

SHARE:

[Join Our Email List](#)



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**



We are thrilled to sponsor the Midwest Urban Strategies newsletter because staying informed on workforce policy and system innovation is essential to meaningful impact. The intelligence it provides strengthens our work at the Foundation for Talent Transformation every day. As technology transforms careers at an unprecedented

speed, individuals need more than credentials. They need self-awareness, conversational skills, courage, and adaptability. We provide free, evidence-based assessments and AI coaches, and partner with organizations to design and license

rigorous competency models and AI-enabled tools that expand opportunity at scale. Together, we are turning rapid change into real momentum for people and communities



March 2026 Edition

Welcome to the March 2026 Edition of the MUS Connector!

March's theme, Strengthening Career Pathways and System Alignment, focuses on how workforce systems are being designed to work together more intentionally to support long-term economic mobility. Across regions and populations, job seekers often encounter fragmented entry points, disconnected programs, and unclear advancement opportunities. This issue explores what it looks like when those pieces are aligned.

This edition centers on how Workforce Development Boards and their partners coordinate across workforce, education, and training systems to create clearer, more navigable pathways. Contributors examine how alignment reduces duplication, strengthens transitions between programs, and helps individuals move from initial engagement to sustained employment and advancement.

Across this issue, readers will find examples of how system coordination translates into real outcomes. From pathway design to regional collaboration, these perspectives illustrate how aligned systems support worker mobility, strengthen employer connections, and build workforce strategies that are responsive, connected, and durable.

In This Month's Edition:

1. [MUS Policy Perspective](#)
2. [Strengthening Career Pathways Through Aligned Systems and Employer Strategy](#)
3. [From the Membership Director](#)
4. [The Workforce Behind the Workforce: A Reciprocal Relationship in Chicago Aligns Early Childhood Education and the Public Workforce System](#)
5. [Member Spotlight: Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership](#)
6. [WorkforceWorks!! Revamping the Achieve More and Prosper \(AMP\) Program: Building Pathways for Youth Success](#)
7. [From Classroom to Career: Rethinking Readiness](#)
8. [Strengthening Career Pathways and System Alignment](#)
9. [Building the Bridges From Learning to Earning](#)
10. [Credit for Prior Learning: A Catalyst of College Completion and Workforce Development](#)

- 11. [Strengthening Career Pathways and System Alignment by Investing in the Workforce Professional](#)
- 12. [Micro-Skills for Macro Alignment: Everyday Practices that Hold Pathways Together](#)
- 13. [From the Feild: YouthBuild Indy Helps Octavia Reed Build the Life She Once Needed](#)
- 14. [Introducing Flat MUS, pronounced, “Muhs”](#)



MUS Policy Perspective

Congress has now settled on the funding for the Departments of Labor and Education for the remainder of Fiscal Year (FY) 2026, through September 30, 2026. Funding cuts and block grant proposals were ultimately rejected by Congress - WIOA and connected national programs are now funded at or near current funding levels. With the FY2026 appropriations cycle mainly complete – the Department of Homeland Security remains shutdown due to a lapse in appropriations – attention will turn to the forthcoming Administration budget proposal and FY2027 process. We expect that friends of MUS and broader stakeholders will need to follow a similar blueprint to maintaining workforce funding in the months ahead.

Focus now shifts to WIOA Reauthorization and funding implementation/allocation by U.S. Department of Labor. We expect another WIOA Reauthorization effort in the coming months, beginning with the House Education and Workforce Committee. Given the disruptive dynamics of artificial intelligence on the nation’s economy and workforce, that will add a layer of urgency to these policy discussions. However, like many issues, bipartisan agreement will be difficult to achieve. As we witnessed in 2024, focusing on WIOA specific policies can yield a bipartisan product; efforts by the Trump Administration to ‘dismantle’ the Department of Education via Inter-Agency Agreements (IAA) with the Department of Labor will be the main obstacle to a bipartisan agreement this Congress. [Read More](#)



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 DOL released \$145 million in Registered Apprenticeship investments, awarded on a pay-for-performance basis.

