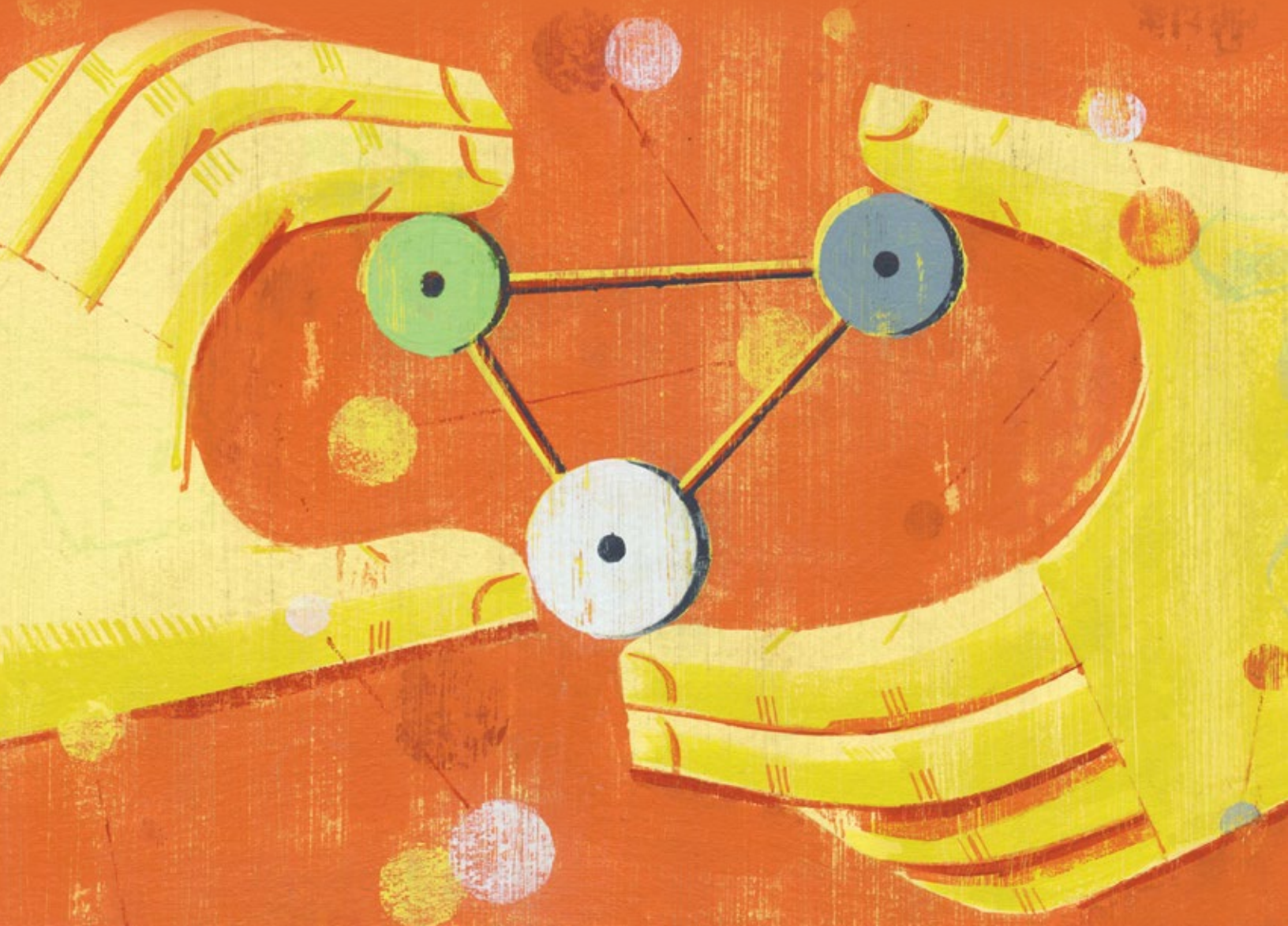


THE MANUFACTURING IMPERATIVE

A new partnership aims to revitalize the manufacturing industry through community colleges.

