



The Center to Advance Manufacturing Monthly News

June 2026

As we share what will be the Center to Advance Manufacturing's final newsletter, I've spent a great deal of time reflecting on the work accomplished through this unique regional partnership over the past several years.

Established through a grant-funded collaboration between Bowling Green State University, Owens Community College, and the University of Findlay, the Center was created with a clear purpose: to strengthen connections between higher education and industry across Northwest Ohio and help support the evolving needs of the region's manufacturing sector.

Throughout the life of the grant, the Center served as a convener for discussions impacting manufacturing today and into the future. Together, we established advisory boards, hosted regional summits and workshops, organized workforce training sessions, supported emerging efforts around automation, AI, and advanced manufacturing technologies, and connected employers directly to critical resources. The Center also helped elevate regional awareness around workforce transformation, innovation, and the future of advanced manufacturing in Northwest Ohio.

As a result, we've seen meaningful investments in equipment, facilities, workforce training, and industry partnerships across all three partner institutions.

While the Center's formal operations will conclude at the end of June, the partnerships and momentum created through this work will continue moving forward. Manufacturing remains a major driver of Northwest Ohio's economy, and Bowling Green State University, Owens Community College, and the University of Findlay remain committed to supporting industry engagement, workforce development, and regional collaboration in the years ahead. Inside this newsletter, you'll find more information about how each partner institution plans to continue building on this momentum, along with an update on how Jeri Steinbrook and I will continue supporting advanced manufacturing-related efforts at BGSU.

On behalf of the Center, thank you to everyone who contributed to this work over the years — our manufacturers, educational partners, economic development organizations, workforce agencies, legislators, students, and community stakeholders. Your collaboration, engagement, and willingness to share ideas and perspectives helped shape the Center's work and strengthened the manufacturing ecosystem across the region.

It has been an honor for Jeri and me to support this work through the Center, and we look forward to continuing to advance manufacturing-related engagement in new ways through BGSU.

Sincerely,

Kassie Cooper
Director

Center Hosts Northwest Ohio Manufacturing Legislative Roundtable

The Center recently hosted the Northwest Ohio Manufacturing Legislative Roundtable at Bowling Green State University, bringing together manufacturers, legislators, higher education leaders, workforce partners, economic development organizations, and CTE representatives for a regional discussion on the future of manufacturing in Northwest Ohio.

Workforce and talent development emerged as a central theme throughout the discussion. Participants emphasized the importance of strengthening long-term talent pipelines through early exposure to manufacturing careers, STEM engagement, career technical education, educator awareness, and experiential learning opportunities. Manufacturers also discussed the evolving workforce implications tied to automation, artificial intelligence, and advanced manufacturing technologies, including the growing need for adaptable training pathways, upskilling opportunities, and critical thinking skills as technologies continue to reshape operations and job roles.

The conversation also highlighted the importance of helping students, families, and educators better understand the breadth of opportunities available in modern manufacturing. Participants noted that many perceptions of the industry do not fully reflect today’s advanced, technology-driven environments or the wide range of career pathways available across engineering, production, maintenance, quality, logistics, supply chain, leadership, and operations. Continued collaboration between manufacturers, schools, colleges, universities, and workforce partners was identified as essential to building awareness and helping students connect their interests and skills to meaningful career opportunities in the region.

Additional discussions centered on infrastructure and regional capacity, including utility demand, energy considerations, and the broader impacts of large-scale industrial and technology-related development across Northwest Ohio. Participants emphasized the need for long-term planning to help the region remain competitive while supporting future growth.

Manufacturers also shared perspectives on broader business conditions affecting growth and competitiveness, including supply chain pressures, the pace of technology adoption, and the need for responsive policy and funding mechanisms that support workforce training and operational modernization.

The roundtable reinforced the value of ongoing communication and collaboration across sectors as manufacturing continues to evolve. The Center extends its appreciation to all who participated in this year’s discussion and contributed their perspectives and insights.





