

# Case Study

## Skills Credentials Aid Displaced Manufacturing Workers in Ohio

February 2013

### THE CHALLENGE

Provide opportunities for hundreds of manufacturing employees at soon-to-be-closed plants to earn skills credentials that will convey an objective measure of workplace skills to future employers

### THE SOLUTION

Deploy onsite rapid response teams to each plant, providing instruction and testing for industry-recognized certifications and affording employees a better opportunity to secure employment before or soon after their exit dates

### KEY COMPONENTS

- ACT WorkKeys® assessments and the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC™)
- Manufacturing Skill Standards Council Certified Production Technician (MSSC CPT) training and certification

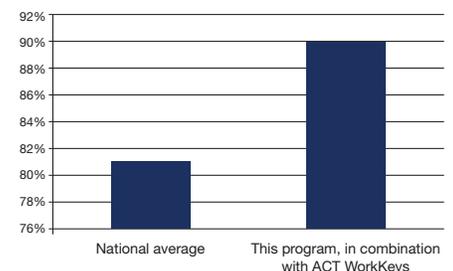
### STATEWIDE RESULTS as of November 2012

- Placement of individuals in new jobs: 425
- Full CPT certifications earned: 422
- NCRCs awarded: 190
- MSSC modular certificates earned: 2,015
- Total number of participants: 1,291

### The Power of Multiple Credentials

- When ACT WorkKeys assessments were used in combination with the MSSC CPT credential, pass rates for all four of the CPT modules exceeded 90%, compared to 81% nationally.
- The CPT pass rate for individuals with an ACT WorkKeys Applied Mathematics score of Level 3 was 59%. The rate increased to 87% for individuals with score of Level 5.
- The CPT pass rate for individuals with an ACT WorkKeys Reading for Information score of Level 4 was 68%, compared to 89% for those with a score of Level 5.
- Of the individuals who earned both the NCRC and MSSC CPT, 45% found employment. Another 25% entered a postsecondary education/training program rather than seek immediate reemployment. The 45% employment success rate is 6% higher than for those who did not earn both credentials.

Passing Rate for All Four CPT Modules



## KEY ORGANIZATIONS

- Manufacturing Skill Standards Council
- Southwest Ohio Region Workforce Investment Board
- Cincinnati Labor Agency for Social Services
- Communications Workers of America

## OVERVIEW

Ohio has been a manufacturing powerhouse for more than a century but has lost nearly 350,000 manufacturing jobs since 2001. However, manufacturing remains crucial to the economy of the state.

As plants closed entirely or downsized dramatically, individuals with decades of manufacturing experience found themselves facing unemployment. Many of these workers began their manufacturing careers right after high school and lacked certifications or diplomas indicative of their skill levels. Meanwhile, employers who were hiring or expanding needed motivated and skilled workers to operate their production equipment but required an objective measure of the skills each prospective employee possessed.

Under the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act, employers planning a closure or mass layoff must provide 60 days' notice to affected workers. Soon after each WARN notice was issued, hundreds of workers faced an exit date when they would no longer have a job.

Early in 2010, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) union was awarded a grant from the US Department of Labor to provide training for displaced manufacturing workers in several counties throughout Ohio. While the grant initially focused on serving displaced autoworkers in several Ohio counties, it was later expanded to other displaced manufacturing workers in Hamilton and Butler counties via a partnership with the Southwest Ohio Region Workforce Investment Board (SWORWIB). At that point, the decision was made to add the NCRC as an additional credential that displaced workers could earn.

In June 2011, President Obama announced the creation of the Advanced Manufacturing Partnership, a public-private collaboration to invest in the nation's manufacturing capabilities. Subsequently, the president announced an initiative to credential 500,000 manufacturing workers with industry-recognized certifications and cited The Manufacturing Institute's NAM-Endorsed Skills Certification System as a national solution.

The foundation of this system is the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate, a gateway credential to the Skills Certification System. Among the certifications within the system is the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council's Certified Production Technician (MSSC CPT) credential, which certifies the core technical skills applicable to all front-line production workers.

Given these events, it was time for Ohio workforce and social service agencies, along with union organizations, to launch new, creative initiatives to serve area workers and employers.

## THE CHALLENGE

Key organizations in this initiative had to persuade workers facing unemployment that their unexpected job search would be more successful if they had industry-recognized, nationally portable credentials to document their skills. The classes and testing would need to be initiated, if not accomplished, before the workers' exit dates. This required an accelerated yet flexible schedule, at a convenient location, at no cost to the individual. The ideal outcome: secure a new job, equivalent to or better than the current position, prior to or soon after the individual's exit date. This would maximize the individual's opportunities while eliminating the need for unemployment benefits.