Strengthening Career Pathways Through Aligned Systems and Employer Strategy

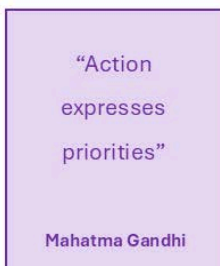
This month March Madness has me at hello. My evening hours (and some of my days!) will be focused on college basketball as brackets are made and broken, along with a few hearts. I love the sport of basketball. It doesn't matter if its middle schoolers working to master fundamentals or college elites playing through round after round on the hunt for that winning net. The sizzle of a well-coached team, its players gobbling up both ends of the court, is one of my favorite pastimes.



Basketball strategy relies on a system. If your team lacks height, you might spread the offense. Fast, scrappy players? Full court man may be the way. But, inevitably, opposing teams figure out your comfort zone. They adjust and challenge. Their adjustments require you to modify and compensate.

This cycle of disruption-adjustment-disruption is the reality in all complex systems. It is more art than science that moves systems from entropy to equilibrium and back again. Last month I wrote about change. The kind that disrupts and sometimes upends. This month I want to consider the power of systems aligned to balance change. Aligned systems require confident leaders who know the strengths and weaknesses of their teams and how to maximize skills and experience to perform at the highest level.

Aligned systems bring consistency when policy introduces complexity. New funding models, including Workforce Pell, along with expanded policy tools, are beginning to shape decisions about workforce program design, employer engagement, and how individuals move through career pathways. As these decisions take shape, early choices carry real implications for quality, access, and long-term outcomes. Guidance will continue to evolve. Institutions will move at different speeds. Staff will need clarity. [Read More](#)



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



From Our



Membership Director

As I reflect on this month’s membership message, I find myself drawn slightly off theme. Instead, I want to speak directly to something profoundly important, the investment each of you makes in Midwest Urban Strategies.

I recently had the distinct privilege of spending time with many of you in Washington, D.C., as we engaged in strategic planning through a scenario planning process. For those less familiar with the approach, scenario planning asks a simple but powerful question: *If certain conditions emerge, how will we respond?* It challenges us to think ahead, to anticipate possibilities, and to position MUS thoughtfully for whatever the future holds.

What struck me most was not simply the exercise itself, but the spirit in the room. Founding, Regular, and Affiliate members, in person and virtual, came together in a shared space of brainstorming, creativity, candor, and innovation. The emphasis truly was on *together*. In a time when the workforce ecosystem is navigating unprecedented complexity, a period that may well be marked in our field’s history, MUS convened with clarity of purpose: to tell our story, to lift our collective voice, and to move strategically into the future.

That kind of engagement does not happen by accident. It happens because of you, your leadership, your partnership, and your belief in the value of collective action.

I would also like to take a moment to honor the legacy of one of our early builders of MUS. As many of you know, Stacey Fowler of St. Louis Development Corporation recently passed away. While we shared a tribute last month, I want to focus here on what Stacey leaves behind. [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

“You have been assigned this mountain to show others it can be moved.”

Mel Robbins

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

The Workforce Behind the Workforce: A Reciprocal Relationship in Chicago Aligns Early Childhood Education and the Public Workforce System



One of the top barriers employers of all industries face in recruiting and retaining qualified candidates is access to child care. As I've mentioned in this space before, the *workforce behind the workforce* is in crisis: there are not enough skilled individuals to staff early childhood programs with enough spaces to support all children and families who need services so they can work. The early childhood education (ECE) workforce has adopted and adapted Registered Apprenticeship (RA) as one solution for this crisis.

Developing talent and upskilling the ECE workforce through RA requires alignment across systems, including ECE licensure, RA, workforce development, and higher education. One of the most challenging alignments is between the ECE and public workforce systems.

ECE providers have found it difficult to engage their local workforce development boards and secure WIOA funding due to chronically low wages in the ECE industry. Midwest Urban Strategies (MUS), as a founding partner of the **Early Childhood Workforce Connector** (ECWC), has worked with several ECE RA sponsors to apply to be eligible training providers in that system.

The **Illinois Early Childhood Apprenticeship Program**, sponsored by the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), exemplifies how cross-sector partnerships and braided funding can drive program sustainability. [Read More](#)

“When we invest in families, we invest in the future.”
Michelle Obama

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:

Chicago Cook
Workforce Partnership

Executive Leader:



George Wright, CEO

Website:

www.chicookworks.org

About the Organization

The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (The Partnership) is a founding member of MUS and the nonprofit umbrella organization overseeing 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 Partnership manages Local Workforce Innovation Area (LWIA) 7, the largest of 22 in Illinois. The organization also oversees a diverse portfolio of corporate and philanthropic workforce initiatives that leverage non-federal funding.

Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership: An Integrated System That's Building Career Pathways at Scale

As the nonprofit umbrella organization overseeing one of the largest public workforce systems in the country, The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (The Partnership) serves as the designated administrator of federal workforce development funding for the City of Chicago and Cook County, which together comprise Local Workforce Innovation Area 7 (LWIA 7), the largest of Illinois's 22 workforce areas. The Partnership manages a network of approximately 70 community-based organizations, including American Job Centers and Career Centers, serving youth and adults across the region. In addition to federal funding, the Partnership oversees a diverse portfolio of workforce initiatives supported by corporate and philanthropic partners, allowing it to leverage non-federal resources to expand access, strengthen career pathways, and respond to regional workforce needs.

Organized around clear career pathways, The Partnership and its network focus on sector strategies shaped by employer demand and regional labor market needs. By working directly with employers to understand the skills they are looking for, The Partnership aligns training and preparation, so job seekers are better positioned to meet real hiring requirements. This approach strengthens the connection between training and employment, supports employers in finding qualified candidates, and helps individuals enter the workforce with direction and room to advance over time.

Hiring events are one place where system coordination is most visible. The Partnership works intentionally with employers to design these events around real hiring needs, bringing together employers, community partners, and workforce staff in settings built for direct connection. Pre-screened, ready-to-work career seekers meet employers face-to-face to learn about available roles and often move quickly into interviews or next steps.

While The Partnership meets and exceeds every WIOA performance measure, success is defined as much by impact as by outcomes. [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.



MUS WorkforceWorks!! ASPYR: Revamping the Achieve More and Prosper (AMP) Program: Building Pathways for Youth Success



Over the past several months, Aspyr has undertaken a major initiative to revamp the Achieve More and Prosper (AMP) program, a cornerstone of youth and emerging talent development in Central Ohio. Working closely with Franklin County Job & Family Services, AMP, part of Ohio's state-mandated Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program (CCMEP), has served young people since 2016. While the program has provided valuable support, this year's Request for Proposal (RFP) cycle presented an opportunity to rethink how AMP can better prepare youth for the future.

Why the Revamp?

For years, AMP operated under the same service delivery model. While effective, it didn't fully leverage the potential to connect participants with high-demand, high-growth career fields. The revamp was driven by a commitment to be more

intentional—aligning services not only with participant needs but also with the realities of the local labor market.

Columbus is rapidly growing in industries such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare, construction, biotech, energy, and skilled trades. These sectors offer stability, livable wages, and long-term career growth—critical factors for youth planning futures.

Connecting Youth to Careers

The redesigned AMP program focuses on career pathways that matter. Participants receive comprehensive support, including:

- **Career exploration and guidance** aligned with Central Ohio's growth industries.
- **Training opportunities** through vetted providers with proven success metrics.
- **Wraparound services** such as soft skills development, resume building, and financial assistance for training-related expenses.
- **Support during transitions, including help with uniforms or tools for new jobs.** [Read More](#)



ABOUT ASPYR:

Collaborating with partners throughout Franklin County and Central Ohio, Aspyr leads the development and implementation of highly innovative and measurably effective workforce strategies and programs that build prosperity for all.

From Classroom to Career: Rethinking Readiness

If we are serious about advancing our workforce and strengthening our economy, we must confront a fundamental misalignment between education and employment. While schools continue to prioritize



academic achievement and technical proficiency, employers consistently report that the greatest predictors of long-term success are not hard skills alone—but soft skills. In fact, research and workforce data suggest that nearly 85% of what it takes to get a job, keep a job, and successfully transition to new opportunities is rooted in soft skills. Yet these essential abilities remain underemphasized in our education system and increasingly absent from our broader culture.

Soft skills—communication, critical thinking, adaptability, teamwork, emotional intelligence, work ethic, and problem-solving—are not optional traits. They are foundational competencies that enable individuals to apply technical knowledge effectively in real-world environments. An employee may possess the necessary

credentials, but without the ability to collaborate, manage time, resolve conflict, or respond constructively to feedback, long-term success becomes far less likely.