Center Supports Early Manufacturing Career Awareness Through Innovators Quest Kits



To support early manufacturing career awareness and hands-on student engagement, the Center purchased Innovators Quest kits for each partner institution.

Developed by the Manufacturing Institute, Innovators Quest is a game-based learning experience for students in grades 4–9 that introduces manufacturing concepts through team-based challenges. Activities highlight skills and concepts such as additive manufacturing, robotics, electromechanical components, quality control, communication, problem-solving, and teamwork. The experience is designed to be used with manufacturer support, helping students connect classroom-style activities to real-world manufacturing careers.

The purchase was informed by themes that emerged during the Design Thinking session at the Center's annual Advanced Manufacturing Summit, where participants discussed how to make manufacturing careers more visible, exciting, and accessible to younger generations. Early exposure, hands-on engagement, and creative approaches to career awareness were identified as important strategies for helping students better understand the opportunities available in modern manufacturing.

To support implementation, the Center also collaborated on a training session with the Manufacturing Institute (*pictured above*), giving participating faculty and staff an opportunity to walk through the game, better understand the facilitation model, and brainstorm ways the kits could be used through camps, campus visits, employer partnerships, and other K–12 engagement activities.

Each partner institution will be able to use the kits in collaboration with local manufacturers through summer camps, campus visits, K–12 outreach activities, or other student engagement opportunities. Through this investment, the Center is helping provide BGSU, Owens Community College, and the University of Findlay with a practical tool to support future talent development and strengthen connections between students, educators, and industry partners.

Connecting Employers to Workforce Resources in Wyandot County

In partnership with the Wyandot County Office of Economic Development, the Center hosted a workforce training workshop focused on Ohio's TechCred program and broader strategies for supporting workforce upskilling.

The session brought together area employers for a discussion on workforce training needs, credential planning, and available resources to help companies strengthen employee skills and respond to changing industry demands. In addition to reviewing key elements of the TechCred process, the workshop provided an opportunity for employers to ask questions, share challenges, and consider how training programs can be used strategically to support both current workforce needs and long-term talent development.



Workshops like this help connect employers with practical information and regional partners who can support their workforce goals. The Center appreciates the employers who participated in the conversation and thanks the Wyandot County Office of Economic Development for partnering on this session.

University of Findlay: Advancing Workforce Development and Industry-Focused Training



With support from the Center, the University of Findlay has demonstrated a strong commitment to advancing innovation and workforce development within manufacturing in Northwest Ohio. UF has undertaken several initiatives designed to support manufacturers, strengthen regional partnerships, and expand career awareness and training opportunities. These ongoing efforts include:

- Promoting manufacturing as a preferential career pathway by incorporating Innovators Quest kits into the Mazza Museum’s STEM camps for area 5th and 6th grade students beginning in fall 2026.
- Strengthening cross-cultural workplace communication for manufacturers through the creation of UF’s Corporate English Partnership Program (CEPP).
- Continuing to invest in and enhance hands-on safety training for manufacturing and industrial settings through UF’s [All Hazards Training Center](#).
- Hosting and facilitating industry-focused workshops and summits regarding innovations in areas such as artificial intelligence, automation, safety, security, and sustainability.
- Creating innovative microcredentials and certificates that help with “upskilling” employees within the manufacturing space, including those which focus on leadership, innovation, and essential business skills.
- Developing strategic partnerships with area K-12 schools, our higher education partners (e.g., Owens and BGSU), and nonprofit organizations to enhance workforce creation and economic development in sectors with a heavy manufacturing footprint, including Agriculture and Life Sciences.

UF looks forward to future collaborative opportunities with BGSU, Owens Community College, and other educators and regional manufacturing stakeholders to strengthen solutions, expand opportunities, and support continued growth in the sector. To learn more about the University of Findlay’s manufacturing-related initiatives or potential collaboration opportunities, please contact Nathan Tice, Chair of the Department of Physical Sciences and Associate Professor of Chemistry, at tice@findlay.edu.

