the program administration changes, the total level of funding was cut by nearly 50%.

Over the next several months, Congress debated whether to accept these proposed workforce development cuts. Recently, local workforce development stakeholders got their answer – the proposed cuts from the Trump Administration, and those reflected in a House Appropriations Committee draft, were soundly **rejected** by bipartisan congressional leaders.

Congress is poised to pass its Labor, HHS, Education Appropriations Bill that will maintain the current WIOA funding mechanisms and fund its programs at current funding levels. It is clear that there was not support in Congress to enact sweeping cuts to these programs. These renewed funding levels will be in effect until September 30, 2026.

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

“Momentum matters: continue building support for WIOA programs, funding and outcomes.”

Chris Andresen

What It Means to Build While Guidance Is Still Taking Shape

Across the public workforce system, the ground is shifting. Federal agencies are signaling priorities around integration, outcomes, and employer engagement, even as formal guidance and legislative details continue to evolve. States are exploring consolidation to concentrate federal workforce funds for greater impact. These changes create uncertainty in the field and raise questions about local control.



Workforce Development Boards (WDB) are technical entities established by federal law (currently the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act or WIOA) that governs how they (and the system they operate in) act. The organizations that house and partner with WDBs are independent corporations that exist to fulfill their organized purpose. Some are nonprofit, some are for profit.

It is a complicated and wonky system that intersects with education, community development, economic development, and the business community. Sometimes (maybe too often) these workforce organizations find themselves stymied by oversight and compliance doctrine that gets in the way of innovation. And sometimes they get in their own way after years of “this is just how we do it” business practices.

Leaders in this system acknowledge that there is room for improvement. Employers get frustrated by the systems’ bureaucracy and job seekers find their options limited by too few resources. Since the release of the America’s Talent Strategy, I have participated in many conversations with Workforce Development Board leaders and partners focused on how to operationalize emerging federal direction.

These discussions are energized, thoughtful, and sometimes difficult. They are grounded in a shared commitment to get this right for employers, job seekers, and communities, even as we navigate ambiguity and make sense of what this moment is asking of the public workforce system. [Read More](#)

“Progress is not something we wait for. It is something we build through action, even when the path is still unfolding.”

John Lewis

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



Employer-Driven Workforce Systems: Learning Where Work Happens

Members of Midwest Urban Strategies are on the ground every day, supporting employers and jobseekers as they navigate a workforce landscape that is changing faster than ever. This month's *MUS Connector* theme, Employer-Driven Workforce Systems, invites us to pause and think differently about how learning, work, and talent development intersect.

When I think about employer-driven workforce systems, my mind immediately goes to apprenticeships and on-the-job training (OJT). I recently heard apprenticeship described as *a learning system that leverages the workplace as a living laboratory*. That idea has stayed with me because it reframes everything.

Consider traditional classroom-based education: there is an instructor, a curriculum, and students. Apprenticeships follow a similar structure but instead of living in a classroom, the learning happens in factories, hospitals, construction sites, offices, and community organizations. The workplace itself becomes a learning environment. Skills are built in real time, in real conditions, alongside real mentors.

This model represents learning at its best. It eliminates the artificial gap between education and employment because learning happens where work happens. There is no lag between theory and application, no long transition from graduation to productivity. Learners are workers. Workers are learners. [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

“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.”

Booker T. Washington



The Workforce Behind the Workforce: Creating an Employer-Driven Apprenticeship Occupation

The early childhood education (ECE) workforce is essential to the efficient functioning of the U.S. labor market.

As the workforce behind the workforce, a strong, robust early childhood ecosystem contributes to the health and well-being of young children and their families while fueling a thriving economy. Reliable, high-quality child care increases participation and productivity in today’s workforce and lays a solid foundation for human capital to build tomorrow’s workforce.

How do we ensure that today’s workforce has access to high-quality ECE, that there are enough early learning programs, well-trained educators, classrooms, and spots available for all young children?