## FINDING A SOLUTION

**They need something on their resume aside from their work experience—they need a way to stand out from other applicants. Industry-recognized skills certifications are a way to do that.**

**Cathy Metcalf**, executive director,  
Cincinnati Labor Agency for Social  
Services

"The MSSC CPT certification seemed the most applicable to the majority of our displaced manufacturing sector workers," says Sherry Kelley Marshall, president and CEO of SWORWIB, serving Cincinnati and Hamilton counties. "Employers who hire a Certified Production Technician know that they are getting someone with strong baseline skills in manufacturing, someone who can work in a team environment, and someone who will help the company's productivity, safety record, and quality assurance."

The Manufacturing Skill Standards Council designed the modules and assessments for the CPT certification using national standards based on input from 4,000 workers at 700 companies, plus 300 subject matter experts, according to Rebekah Hutton, director of research and government relations for the council.

The CPT certification is built on four modules: Safety, Quality Practices and Measurement, Manufacturing Processes and Production, and Maintenance Awareness. Individuals must work through online curricula and take an assessment for each module.

SWORWIB leadership began to work with the Cincinnati Labor Agency for Social Services (CLASS) on implementation of a five-week "fast track" CPT model. Cathy Metcalf, executive director of CLASS, and Marshall of SWORWIB agreed that asking each worker to prepare for and take ACT WorkKeys assessments would be an essential component of the plan. "With an accelerated program, it is extremely important that we measure and confirm the individuals' foundational skills first," says Metcalf. "The CPT curricula and tests are challenging, so it's essential that each person's skills are sufficient to ensure success with the rest of the program."

Marshall adds, "As we began to implement the plan, it just made sense to have the workers take all three ACT WorkKeys assessments and earn the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate. It's another nationally recognized credential, it's portable, employers like it, and it improves the results of a job search."

## IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

The Hamilton County plants where rapid response operations were deployed included Avon Products, Inc., Beam Global Spirits & Wine, and Graphic Packaging, as a total of nearly 1,500 workers were to be displaced from the three plants. In each case, the employers supported onsite training and welcomed presentations to employees. The program was later expanded to nearby Butler County, which was experiencing multiple plant closings.

**The NCRC allows them to demonstrate their intelligence and competency. When you see workers without a high school diploma or GED scoring 6s on their ACT WorkKeys tests, you see a visible boost in self-confidence.”**

**Sherry Kelley Marshall**, president and CEO, Southwest Ohio Region Workforce Investment Board

To help build credibility, Metcalf shares her experience as a 22-year employee of an Indiana auto parts manufacturer that closed. “I tell them how things have changed in the job search process. I let them know that it’s important to know how to use a computer to submit an application online. I tell them that they need something on their resume aside from their work experience—they need a way to stand out from other applicants. Industry-recognized skills certifications are a way to do that. And I tell them it will take a lot of work, but the team will be there every step of the way.”

“I also tell them,” adds Metcalf, “that the last thing they want to have happen is to apply for a position, then take the ACT WorkKeys assessments and fail. That means the end of that opportunity. But if they earn the NCRC now, using ACT KeyTrain® coursework to improve their scores if needed, then they have a leg up on other candidates and don’t have to worry about testing later.”

Funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and the State of Ohio made it possible to install up to 20 laptop computers in a lab at each company for use by the still-employed workers before or after their shifts. Additional transition centers with computers were available at union halls, employment centers, and other sites operated by community-based organizations. Workers were able to work through ACT KeyTrain curricula to prepare for their ACT WorkKeys assessments, take their assessments in a proctored environment to earn the NCRC, and attend classes and complete coursework and testing for the required modules to earn the MSSC CPT credential. Employees with nearer-term exit dates were given priority in class scheduling.

Marshall believes that in today’s economy and workplace, “Employers expect an objective definition of skill sets. In Ohio, we have a manufacturing workforce that is bright and experienced but not necessarily well educated. The NCRC offers those individuals who didn’t finish high school or pursue higher education a new credential to help document knowledge and skills. The NCRC allows them to demonstrate their intelligence and competency. When you see workers without a high school diploma or GED scoring 6s on their ACT WorkKeys tests, you see a visible boost in self-confidence.”

Kathleen Williams, youth and public information coordinator at SWORWIB and a former rapid response coordinator in Butler County, adds, “These workers are very motivated. In most cases, they spend up to four hours in the classroom before or after working a full shift at the plant. They really want these credentials for their resume, and I think that says a lot to prospective employers. We’ve talked to several of the workers who found employment at good companies earning good wages, and they definitely credit these credentials as helping them advance to new opportunities.”