Owens Community College: Strengthening Skilled Trades and Manufacturing Talent



For over 60 years, Owens Community College has supported the region’s manufacturing workforce. Today, Owens continues to help prepare the next generation of talent through cutting-edge Mechanical Engineering Technology programming, advanced AI education, and custom training solutions designed for business organizations and delivered where and when it’s needed.



Collaboration remains central to this work. Owens designs apprenticeship and “earn and learn” programs that provide flexible skilled trades training for employees, while also igniting passion in the next generation through hands-on experiences that showcase high-tech manufacturing careers, including STEM Summer Camps and the annual *Jill of All Trades* event each October.

Real innovation happens together, and recent work with the Center to Advance Manufacturing proved exactly that. By partnering with Bowling Green State University and the University of Findlay, Owens expanded a powerful ecosystem driving local industry innovation and advocacy.

Owens remains deeply dedicated to this teamwork and continues to work hand-in-hand with employers to solve training challenges, maximize funding opportunities such as TechCred, and build seamless pathways to advanced degrees with our university partners.

Our shared achievements prove that strong partnerships build a stronger workforce. To learn more about workforce training opportunities and educational solutions at Owens Community College, contact Charlene Page, Executive Director of Workforce and Economic Development, at charlene_page@owens.edu.

Bowling Green State University: Building Pathways for Advanced Manufacturing Talent



Bowling Green State University remains committed to supporting the advanced manufacturing sector and recognizes the important role manufacturing plays in Northwest Ohio’s economic future. Through investments in high-demand academic programs, modern facilities, applied learning, and industry partnerships, BGSU continues to strengthen pathways that benefit both students and regional employers.

A key example is the new Engineering and Innovation Center, a 77,000-square-foot facility designed to support hands-on learning, research, prototyping, workforce development, and industry collaboration. The facility includes state-of-the-art lab spaces connected to areas such as robotics, electronics, computer engineering, and advanced manufacturing, helping students gain experience with the tools, technologies, and collaborative environments they will encounter in the workforce.

BGSU is also aligning academic programming with emerging industry needs through programs such as Robotics Engineering, Electronics and Computer Engineering, Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering, and the customizable AI + X bachelor’s degree. These programs reflect the growing need for graduates who can work across disciplines and support advanced manufacturing environments shaped by automation, data, artificial intelligence, robotics, engineering, business, supply chain, and technology.

Building on these investments, BGSU is launching the Advanced Manufacturing Career Accelerator to create earlier and more intentional connections between students and industry. The Accelerator is designed as a flexible, curated series of career-building experiences that gives students direct access to manufacturers throughout their time at BGSU. Industry partners will have opportunities to engage through advisory board participation, classroom engagement, events, networking opportunities, career treks, site visits, career conversations, and real-world projects. The goal is to help students gain clearer career direction and stronger professional connections while helping employers build earlier relationships with future talent.

Manufacturers interested in learning more about the BGSU Advanced Manufacturing Career Accelerator, partnership opportunities, or ways to engage with students can click [here](#).

Looking Ahead

As the Center concludes operations, Kassie Cooper and Jeri Steinbrook are grateful for the opportunity to continue supporting manufacturing-related engagement as part of BGSU’s broader efforts to connect students, employers, educators, and workforce partners. While their roles will look different moving forward, their work will continue to build on the relationships and momentum developed through the Center.

Kassie will transition into the role of Director of the BGSU Advanced Manufacturing Career Accelerator, where she will help lead student-industry engagement efforts connected to advanced manufacturing career pathways, employer partnerships, and experiential learning (*see accelerator details above*). Jeri will continue supporting workforce efforts through BGSU by helping employers and learners navigate and fully benefit from current and emerging opportunities.

As this work continues in exciting ways through BGSU, partners are encouraged to stay connected. Kassie can be reached at kassiec@bgsu.edu and Jeri can be reached at jeris@bgsu.edu.