By Debra Volzer, Ph.D.



The Workforce Pipeline Challenge is a three-year pilot program with a goal to attract 1,000 individuals annually at each of the initial 25 participating community and technical colleges, resulting in 75,000 or more qualified workers in pursuit of manufacturing careers.

SME, THE NATIONAL NONPROFIT COMMITTED TO accelerating new manufacturing technology adoption and building North America's manufacturing talent and capabilities, announced a new initiative involving a partnership with community and technical colleges to address the urgency of revitalizing manufacturing's industrial base, growing the industry's talent pipeline, and enhancing the skills and productivity of manufacturing workers.

The Manufacturing Imperative – Workforce Pipeline Challenge (MI-WPC) was announced in fall 2023 and launched in January 2024. It combines the industry and workforce expertise of SME with the educational programs and innovations of a select group of U.S. community and technical colleges. The initiative builds awareness of careers in manufacturing, optimizes workforce systems, and accelerates the education and skill development needed to place individuals in jobs making family-sustaining wages.

The Workforce Pipeline Challenge is a three-year pilot program with a goal to attract 1,000 individuals annually at each of the initial 25 participating community and technical colleges, resulting in 75,000 or more qualified workers in pursuit of manufacturing careers. Doing so will help address the anticipated lack of talent needed to fill 2.7 million manufacturing roles by 2030. If the nation cannot solve this shortage, it is anticipated to have a \$4 trillion impact on the economy. Best practices identified throughout the program will be shared nationally to help other programs implement innovative solutions to grow local economies, reduce barriers to employment, and fill vacant manufacturing jobs.

Institutions participating in the Challenge include Wallace State and Calhoun Community Colleges (Ala.), Daley College and Wilbur Wright from the City Colleges of Chicago and College of Lake County (Ill.), WSU Tech (Kan.), Grand Rapids and Schoolcraft Community Colleges (Mich.), South Central College (Minn.), St. Charles Community College and St. Louis Community College (Mo.), Wake Tech Community College (N.C.), Mohawk Valley Community College (N.Y.), Columbus State and Lorain Community Colleges (Ohio), Tulsa Community College (Okla.), Greenville Technical College (S.C.), Pellissippi State Community College and Motlow State Community College (Tenn.), Dallas College System (Texas), Patrick & Henry Community College (Va.), Edmonds College (Wash.), and Gateway Technical Community College (Wisc.).

Participating colleges have committed to a specific set of requirements, demonstrating commitment to this national approach to pipeline

development and to implementing innovative solutions to address longstanding industry challenges. Their collective voices will also inform legislation, policy, and funding.

Eighty percent of the colleges participating in this initiative have launched. During each launch session, SME solicits best practices and challenges facing each college. These kickoff sessions engage key leaders at the college, community-based organizations, employers, and economic developers, which offers a holistic view of the community. Some common themes are emerging, including:

1. **Ensuring target populations are considered and connected with manufacturing education and career opportunities.** Women, minorities, underrepresented, and low-income adults are often inadvertently left behind or not effectively engaged in training, education, or manufacturing career pathways.
2. **Not all employers in each local community are connected to the college and the college's training programs.** There is inconsistent alignment in some of the programs delivered, expectations or understanding of what the college can provide, and validation of program content from employers.
3. **Learners sometimes miss training opportunities because of the current modality of programs.** Learners require online, hybrid, open labs, and other flexible learning options to meet their needs. Misalignment with learners' needs is a contributing factor to low enrollments in college STEM and manufacturing programs.

These emerging trends, best practices, and a deeper dive into the progress made and resources provided by SME will be shared in June 2024.



Dr. Debra Volzer is director of government and workforce partnerships at SME. For more information on the Workforce Pipeline Challenge, or to learn more about opportunities to engage with and support the program, contact dvolzer@sme.org.