Listening to and Supporting ECE Employers: A Director-Level Program

Last month, we discussed career pathways for early childhood educators and how Registered Apprenticeship (RA) can support an educator’s career trajectory. To build on that, I want to talk about the newest addition to the US DOL’s (DOL) list of apprenticeship occupations for ECE: **Early Childhood Education Director**. While RA programs for the three other DOL-recognized ECE occupations train the classroom educators, until recently, there was no director-level RA program. Aspiring and existing early childhood leaders do not feel prepared for the responsibilities of managing a child care center or home-based program. RA and other training programs rarely provide education and support for operating a small business and managing staff. [Read More](#)

“The purpose of education is to develop human potential.”

Asa Hilliard

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:

City of Minneapolis
Employment and Training

Executive Leader:

Deb Bahr-Helgen
Executive Director

Visit Website: [HERE](#)



Tell us about your organization’s mission and the communities served:

The City of Minneapolis Employment and Training (MET) is the workforce development division for the City of Minneapolis. We work to build a competitive, inclusive economy by connecting residents and businesses to opportunity.

As the administrative entity for the Minneapolis Workforce Development Board, we ensure alignment between community needs, business priorities, and workforce strategies. We design, fund, and manage programs that help youth and adults prepare for meaningful work in high-demand industries. These programs provide training, career counseling, and support services that help residents move into stable, family-sustaining employment. For decades, MET has helped reduce economic disparities and expand access to good jobs for people of color, people with disabilities, and residents who live in areas with high poverty and unemployment. Each year, together with our network of community-based partners, we support more than 10,000 job seekers — about 80% of whom identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color.

MET is an equal opportunity employer and service provider, a proud partner of the American Job Center network, and a leading CareerForce partner. We help connect career seekers and employers across the region, building a workforce that reflects the strength and diversity of our city.

Building a Community-wide Workforce for Minneapolis

In a city known for its resilience, innovation, and civic pride, the City of Minneapolis Employment and Training plays a central role in connecting residents and businesses to opportunity while helping shape a more comprehensive local economy.

As the workforce development division for the City of Minneapolis, Employment and Training, often referred to as MET, supports systems that help people prepare for meaningful work and employers access the talent they need to thrive.

Under the leadership of Director Deb Bahr-Helgen, MET serves as the administrative entity for the Minneapolis Workforce Development Board, aligning community needs, business priorities, and workforce strategies across the city. Their work spans youth and adult services, employer engagement, and place-based delivery models, all grounded in a shared goal: helping residents move into stable, family-sustaining employment with pathways for long-term mobility.

For decades, MET has helped reduce economic disparities and expand access to good jobs for people of color, people with disabilities, and residents who live in areas with high poverty and unemployment. Working alongside a strong network of community-based partners, MET supports 10,000+ job seekers each year through programs designed to meet both individual and employer needs.

That commitment is reflected in the breadth of MET's programming. Adult services include short-term career pathway training that leads to industry-recognized credentials, individualized career counseling through WIOA programs, services that help job-ready individuals find and keep employment, and comprehensive support for dislocated workers navigating career transitions. [Read More](#)

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



ABOUT CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

City of Minneapolis Employment and Training addresses local workforce needs by funding skills training, career services, and partnerships that open doors to opportunity. We support job seekers and businesses to build a stronger, more inclusive economy for our community.



MUS WorkforceWorks!! The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership: Strengthening Employer Connections!

The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (The Partnership) is the non-profit umbrella organization that oversees one of the largest public workforce systems in the country. As the designated administrator of federal workforce development funding for the City of Chicago and Cook County, The Partnership manages a network of approximately 70 community-based organizations, including American Job Centers and Career Centers, serving youth and adults. The organization also oversees a diverse portfolio of workforce initiatives representing corporate and philanthropic funds leveraging non-federal workforce development funding. For more information, visit <https://chicookworks.org/>.

The Business Relations and Economic Development Team

The Partnership has a team of four Business Relations Specialists who focus on employer outreach and facilitate these relationships at [the American Job Centers and Career Centers in its network](#).

