



**Bucks County
Community College**

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**Center for Workforce Development @ Bucks County Community College:
Closing the Skills Gap
Statement for House Small Business Committee Field Hearing
Presented by
Susan Herring, Interim Executive Director, Center for Workforce Development
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Good morning, Representative Fitzpatrick, Representative Evans, and audience members. Thank you for the invitation to provide testimony on this very important topic.

The Center for Workforce Development at Bucks County Community College (Bucks) works with local businesses to provide customized training to build the skill level of their current employees. Our offerings include a large range of topics designed to assist the individual company in meeting their specific needs. Topics include industrial safety, computer applications, Lean Six Sigma, executive coaching and leadership academies, to name just a few. These programs help local businesses thrive by providing a highly skilled workforce. We train approximately 2,800 incumbent workers a year, and partner with over 50 companies, with 80% estimated to be small businesses. Our clients have access to WEDnetPA* funding through the state, as well as Incumbent Worker Training funding through the Bucks County Workforce Development Board. Both are excellent programs that give preferential treatment to small businesses, and bring significant value to our business partners.

*WEDnetPA is a grant program created by the Department of Community & Economic Development, (DCED) and made available through the Workforce and Economic Development Network of Pennsylvania. This program provides funding for qualified employers to train new and existing employees, and allows companies to stay competitive while keeping employee skills current and relevant. Bucks is one of 27 partners across the state of Pennsylvania awarding between 35 – 50 companies in Bucks County funding between \$250,000 - \$400,000. Last year (FY 16-17) Bucks awarded 33 contracts, of which 26 were small businesses.

The Center for Workforce Development also works closely with businesses to help mitigate the shortage of skilled workers in manufacturing. Working in partnership with the County of Bucks, the Bucks County Workforce Development Board and PA CareerLink™, the college has developed and implemented pre-apprenticeship programs designed to upskill and retrain un- and underemployed individuals to learn new skills to fill the ever growing gap for well trained entry level employees for manufacturing jobs. As retirements loom large for businesses, more well-trained entry level employees will be necessary to feed to manufacturing businesses to keep them thriving in our local economy.

Bucks County expects to see nearly 3,000 new jobs in advanced manufacturing in the next 10 years. This, coupled with impending retirements of baby-boomers, make it vitally important to provide accessible means for entry into the industry sector. Most of our manufacturing partners are small businesses. We use federal funding that flows through the BC Workforce Development Board and County of Bucks to train entry-level workers and feed them into these companies.

The College, in collaboration with the County of Bucks and local manufacturing companies developed and launched the Metalwork Training Program in 2014. The Program prepares students with the skills to fill entry-level machining positions for manufacturers in the region. As a result of the success of this program, and in response to employer demand, the college launched the Industrial Maintenance Training Program in October 2016. This program prepares students for entry-level jobs as electro-mechanical technicians in the industrial maintenance field. Both programs provide opportunities for students to earn industry-recognized credentials including OSHA 10, Forklift Safety, and NIMS, and both programs put a great deal of emphasis on employability skills training and placement into good-paying jobs. The Metalwork training takes place in Bristol, and the Industrial Maintenance program trains out of the BC Public Safety Center in Doylestown.

Over the past three years, we have trained approximately 170 un- and under-employed students in industrial skills and have a job placement rate of over 92%. The average starting wages are between \$15 – \$18/per hour, plus benefits, with the opportunity to earn \$40 - \$50,000 per year within the first couple of years of employment. This high success rate is due to our robust candidate vetting and testing process, the ongoing dedication of excellent industry experts as our instructors, employability skills training, and the efforts of a dedicated job developer. Once employed, students have the opportunity to continue their training by entering OJT positions, apprenticeship programs and/or continuing their education at Bucks.

Manufacturing is alive and well in Bucks County and the demand for skilled workers is higher than ever. In fact, our recent Metalwork cohort graduated 11 students, and our partner manufacturing companies had 33 job openings, providing for a competitive job market favoring skilled job seekers. Bucks is serving the business community by building the workforce pipeline and connecting a new generation to the high-priority occupations in manufacturing. Approximately 28% of our students are under the age of 24, 50% under 30, and our average age is 32.

The Center for Workforce Development is continuing its efforts to close the skills gaps in manufacturing by expanding its 12-week Metalwork Training Program to serve the Upper Bucks population of job seekers and manufacturing businesses. Through a collaboration with the Upper Bucks County Technical School, the Upper Bucks Chamber of Commerce, and the Quakertown Area Planning Committee, we are on track to begin our first cohort in Upper Bucks on February 26, 2018. The college is applying to the County for CDBG funding to support our efforts beyond this pilot cohort.

In addition, the college is collaborating with the Bucks County Workforce Development Board to apply for the state's Strategic Innovation Grant to provide a Manufacturing Career Pathways Program to in-school and out-of-school youth between the ages of 18 and 24. The demand in manufacturing is due, in large part, to the aging of the skilled workforce coupled with the fact that for generations, there has been little interest in promoting this field as a viable career option. It is imperative that high school students and their parents learn more about these opportunities to help them make smart choices for their futures and build the workforce pipeline. The College will leverage the success of its industry programming into working with our local high schools to begin educating in-school youth and recent graduates between the ages of 18 and 24 on the benefits of a career in manufacturing. Our framework will be similar to our manufacturing programs but geared more towards students that are still unsure and looking to gain exposure to the industry. The Manufacturing Career Pathways Program will be a coursework introduction to manufacturing partnered with an internship. This will give students a foundational understanding of manufacturing while introducing them to career options in the field. Students would begin with classes at the Lower or Upper Bucks Campus. Once they have successfully

completed the coursework they would then transition into an internship with one of our pilot companies. The Manufacturing Career Pathways program will provide a new opportunity for targeted youth to enter the Manufacturing sector.

As with all workforce development programs, our programs' success begins and ends with the symbiotic relationship we have built with the manufacturing business community. Our business partners participate in several ways. They assist with developing and refining the curriculum, vetting training candidates, offering company tours, and hiring our graduates. Our business partnership has grown from an original 20 manufacturers, to over 70, spanning Bucks and surrounding counties. Media articles, industry partnerships, and word of mouth have contributed to the rapid increase.

The College is very thankful for the federal programs that have provided funding to train individuals who most likely would not have been able to afford the classes. The training programs are strongly supported by the County of Bucks, through past CDBG funding, and by the Bucks County Workforce Development Board through Individual Training Account funding (ITAs) and currently, a US Department of Labor, Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) Grant. The WIF grant will support training through September 2018, and the college is actively pursuing other funding sources that will enable us to continue to serve job seekers and our manufacturing partners.

In addition, in 2017 the college in partnership with Bucks County Workforce Development Board, was awarded the PA Tech Grant that will allow the college to upgrade existing manufacturing equipment in order to build capacity at our Advanced Manufacturing Training Center in Bristol.

Our students come to us facing barriers to employment, and many of them are dealing with personal challenges that have limited their ability to find financial stability, such as addiction, homelessness, incarceration, single parenthood, and disability. The College's pre-apprenticeship programs have truly been life-transforming opportunities for these individuals. Supportive family and friends attend our graduation ceremonies, and it is humbling to receive their heartfelt thanks for giving their loved ones a chance to be a part of something that will forever change their lives.

Continued funding of Bucks County Community College's pre-apprenticeship training programs is critical to sustaining our work that has brought successful outcomes to so many of our residents, while at the same time closing a skills gap that is essential for the continued success of our small manufacturing businesses in the region.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this morning's hearing. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

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