ACCELERATED TRAINING FOR ILLINOIS MANUFACTURING (ATIM)

NATURE OF THE INNOVATION: Personalized pathways for unemployed and underemployed workers in regionally demanded manufacturing occupations: machining, mechatronics, welding, and logistics/inventory. Participants earn industry-recognized credentials on an accelerated schedule, accompanied by placement in paid internships and on-the-job training opportunities.

Key Features

Employer-Driven Training Pathways: DCEO worked with manufacturing sector employers, industry groups such as the Illinois Manufacturers’ Association (IMA), and the public-private Illinois Pathways Manufacturing Learning Exchange to validate the demand for program tracks across ATIM’s five workforce regions. DCEO also used occupational competencies endorsed by IMA, the Illinois Network for Advanced Manufacturing, and selected employers to evaluate partnering training programs. In another capacity, strong industry partnerships have been essential for procuring work-based learning opportunities for ATIM trainees.

Personalized Training Plans: ATIM participants complete a skill gap analysis that illuminates the skills they will need to develop in order to become employable in one of the program’s target occupations. After exposing a participant to the demand for jobs in their region and accounting for their goals and capacity to be in training—from as little as a month to as long as two years—a case manager works with the participant to create an individualized training plan offering a roadmap to attaining employment at a participant’s desired experience level. A team—including a case manager, a representative from one of the program’s training providers, and a manufacturing industry member—monitors the training plan for the duration a participant is enrolled in ATIM. The training plans have a predicted start and end date; when these deadlines are missed, the team receives an automated notice, at which point they can contact the participant (and each other) and immediately take corrective action.
**ADVICE TO PRACTITIONERS**

**Utilize Real Time Data in Program Oversight:**
Program leaders can see individual records inside Illinois’ workNet portal, a service delivery platform linked to the state’s WIA client tracking system. Illinois workNet provides ATIM with a hub for conducting outreach, collecting participant data, seeing trainees’ progress (in dozens of cases, staff have intervened to encourage local areas to take action on applicants awaiting placement into an evaluation group), and viewing participants’ credential and employment outcomes. “If local case managers and training providers could see the data on all of their clients in real time, they could enhance program oversight and management by seeing the bottlenecks, seeing when and how participants are off track, and being able to take corrective action before it’s too late,” says Michael Baker, Strategic Planning & Innovation Manager at Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

**OBSTACLES OVERCOME**

**Meeting Enrollment Targets:** ATIM’s random assignment evaluation used a 70%/30% split, with 30% of eligible applicants assigned to a control group. Taking into account other applicant eligibility attrition, ATIM experienced an applicant to treatment group ratio of over 6:1. Many more individuals—ATIM estimates 25—must be made aware of the program to generate one participant. If a higher treatment/control split is used—say, 50/50—this ratio is even higher.

As one lever to boost enrollments, ATIM regional staff worked with the Illinois Department of Employment Security, the agency that pays unemployment insurance, to create messages tailored to each region and targeted to those at both the beginning and end of their benefit cycle. (UI claimants are able to participate fully in ATIM, earning from work-based learning in addition to their UI income, thought limited to amounts not impacting benefits. Participants earning extra income are incentivized to enroll in training.)

**Future Outlook**

**Pilot-testing the Model in a New Sector:** Experience with ATIM has led Illinois to pilot an Information Technology effort, similar to ATIM, offering project-based work and an ecosystem of industry-recognized credentials. It also provides a test of whether the ATIM approach can be replicated in a new sector.

**Interested in Learning More?**

To learn more, visit http://www.ilworknetmanufacturing.com/ATIM. Grantee contact: Michael Baker, Michael.Baker@illinois.gov.

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**Nationally Portable, Stackable Credentials:** All program participants begin with an introductory module in manufacturing and safety, earning them a Manufacturing Skills Standard Council credential. Trainees can complete additional MSSC modules through ATIM that lead to the Certified Production Technician credential as well as earn industry-recognized credentials from the American Welding Society, American Production & Inventory Control Society, and National Institute of Metalworking Skills.

**Paid Internships and OJT:** ATIM incorporates as much work-based learning as possible into a participant’s training plan, easing an obstacle to completion by allowing trainees to “learn & earn.” Depending on the participant’s skill level, internships can precede technical skill training or begin during or following it. ATIM covers 100% of internship wages plus insurance and workman’s compensation, allowing employers to “try before they buy.” On-the-Job training participants are hired with a known skill gap, enabling employers—reimbursed for up to 90% of OJT wages paid—to realize significant savings while trainees acquire necessary skills.