Unfortunately, our current education model often sidelines these skills in favor of standardized testing and rigid academic benchmarks. In many cases, soft skills are not intentionally taught, measured, or reinforced. As a result, students may graduate academically prepared but professionally underdeveloped. Employers then inherit the responsibility of teaching workplace behavior, communication norms, and professionalism—an inefficient and costly solution to a systemic gap.

The workforce system feels this impact acutely. High turnover rates, workplace conflict, disengagement, and stalled career mobility frequently trace back to deficiencies in soft skill development. [Read More](#)

“Intelligence plus character, that is the goal of true education.”

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



Strengthening Career Pathways and System Alignment

Last month, we discussed the importance of employer-driven workforce systems. These are models that begin with business demand and design training accordingly.

That shift is essential. Employer engagement, however, is only the starting point. To deliver sustained impact, regions must align systems across workforce boards, training providers, community partners, and employers. Coordinated career pathways must be measurable, scalable, and responsive to labor market demand.

From Employer-Driven to System-Aligned

An employer-driven approach ensures training reflects real hiring needs. A system-aligned approach ensures every partner is operating from a shared strategy.

Alignment requires shared labor market data. It requires coordinated funding strategies. It requires integrated support services. It also requires clearly mapped advancement pathways beyond entry-level roles. When alignment exists, duplication decreases and outcomes improve.

Career Pathways as Regional Infrastructure

Effective pathways are not isolated programs. They function as infrastructure within a regional workforce strategy.

Strong pathways include accessible entry points into high-demand sectors. They include stackable credentials tied to advancement. They embed work-based learning such as externships. They coordinate support services that improve completion and retention. [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

“Our strength is not in our numbers, but in our unity.”

Jesse Jackson



Building the Workforce Systems of the Future

Building the Bridges From Learning to Earning

At the heart of an effective career pathway strategy is a connected ecosystem where credentials, work experiences,

and employability skills translate into real economic mobility.

Workforce systems today are being asked to expand access while improving outcomes. That cannot be achieved by adding programs alone. It requires system alignment so that education and training providers, workforce boards, employers, and local partners operate with shared language, trusted signals of skill, and interoperable data infrastructure.

When pathways are aligned, three things improve:

1. Individuals can clearly see their next step.
2. Employers can trust what credentials and experiences represent.
3. Partners can coordinate efforts without duplicating services.

Alignment turns fragmented initiatives into a functioning talent system.

The U.S. Department of Education 15 Million Dollar Challenge

On December 15, 2025, the U.S. Department of Education launched the Connecting Talent to Opportunity Challenge, a \$15 million prize competition to accelerate the development of integrated statewide Talent Marketplaces (<https://www.cto-challenge.com/>). The initiative signals a national shift toward building public, state maintained digital ecosystems that connect education, workforce systems, and employers through interoperable, competency-based infrastructure.

Rather than relying on degrees or job titles alone, a Talent Marketplace translates learning and work into standardized, machine-readable skills. This allows opportunities to be matched fairly and efficiently. The initiative strongly encourages governors to take an active leadership role and commit to advancing integrated statewide talent marketplace infrastructure.

At its core, the model integrates three components: [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

“The future of work will reward those who can adapt and build skills continuously.”

Indra Nooyi

Credit for Prior Learning: A Catalyst of College Completion and Workforce Development

Credit for prior learning is all about benefiting from workplace and other experiences that have occurred before students enter the classroom. But the benefits don't stop there. CPL returns the favor to the workplace, not only by expediting work-relevant credential completion but also by strengthening the alignment between academic curricula and workforce needs.



Misalignment between college curricula and the latest workforce needs is a frequently bemoaned challenge underscoring the need for strategic coordination among workforce developers, private industry, and postsecondary education. Such dissonance sows doubt among students about education's return on investment. It also forces employers to choose among college credentials, competency-based assessments, industry training, and other alternatives.

Meanwhile, surveys and other research continue to indicate that, over time, college degrees pay off. A **Lumina Foundation-Gallup survey** showed that most adults who haven't completed a degree find them "extremely" or "very" valuable (55% for associate degrees, 70% for bachelor's degrees). **According to the U.S. Department of Labor**, workers 25 and older who have a bachelor's degree earn 66% more (18% for associate degree holders) than workers who didn't attend college.

