



The Center to Advance Manufacturing Monthly News

May 2025

In-Demand Jobs Week, recognized each May in Ohio, serves as a timely reminder of the vital role talent plays in driving our state's economy—especially in manufacturing.

As industries modernize, the jobs powering them are changing rapidly. The most in-demand roles today reflect a growing blend of traditional trade skills and advanced technology capabilities. Maintenance technicians, automation specialists, quality engineers, and skilled machinists remain critical—but are now joined by roles like robotics programmers, mechatronics technicians, and data-savvy production supervisors. These positions aren't just supporting production; they're shaping its future.

National reports continue to reinforce what we see regionally: the path forward depends on workforce agility. AI, intelligent automation, and machine learning are accelerating the pace of change on the shop floor, creating new efficiencies but also raising the bar for technical knowledge. A recent article from *Manufacturing Dive* noted that roles in automation, maintenance, and process improvement are among the hardest to fill, while *ThomasNet* emphasized that factory jobs are no longer "blue collar" in the traditional sense—they're becoming "new collar," requiring a unique mix of technical skills and adaptability.

At the same time, retention and upskilling remain top priorities. The workforce of tomorrow isn't just about filling roles—it's about equipping people to grow alongside innovation. As one industry analyst noted, companies that succeed in this environment will be those that invest in talent just as intentionally as they invest in technology.

At the Center to Advance Manufacturing, we view In-Demand Jobs Week as more than a moment of awareness—it's a reflection point. How can we better align education with industry? How do we create pathways for advancement in an era where job roles shift faster than ever before? And how do we ensure that manufacturers in Northwest Ohio have access to the skilled talent they need not just to compete, but to lead?

To help answer these questions, we're hosting a Regional Workforce Collaboration Roundtable in June, in partnership with BGSU's Center for Regional Development. The session will bring together manufacturers, educators, workforce professionals, and economic development leaders to dive into recent workforce research—including insights from our regional automotive workforce study and local Industry Sector Partnership initiatives. Together, we'll explore strategies for closing skills gaps and building a stronger, more resilient talent pipeline. (*See page two for full event details and registration information.*)

As we look ahead, one thing is clear: the future of manufacturing will be shaped by those who can adapt, collaborate, and build talent with intention. We're proud to be a part of that work—and grateful to each of you for the role you play in advancing our region's workforce.

As always, we welcome the opportunity to connect and support your efforts. Feel free to reach out at anytime!

—The Center to Advance Manufacturing Team

University of Findlay Supply Chain Students Wrap Up Spring Tour Series

Dr. Ekpen Owie of the University of Findlay partnered with the Center to lead a multi-site tour series—culminating in visits to Ohio Logistics and Kreate in Findlay to give students firsthand exposure to manufacturing and logistics careers.

At Ohio Logistics, students toured the company's expansive warehousing and distribution operations. Led by President and CEO Chuck Bills, the visit offered insight into inventory management, supply chain coordination, and the technologies driving efficiency across facilities.

The tour series concluded at Kreate, where Director of Supply Chain John Kerr led students through a high-speed manufacturing environment focused on automation, lean processes, and customer responsiveness.

These visits help bridge classroom learning with real-world experience, building student awareness of in-demand careers across the supply chain. Many thanks to Ohio Logistics, Kreate, and all our industry partners for supporting the next generation of supply chain professionals!

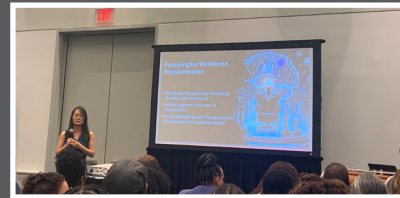


Exploring Workforce Trends in an AI-Powered Era

Center Workforce Training Coordinator Jeri Steinbrook recently attended the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals Conference, a dynamic event focused on the future of workforce development in an AI-driven world.

The conference featured sessions on AI integration, leadership succession planning, labor market shifts, and strategies for building inclusive talent pipelines. Key discussions addressed how to support veterans and multilingual workers, leverage data to guide workforce strategies, and respond to rapid changes in technology and talent needs.

One of the strongest takeaways was the continued importance of human connection, mindful leadership, and cross-sector collaboration in navigating change. Jeri left with actionable insights on reskilling, ethical uses of AI, and strengthening systems to better serve both current and future workforce demands.



Dr. Joanne Wang from Vanderbilt University's School of Engineering presented to a standing-room-only audience on preparing for an AI-transformed workplace.

REGIONAL WORKFORCE COLLABORATION ROUNDTABLE

Tuesday, June 3 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

BGSU Levis Commons

REGISTER TODAY [HERE](#)



You're Invited: Regional Workforce Collaboration Roundtable

The Center to Advance Manufacturing, in collaboration with BGSU's Center for Regional Development (CRD), is hosting a Regional Workforce Collaboration Roundtable to strengthen dialogue and foster collaboration around workforce development efforts in Northwest Ohio.