Employer relationships are critical to workforce development. Working with businesses to understand where there is a need for a skilled workforce, and facilitating career-seeker training for those positions, is an imperative to any successful workforce ecosystem.

Serving High-Demand, High-Growth Sectors

The Partnership's network includes sector centers that focus on high-demand, high-growth industries, including Healthcare; Hospitality and Tourism; Transportation, Distribution and Logistics (TDL); and Information Technology (IT). In addition, the organization leverages public and private sector funding to meet employer needs in the construction and clean energy sectors. The Partnership works closely with employers in these sectors to ensure the career seekers served by its network connect with ready-to-hire employers in Chicago and suburban Cook County. The organization also produces hiring events, allowing career seekers and employers to meet on-one-on, resulting in hundreds of second interviews and conditional offers each year. [Read More](#)



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.

Beyond the Hire: Building Trust with Detroit Employers

Meaningful employer engagement isn't a one-off job fair, a few polite emails, or a single "yes" from a hiring manager. For organizations like Visionz, working alongside Detroit employers while preparing justice-involved talent for sustainable careers,



real engagement looks like a long-term relationship built on trust, consistency, and shared value.

It starts with listening before asking. Employers across Detroit face real pressures: staffing shortages, turnover, training costs, safety concerns, and the need for reliable employees who show up ready to work. Visionz earns credibility by learning what employers actually need

for specific roles, shift requirements, transportation realities, workplace culture, and retention pain points, then aligning our preparation and support accordingly. We don't lead with a pitch; we lead with understanding.

Meaningful engagement also means speaking the language of outcomes. Employers don't just hire résumés; they hire risk and responsibility. Visionz builds trust by bringing clarity and structure to what can feel uncertain: readiness standards, coaching supports, and a process for addressing issues early. We show employers what we do, how we do it, and what they can expect before a participant ever steps onto the job site. That transparency is what turns skepticism into partnership.

But the real differentiator is what happens after the hire. Many programs focus on placement. Visionz focuses on stability. Our case management model supports participants through the transition: onboarding, problem-solving, communication coaching, resource navigation, and accountability. When employers see that they are not alone after day one that there is a partner helping the employee succeed they begin to view justice-involved talent not as a gamble, but as a pipeline. Employer engagement becomes retention engagement. [Read More](#)

"Human progress
is neither
automatic nor
inevitable."

Martin Luther King Jr.

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.

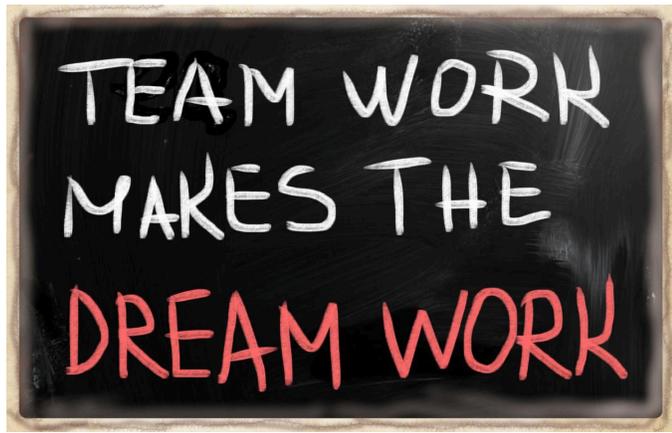


Chris Rivers
CEO, Visionz Group

Building Employer-Driven Workforce Systems: Redefining How Talent Is Trained and Deployed

Across the country, workforce systems are facing a common challenge: too many training programs are built in isolation from the employers they are intended to serve. The result is a persistent mismatch between credentials earned and skills needed, leaving employers short-staffed and job seekers frustrated.

To meet today's labor market demands, we must rethink how workforce systems are designed. The future lies in *employer-driven workforce systems*, models that begin with employer needs and work backwards to design training, support, and placement strategies that deliver real outcomes.