CPL can harmonize the needlessly competing choice between short-term and traditional credentials. The process of evaluating "real world" learning builds much-needed bridges between theory and practice. The benefits travel both ways. CPL is a fertile source of direct, empirical data on the competencies most valued in the workforce. Connecting learning outcomes from work-based learning and academic curricula keeps administrators plugged into the latest industry needs and workforce trends. CPL can reframe the "academic vs. vocational" paradigm, replacing zero-sum silos with parallel pathways. After all, if students benefit when education satisfies workforce needs, why shouldn't workers benefit when employment supports education needs?

For example, CAEL led a partnership with the Machinists Institute and Renton Technical College (RTC) in Washington to create a groundbreaking registered apprenticeship pathway. [Read More](#)



CAEL is a national nonprofit membership organization founded in 1974 on the principle that college-level learning neither begins nor ends in the classroom. In collaboration with partners throughout the workforce ecosystem, CAEL fosters innovative, lifelong learning to help adult learners and their communities thrive.



Strengthening Career Pathways and System Alignment by Investing in the Workforce Professional

Across the country, workforce systems are evolving toward stronger alignment between workforce boards, education partners, training providers, and employers. Yet one of the most important drivers of successful alignment is often overlooked: the workforce professionals themselves.

Career pathways are typically discussed in the context of job seekers — how individuals move from entry points to sustainable careers and long-term economic mobility. Increasingly, however, regions are recognizing that career pathways must also exist within the workforce development profession. When workforce staff have clear training pathways, shared competencies, and opportunities for professional advancement, they are better equipped to guide participants through complex systems and create seamless experiences across programs.

From frontline career coaches to business services representatives, investing in structured professional development is emerging as a key strategy for strengthening system alignment in practice.

Career Pathways for Workforce Staff Strengthen Service Delivery

Workforce professionals operate at the intersection of multiple systems: workforce programs, education institutions, social services, and employer partnerships. Navigating these intersections requires a specialized skill set that is often developed informally through experience rather than through structured training pathways.

In regions where workforce boards are intentionally developing career pathways for staff, professionals can gain greater confidence in guiding participants and stronger collaboration with partners. Clear professional development pathways help staff understand not only their own roles but also how their work fits into a broader system designed to support participant success. [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

“The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership.”

Harvey S. Firestone

Micro-Skills for Macro Alignment: Everyday Practices that Hold Pathways Together

When we talk about strengthening career pathways and system alignment, the focus often lands on big, structural efforts: shared data systems, regional partnerships, formal agreements between workforce, education, and training providers. These pieces are essential. But for the young people moving through these pathways, alignment is experienced less as a strategy document and more as a series of human interactions.



From that vantage point, the “glue” that holds a pathway together is often small, repeatable practices—micro-skills—that staff bring into everyday conversations.

Across workforce boards and partner organizations, many of these practices are already happening: a case manager who pauses to really hear a young person’s worry, an instructor who checks for understanding before moving on, a coach who

names a feeling instead of brushing past it. When these skills are used consistently across systems, they make fragmented landscapes feel more navigable.

A few examples of micro-skills that support macro-level alignment:

Pausing before advice-giving.

When a young person shares a concern (“I’m not sure this training is right for me”), the instinct can be to jump straight to solutions. A brief pause—paired with a clarifying question like, “Can you tell me a bit more about what’s feeling off?”—can reveal barriers that matter for the entire pathway design, not just this moment.

Reflecting what you’re hearing.

Simple reflective statements (“It sounds like you’re feeling stuck between needing income now and wanting more training for later”) help young people feel understood and help staff across programs hear the same underlying tension. Over time, patterns in these reflections can inform more aligned services and supports.

[Read More](#)

“People will never forget how you made them feel.”

Maya Angelou

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



Donate to SEED Fund

**From the Field:
YouthBuild Indy Helps Octavia Reed Build the Life She Once Needed**

When Octavia Reed enrolled in YouthBuild Indy’s first-ever certified nursing assistant training cohort, she was looking for more than a certification but also a



foundation for a better future. At 25, after growing up in the foster care system from age 15, Reed entered the 24-week program determined to create the kind of stability she had always wanted for herself and her young daughter.

EmployIndy's YouthBuild Indy program provides far more than industry-specific training. Participants receive a weekly stipend and opportunities to work toward their high school equivalency diploma, gain job-readiness and leadership skills, complete relevant coursework, earn OSHA 10 and first aid/CPR certifications, and receive hands-on experience and job placement support. This holistic approach was transformative for Reed.