The onsite computer lab/classrooms, with instruction available before and after work shifts, helped make the process convenient. But it was also important to accelerate the pace so workers could complete their credentials prior to their exit dates. “The fast-track

element was essential,” explains Metcalf. “Our program made it possible to earn the NCRC and a CPT credential in only five weeks—an intense five weeks to be sure—but five weeks was our goal.”

Both Metcalf and Marshall believe that The Manufacturing Institute’s NAM-Endorsed Skills Certification System has it exactly right: the NCRC should be the gateway credential because it helps document an individual’s cognitive skills. Marshall says, “ACT WorkKeys testing is important for MSSC coursework readiness even if the program isn’t an accelerated program. You need to know if the individual can read, understand, do math, and solve problems at a credible level before you launch into an intensive curriculum. In my book, the NCRC and MSSC work hand in glove.”

Metcalf explains, “With lean manufacturing, middle-level supervisors and managers that used to be around to solve problems went away. They were considered an unproductive expense that detracted from lean goals. So now it’s more important that all workers can think and make decisions on their own. Credentials help prove that those critical thinking skills are present.”

## OUTCOMES

When ACT WorkKeys assessments were used in combination with the MSSC CPT credential, pass rates for all four of the CPT modules exceeded 90%—nine points above the national average.

In addition, higher ACT WorkKeys scores translated to higher pass rates on the CPT course exams. For example:

- The CPT pass rate for individuals with an ACT WorkKeys Applied Mathematics score of Level 5 was 87%, compared to 59% for those with a score of Level 3.
- The CPT pass rate for individuals with an ACT WorkKeys Reading for Information score of Level 5 was 89%, compared to 68% for those with a score of Level 4.

Of the individuals who earned both the NCRC and MSSC CPT, 45% found employment and another 25% entered a postsecondary education/training program rather than seek immediate reemployment. The 45% employment success rate is 6% higher than for those who did not earn both credentials.

According to Marshall, some members of Cincinnati’s Advanced Manufacturing Career Pathways Collaborative have taken ACT WorkKeys assessments themselves. Many members now guarantee an interview to applicants with the NCRC and an MSSC CPT credential. And in addition to the guaranteed interview, some provide a 50-cent-per-hour increase in the salary offer.

Marshall says, “As a public sector servant, I’d much rather invest in people being trained before they lose their jobs. I enjoy seeing them succeed in their training, earn their credentials, and avoid unemployment benefits because their last check at the closed plant is followed by their first check from the new job.”

Metcalf adds, “When I can help a person who thinks his world just ended with that WARN notice, I think I just may have one of the best jobs in America.”

**We’ve talked to several of the workers who found employment at good companies earning good wages, and they definitely credit these credentials as helping them advance to new opportunities.**

**Kathleen Williams**, youth and public information coordinator, Southwest Ohio Region Workforce Investment Board

## SUCCESS STORY

Adrian Waites was working for Mohawk Fine Papers in Hamilton, Ohio, as a “back tender.” He was just months shy of his 30-year mark with the firm when Mohawk announced its decision to shut down the Hamilton operation entirely. Employees were given about 60 days’ notice. Adrian was responsible for monitoring the measurements of the paper, including weight, caliper width, watermark clarity, curl, smoothness, and moisture content, as well as overall appearance. He was a front-line worker responsible for the quality of the plant’s output.

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**Cathy Metcalf**, executive director,  
Cincinnati Labor Agency for Social  
Services

When the closing was announced, Cathy Metcalf spoke at the plant. She said that the better-paying jobs would require certifications. She recommended that all individuals consider coming to the onsite classroom at Mohawk to prepare for and take their ACT WorkKeys assessments to earn the National Career Readiness Certificate and also complete the coursework and testing to become Certified Production Technicians—an MSSC certification.

“I didn’t want to do it,” Adrian recalls, as he had been out of the classroom for decades. “The experience was better than I thought it would be. The instructors were great and really helped break down the content to make it easier to understand and remember.”

He earned a Silver-level NCRC but may retake Locating Information to try for a Gold.

Adrian applied at a distillery in Lawrenceburg, Indiana, 38 miles—about an hour’s drive—from his newly constructed home in Hamilton. When he interviewed at the former Seagram’s distillery, now owned by Midwest Grain Products (MGP), the interviewer’s second question focused on skill certifications. Adrian believes that his NCRC and CPT credentials helped his chances. He was hired as a distillery operator. He’s grateful to be working.

Adrian tells about a coworker at the paper mill who chose not to do the NCRC and MSSC training/testing. That person remains unemployed.

When asked why he thinks employers care about skills certifications, he responded, “It shows you can think on your own. That’s what they want.”