From Program-Led to Employer-Led

Traditional workforce training often starts with a curriculum and then searches for employers willing to hire graduates. Employer-driven systems flip that model. In an employer-led approach, workforce partners engage businesses early to understand:

- Current and projected hiring needs
- Required competencies and certifications
- Workplace expectations and career pathways
- Barriers to onboarding and retention

This insight directly informs how training is structured, how learners are prepared, and how success is measured. [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

“When systems are built to include everyone, performance improves for all.”

Angela Glover
Blackwell



Building the Workforce Systems of the Future

The future of work is arriving faster than the systems designed to support it. Automation, artificial intelligence, demographic change, and evolving business models are reshaping how work is organized and how talent is developed. In this environment, workforce systems must move beyond fragmented programs and reactive interventions. They must become adaptive, integrated, and grounded in real time insight. Shared data services are essential to building systems that are ready for what comes next.

The opportunity ahead is not simply to modernize existing workflows. It is to rethink workforce systems from the ground up so that human potential and employer demand are continuously aligned rather than periodically reconciled.

Designing Systems

Future workforce systems should function as dynamic, learning systems rather than collections of disconnected initiatives. Shared data services make this possible by providing a common digital backbone that connects employers, job seekers, training providers, workforce boards, funders, and service partners.

In this future state, stakeholders no longer operate in isolation or depend on delayed reporting cycles. Shared data services provide real time visibility into talent supply, skill development, hiring demand, and outcomes. Employers can see emerging pipelines and changing skill needs. Training providers can adjust curricula as demand shifts. Workforce professionals can coordinate services across organizations with shared situational awareness.

The result is a system that learns continuously. Data is not gathered solely for compliance or reporting. It becomes the feedback loop that allows the system to adapt as economic conditions and labor markets evolve. [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

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

James Baldwin

Building Employer-Driven Workforce Systems: From Engagement to Impact



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
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For years, workforce systems have emphasized employer engagement. But in today’s labor market, engagement alone is no longer enough. Employers are looking for true partners who understand their business models, anticipate talent challenges, and co-design solutions that deliver measurable results.

Building an employer-driven workforce system means aligning public and private resources around real industry demand—while preparing workers for stable, upwardly mobile careers. As of 2026, this work is increasingly shaped by the national focus on industry-led talent strategies, rapid technological change, and the growing need for skills-first approaches. The question is no longer *whether* employers should be involved, but *how deeply* they help lead.

From Advisory to Action: What Meaningful Employer Engagement Really Looks Like

Many workforce boards and agencies have employer advisory groups. Too often, however, those structures stop at information sharing. Employer-driven systems move beyond advice and into shared ownership.

Meaningful engagement begins with listening. Instead of leading with program offerings or compliance requirements, workforce professionals start with curiosity.

Asking questions such as:

1. What are employers’ growth plans?
2. Where are productivity or retention challenges showing up?
3. Which roles are hardest to fill—and why?

By helping to deliver realistic outcomes, this approach aligns closely with sectoral partnerships, the foundation of employer-driven systems. By convening multiple employers within the same industry, alongside education and public partners—workforce leaders can address shared talent challenges collectively rather than employer by employer. [Read More](#)

"Good leadership starts with asking the right questions and building systems that allow people to succeed at scale."

Melody Hobson

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alexis Franks is Director of Membership at NAWDP, bringing over a decade of workforce experience supporting workforce development professionals nationwide through innovative programs, strong employer connections, and impactful membership engagement while meeting evolving demands.

Alexis Franks
Director of Membership, NAWDP



Reset 2026! The Importance of Enhancing Board and Contractor Relations!

The relationship between a Workforce Development Board and its contractors is the engine of the public workforce system. As federally mandated, fund-holding entities, **Boards are strategic investors,**

allocating resources from sources such as WIOA to address regional labor challenges. **Contractors are the mission-critical implementers,** the organizations on the ground delivering career services, training, and support to job seekers and businesses.