She earned her CNA certification, along with OSHA 10 and first aid/CPR certifications, all major milestones that positioned her for success in the healthcare field. Her growth during the program was so evident that her peers selected her to be the keynote speaker during the program celebration, a moment that highlighted her emerging confidence and leadership.

"I wanted to earn my CNA for my daughter, to create a life for her that I never had," Reed said. "But as I started working through the program, I realized I had to do this program for myself if I really wanted to create a better life for us."

Throughout the training, Reed found her voice. She learned how to advocate for herself, build confidence and recognize the power of her own story — one she hopes will inspire others who have faced similar obstacles. Some days presented challenges, especially when childcare was not available. Rather than missing class, Reed brought her daughter to training, allowing her to continue progressing and supporting her family. [Read More](#)

Read more about EmployIndy and their work in their Report to the Community: [HERE](#)

ABOUT EMPLOYINDY

EmployIndy

GUIDING MARION COUNTY'S WORKFORCE

EmployIndy connects Marion County residents to training and career services that support livable wages, upward mobility, and meet employer demand, positioning Central Indiana as a growing hub for workforce opportunity.



MUS Partnership Press Release

The Foundation for Talent Transformation
Joins Forces with
Midwest Urban Strategies
to Accelerate Workforce Development

Read Article: [HERE](#)

Introducing... Flat MUS! (pronounced "Muhs")

Before we introduce Flat MUS, it helps to understand the inspiration behind him. Based on Jeff Brown's children's book *Flat Stanley*, Stanley Lambchop is flattened when a bulletin board falls off his bedroom wall and lands on him while he's sleeping. Instead of being injured, he becomes paper-thin. His family soon realizes this unexpected situation has advantages. Stanley can slide under doors, fly like a kite, and most famously, be mailed in an envelope to visit people in other places.



Introduced in classrooms, typically in grades 2 through 4, the book eventually inspired a widely adopted classroom project. Students receive a printed outline of Flat Stanley, color and cut him out, personalizing him before mailing him to family or friends. Hosts photograph and document his visits, then send him along on his journey. Eventually, Flat Stanley makes his way back to the child, who presents his adventures, photos, and stories to the classroom.

It is a fun and creative project. Families often lean into the humor, staging elaborate photo shoots or sending Stanley on adventures that reflect their own communities and personalities. Over time, what begins as a paper cutout becomes something more meaningful. Students reflect on geography, culture, and communication, and a simple character becomes a bridge between places and people.

For an organization deeply engaged in strengthening the early childhood workforce, the inspiration felt fitting. Flat Stanley has long been used in elementary classrooms to foster connection, creativity, and communication — qualities that mirror the kind of systems-building MUS champions across the workforce ecosystem.

Flat MUS first appeared at our 2025 Milwaukee Forward Convening. He was tucked into registration bags and ready to travel. What began as something playful became an interactive and fun experience for our attendees. They were invited to take Flat MUS to local landmarks, snap selfies, and share their adventures on social media using the hashtags #FlatMUSinMKE and #MKEForward. The idea was simple: explore Milwaukee, connect with one another, and document the journey.

Flat MUS joined us at curated tours, appeared during sessions, and tagged along in conversations that stretched well beyond sightseeing. That is very much by design.

[Read More](#)

Flat MUS in Milwaukee and Washington D.C.



MUS Convenings Are Not Typical Conferences

We intentionally create a boutique, immersive experience built to spark natural connection with workforce development stakeholders. From workforce simulations to site visits to

VALPARASIO | Orville Redenbacher

MUS 2026 Summer Convening

Long before grocery store shelves were lined with his name, Orville Redenbacher was experimenting with corn in Valparaiso. His pursuit of the perfect pop began in Northwest Indiana. **Proof that bold ideas can rise from anywhere.**

WorkforceWorks!!—The Urban Rural Connection

NORTHWEST INDIANA FACTS

50 WILD FACTS ABOUT INDIANA

MUS 2026 Summer Convening

Northwest Indiana Aerial Shot, mainly Hammond. Chicago skyline in the distance



Presented in Partnership: MIDWEST Hotel Accommodations: CWI Blue Chip

WorkforceWorks!!—The Urban Rural Connection

Watch YouTube Video: [HERE](#)

INDIANAPOLIS | Raggedy Ann Doll

MUS 2026 Summer Convening

The birthplace of Raggedy Ann. Johnny Gruelle, a newspaper cartoonist, transformed a simple rag doll into a storybook star. Inspired by his daughter, he brought her to life through illustrations.