When this relationship fractures, the system seizes. The classic pain points are all too familiar: a **funder-grantee dynamic rife with compliance fear**, where contractors hide challenges to avoid being penalized, and boards micromanage inputs because they distrust outcomes. Communication becomes a one-way stream of mandates and reporting demands, stifling innovation. The result? Services that may be technically compliant but are often inflexible, slow to adapt, and focused more on audit trails than on changing lives. The community we serve pays the price. To reset for the demands of 2026, we must move from a transactional "funder vs. vendor" model to a strategic "investor-partner" alliance. This requires intentional leadership from Boards in four tactical areas:

1. Recognize Contractor Efforts.

Go beyond the standard contract monitoring visit. Publicly commend their staff at board meetings. Share their success stories with elected officials and in annual reports. Invite them to present outcomes *with* you, not just *to* you. This transforms their role from a hidden executor to a valued, visible partner in the mission.

2. Lead From A Post-Pandemic Perspective.

Acknowledge that the old "butts in seats" and pure output metrics are often obsolete. Engage contractors in redefining what "performance" means in an era of virtual services, hybrid work, and supply chain crises—co-create flexible models that reward innovation in engagement and quality of placement, not just quantity. Your role as a board is to remove barriers, not just audit them.

3. Communicate From A "We" Perspective.

Scrutinize your language. Replace "You must submit..." with "**We** need to report on..." Shift from "Your outcomes are low" to "**Our** challenge in this sector is... how do we solve it?" This linguistic shift is powerful. It signals shared ownership of both problems and solutions, fostering proactive problem-solving instead of defensive compliance. [Read More](#)

"Transformation doesn't happen without disruption."

Ursula Bums

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

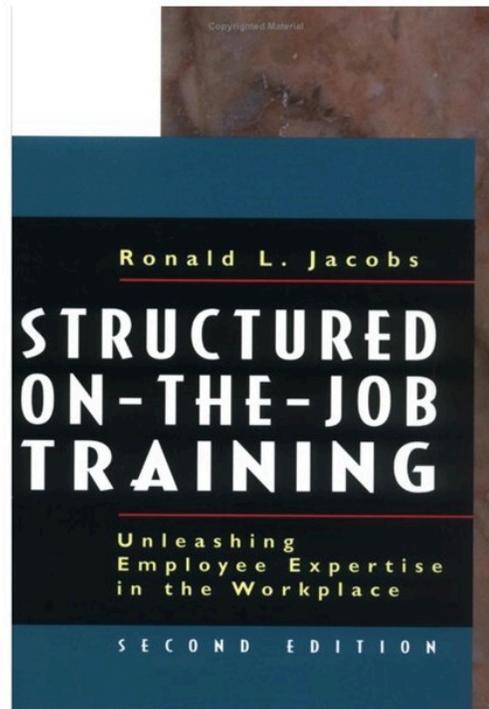
Darrell "Coach D" Andrews is a nationally acclaimed innovator in workforce development, a motivational leader, and author. With his team, he empowers staff, leaders, and clients through transformative coaching, training, that drive results and ignite purpose.



Darrel "Coach D" Andrews
President & CEO, Darrell Andrews, LLC & Associates

Competency-Based Apprenticeships and Learning the Intangibles

A number of years ago, while a professor at Ohio State University, I (Ron) led a group of graduate students from our Workforce Development and Education program, on a study trip to Germany, and among our site visits was a unique opportunity to tour the Volkswagen Wolfsburg plant. We met some young metal-worker apprentices in a company lab and, sure enough, we observed them spending part of their apprenticeship experience by filing away on pieces of metal blocks, without actually making anything useful. What was the reason? We were told that apprentices must get to know, in a somewhat abstract way, how metal responds when worked, and there's no better way to achieve that goal than to scrape away with a metal file and examine the piece and filings along the way.



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

Clearly, there must be some basis for having apprentices simply file away on metal, as this practice has a long history in the context of German apprenticeship lore. In today's context, identifying the specific rationale for such an assignment might be increasingly difficult to document. Apprentices in the 1990s were presumably more accepting when asked to do something with less explanation, but would today's apprentices be so accommodating without seeing the point upfront?

Last month, on January 20, Scott and I presented a Learning Lab focusing on understanding and implementing competency-based apprenticeships. We reviewed our definition of a competency-based apprenticeship and discussed the decision

considerations for going in that direction, rather than a time-based apprenticeship, related to a project for two operator apprenticeship positions at Environmental Services in Minneapolis. Clearly, our view of apprenticeships makes learning outcomes explicit and measurable as a priority. We discussed the on-going apprenticeship project and promised to present another Learning Lab when more program outcomes could be reported. We had an enlightening discussion with participants following our presentation, focusing on the sometimes daunting implications when a competency-based apprenticeship is selected. [Read More](#)



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, PhD., Principal, SiTUATE, LLC.

“Experience is the only teacher.”
Ralph Ellison

“Once you learn to read, you will be forever free.”
Frederick Douglass

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

George (Scott) Bowes is an Competence Consultant partnering with water, wastewater, trucking, and transit organizations to translate complex roles into measurable training and certification pathways that strengthen workforce readiness and operational excellence

Scott Bowes
Competence Consultant



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From the Field: Ramon's Story

After 31 years of incarceration, Ramon was determined to rebuild his life and pursue a meaningful career. With support from [OhioMeansJobs Stark & Tuscarawas Counties](#) and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) training assistance, he found his path in the HVAC industry—an in-demand field offering stability and growth.

With guidance through career exploration and one-on-one support, Ramon enrolled in HVAC technician training at **Stark State College**. Before completing the program, he was hired by The K Company, earned multiple credentials, and advanced into a full-time role, earning \$24 an hour!

Ramon’s success reflects a larger impact –85 individuals like Ramon received training services (from July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025), earning an average of \$47,800 after completing their programs. [Read More](#)

Read Ramon’s full story and more in our Report to the Community: [HERE](#)



ABOUT STARK TUSCARAWAS WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD



The Stark Tuscarawas Workforce Development Board represents business, economic development, education, labor, and community organizations. In partnership with county commissioners, the board plans, administers, and oversees workforce development programs funded under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

MUS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit strengthening workforce systems across the Midwest and beyond.



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The Community Spotlight is open to organizations across the workforce development ecosystem that want to share their work, services, and solutions with a national audience of workforce leaders and practitioners

Created by workforce development stakeholders for workforce development stakeholders, the MUS



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Connector offers a trusted space for training providers, workforce organizations, employers, and partners to connect with peers who are shaping workforce systems across the country.

Community Spotlight advertising also provides a meaningful way to support the work of Midwest Urban Strategies as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. To learn more about opportunities 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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Next month's newsletter theme will focus on:

Strengthening Career Pathways and System Alignment

Questions about article submission? We are happy to help!

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melanie@midwesturbanstrategies.com

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FOR MORE DETAILS
Sandy Mead
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We're still here—offering guidance, technical assistance, and connection.

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MUS Learning Lab

SAVE THE DATE

Understanding Workforce Pell
Tuesday, March 17, 2026
1-2:30pm CST (2-3:30 EST)
Presented in Partnership with CAEL

Let's learn together how Workforce Pell will reshape access to short-term training for adult learners.

Registration opening soon!

2026 Sponsorships-Available Now!
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EVENTS ■ WEBINARS ■ ANNOUNCEMENTS

CLASSIFIED SECTION:

EVENT: Save the date! MUS MUS Learning Lab: Understanding Workforce Pell – Tuesday, March 17 from 1-2:30PM CST, Presented in partnership with Cael (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning). With Workforce Pell launching July 1, 2026, federal aid will for the first time support short-term, career focused training, making it critical for education, workforce, and employer partners to quickly align, set clear guardrails, and collaborate to ensure adult learners can access and navigate these new opportunities successfully
Registration to open soon!

EVENT: REGISTRATION OPEN! MUS Summer Convening 2026 – June 2–4, A WorkforceWorks!! Convergence: NWI - The Urban/Rural Connection. MUS will bring workforce leaders together for three days of collaboration, innovation, and partnership in northwest Indiana. Register: [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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