In 1918, he published Raggedy Ann Stories and patented the doll, turning an Indiana idea into a national treasure.

WorkforceWorks!!—The Urban Rural Connection

NORTHWEST INDIANA FACTS

Check out our Advertisers!

Partnering for Better Savings: See What's New!

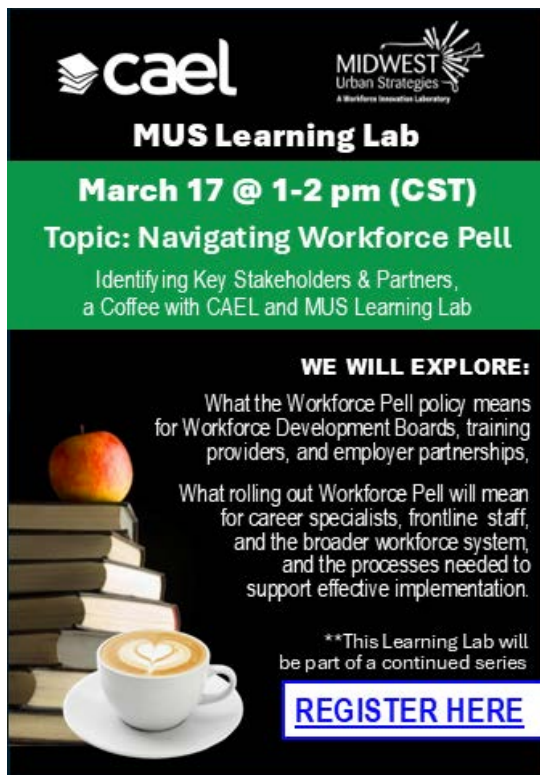


MUS 2026 Summer Convening
Join Us in Northwest Indiana This Summer!

Join Midwest Urban Strategies for WorkforceWorks!! Northwest Indiana: The Urban Rural Connection, hosted in partnership with **Center of Workforce Innovations.**

This three day convening will bring workforce leaders from across Indiana into communities where innovation is happening in real time.

Through curated site visits, employer engagement, and candid policy conversations, attendees will explore how local leaders are building training programs in the trades, healthcare, CDL, and more while strengthening systems that serve both urban and rural residents.



cael **MIDWEST**
Urban Strategies
A Workforce Innovation Laboratory

MUS Learning Lab

March 17 @ 1-2 pm (CST)

Topic: Navigating Workforce Pell

Identifying Key Stakeholders & Partners,
a Coffee with CAEL and MUS Learning Lab

WE WILL EXPLORE:

What the Workforce Pell policy means for Workforce Development Boards, training providers, and employer partnerships,

What rolling out Workforce Pell will mean for career specialists, frontline staff, and the broader workforce system, and the processes needed to support effective implementation.

**This Learning Lab will be part of a continued series

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Come ready to learn, question, and think differently about what effective workforce strategy looks like on the ground.

Event Sponsor Opportunities: [HERE](#)

Convening Hotel Reservation Questions?

Please Call
Blue Chip Hotel and Spa
(888) 879-7711

Registration Ends 5/15/2206

When calling hotel, please use Group Code: **MUS2026** to identify yourself as members of the MUS 2026 Summer Convening in order to receive the Group Rate.

Community Spotlight Advertisements

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 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.



**FOUNDATION FOR
TALENT
TRANSFORMATION**

**Empower Your Clients for
Workforce Success with
Free Assessments**

Help your clients develop self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and communication skills to thrive in today's workforce

Learn more about our Authors by clicking on their headshots.

Explore and Connect Today!

734-331-8604

Access Ad Rates HERE


Next month's newsletter theme will focus on:

Expanding Apprenticeship and Earn-and-Learn Pathways

Questions about article submission? We are happy to help!

734-331-8604


melanie@midwesturbanstrategies.com



EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE CONNECTOR

The Case for ECE as a Quality Job

April 21, 2026 • 2pm-3:15pm ET



VISIONZ GROUP Specializing in Reentry Workforce Readiness



Three Programs to Build Better Futures:

- C.H.O.I.C.E.S. PROGRAM**
Youth Violence Prevention & Intervention
- C.O.N.N.E.C.T. PROGRAM**
Pre & Post Release Reentry Support
- RETURNING OFFENDER SUCCESS PROGRAM**
Reentry Workforce & Life Skills

Connect to learn more!

800-617-0093 • info@visionzgroup.com

WWW.VISIONZGROUP.COM



Transforming Healthcare Education
Pilot Programs with Externships



Industry Recognized Credential
Online Career Training: CCMA

Matching Skilled Certified Clinical Medical Assistants to Top Employers

Plan your Regions Pilot Today!

FOR MORE DETAILS
Sandy Mead
734-718-2515 • smead@skilltrade.com

NAWDP 42ND ANNUAL CONFERENCE
PHOENIX, AZ - MAY 18-20, 2026

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE
WWW.NAWDP.ORG

Register by May 6, 2026

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS
CORRECT. ADVANCE. INNOVATE.

Join us for an Online Event!
MUS Learning Lab
April 15th @ 1-2 pm (CST)

Topic: Navigating Youth Emotions
Presented in partnership with Okay So

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Young people frequently experience strong emotions of frustration, anger, sadness, and more.

How youth workers respond in those moments makes a difference: an opportunity to build trust, deepen their connection to our program, and make a lasting impact in their life.

This Learning Lab will introduce evidence-based, youth-friendly skills for meeting these difficult moments.

MUS IS LOOKING FOR NEW MEMBERS!

Interested Candidates
Please Email:

Kellie Landaker
Membership Director
kellie@midwesturbanstrategies.com

2026 Sponsorships-Available Now!
Your brand belongs in this conversation.
Partner with MUS.

2026 Summer Convening Packages
Early Childhood Education Packages

Sponsorships available at every level.

Find out more [CLICK: HERE](#)

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.



EVENTS ■ WEBINARS ■ ANNOUNCEMENTS

CLASSIFIED SECTION:

EVENT: March 17, 11:00 am – 2:30 pm CST, NAWDP Day of Learning, This NAWDP Day of Learning will explore all things apprenticeship. Learn from federal, state, and employer perspectives to highlight current priorities, promising practices, and lessons learned across apprenticeship and workforce systems. This event is provided at no cost through a grant with the National Institute for Work and Learning (NIWL). Register: [Here](#)

EVENT: March 17 from 1-2:30pm CST, MUS Learning Lab: Understanding Workforce Pell – Tuesday, 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 Register: [Here](#)

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](#)

EVENT: April 15, 1–2pm CST. MUS Learning Lab Navigating Youth Emotions. In partnership with OkaySo, this session will equip youth workers and frontline staff with evidence-based, youth-friendly skills for responding to strong emotions such as frustration, anger, and sadness. Learn practical strategies to build trust, deepen connection, and support young people in difficult moments. Register: [Here](#)

EVENT: April 21, 2:00–3:15pm ET. The Case for Early Childhood Education as a Quality Job – A virtual panel discussion examining what defines job quality in Early Childhood Education and how ECE professionals exemplify those standards daily. Register: [Here](#)

ANNOUNCEMENT: 2026 MUS Convening Sponsorships Available. Our sponsors receive red carpet treatment! Partnering with MUS comes with plenty of benefits and opportunities to build strong connections and partnerships. Inquire within to learn more: [Here](#)

ANNOUNCEMENT: RFP: Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership and the LWIA 7 Workforce Innovation Board release a Request for Proposals for American Job Center WIOA Title I Services. The RFP seeks delegate agencies to deliver workforce services at 11 American Job Centers across Cook County, including the City of Chicago, through innovative, customer-centered models aligned with WIOA Title I. Responses are due March 23, 2026 by 4:00pm CT. 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: Visionz Group seeks partners to collaborate on expanding workforce readiness and reentry training programs in communities nationwide. Organizations interested in strengthening youth intervention, pre- and post-release support, and returning citizen workforce development are encouraged to connect 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: MUS 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.

[Subscribe to MUS Connector](#)

[f Share This Email](#)

[in Share This Email](#)

Midwest Urban Strategies | 890 Elm Grove Road 110-2 | Milwaukee, WI 53122 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!