This interactive session will feature highlights from CTAM's recent Northwest Ohio automotive workforce analysis, insights from CRD's manufacturing workforce listening sessions, and updates from regional Industry Sector Partnership (ISP) initiatives. Following these presentations, attendees will engage in a roundtable discussion focused on identifying workforce challenges, closing skill gaps, and exploring collaborative solutions to support industry and economic growth across the region.

We invite manufacturers, workforce development professionals, educational partners, and regional leaders to join the conversation and help shape future strategies for building a stronger workforce in Northwest Ohio. Registration is limited -- Secure your seat [here!](#)

Decades of declining birth rates have led to a widespread shortage of working-age individuals (ages 16–64) in the U.S. and much of the world. This demographic shift has triggered a labor crisis that is already impacting the automotive sector—and nearly all industries and occupations. Without intentional strategies, this crisis will only intensify.

In the U.S., the population is projected to grow by 18 million by 2032, yet the workforce will expand by only 2.1 million—a ratio of 8:1. In 1950, there were 5.8 prime working-age Americans (ages 25–64) for every person age 65 or older. Today, that ratio has dropped to 2.9, and it is expected to continue declining for decades. To remain competitive, we must invest in strategies to recruit, train, retain, and continuously upskill the workforce of tomorrow. *(Source: The Rising Storm, Lightcast 2024)*

Understanding and clearly articulating the range of skills needed in today’s—and tomorrow’s—workforce is essential to developing effective education and training strategies. Unfortunately, these conversations are often hindered by overly broad terms that lead to misunderstanding and misalignment. Take “soft skills,” for example—a commonly identified area for workforce improvement. This key term generally encompasses everything from basic workplace behaviors (punctuality, dress, teamwork) to more advanced competencies like leadership, conflict resolution, and emotional intelligence. Without further clarification, it becomes too ambiguous to drive meaningful action. To make progress, we need more precise and consistent ways to define and categorize critical skill sets.

One way to improve workforce discussions is to identify broad but distinct groups of related skills. In a manufacturing environment, three core skill categories are essential:

1. **Foundational Skills** are the baseline expectations for any employee, regardless of role or setting. These include punctuality, dependability, appropriate workplace behavior, and basic communication. While specific expectations may vary from remote to on-site work, these are universal threshold criteria for employment.
2. **Essential Job Skills** are role-specific competencies that allow employees to perform their primary job functions safely and effectively. These range from operating machinery and maintaining equipment to overseeing production lines or specialized tasks. Workers in these roles must also possess the relevant foundational skills.
3. **Cross-Cutting Skills** go beyond technical requirements and are often the differentiators for long-term growth and advancement. These include critical thinking, problem-solving, understanding systems and workflows, continuous improvement, and proactive decision-making. These skills are valued across industries and can significantly impact individual and organizational success.

All employees must possess the Foundational Skills and Essential Job Skills required for their roles. Essential Job Skills are typically narrow and task-specific, though they can be highly advanced depending on the role. Cross-Cutting Skills, by contrast, are broadly applicable across roles and industries. These skills are sometimes core job requirements; in other cases, they are preferred attributes that enhance team performance and organizational agility.

The **Northwest Ohio Automotive Manufacturing Sector Study** completed in partnership with the Center for Automotive Research in December 2024, confirmed high demand for both Essential Job Skills and Cross-Cutting Skills across the region’s manufacturing workforce. A sample of these high-priority skills is outlined in the table below.

Essential Job Skills	Cross-Cutting Skills
Maintenance and Repair	Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
Machine Operators	Continuous Improvement/Quality Mgt.
Mechanical Engineers	Willingness to Learn
Manufacturing Assemblers	Conflict Resolution
Electrical Engineers	Adapting to Change
Skilled Trades	Leadership

The demand for both of these skill sets reflects manufacturers’ efforts to train new employees and upskill existing ones as they modernize operations and replace a retiring workforce. It also suggests that employers increasingly expect employees not only to perform their individual tasks, but to collaborate on process improvements and engage in problem-solving. The growing emphasis on Cross-Cutting Skills indicates that companies are seeking individuals who can help them adapt, innovate, and compete in a rapidly changing global economy.

The Center and its partners are committed to developing and expanding programs that address these workforce needs and make upskilling opportunities more accessible for Northwest Ohio’s manufacturers

Understanding Foreign Trade Zones

Foreign Trade Zones (FTZs) are secure areas located within the United States but considered outside U.S. Customs territory for duty assessment and entry procedures. They allow companies to store, assemble, manufacture, or repackage imported goods before the goods officially enter U.S. commerce.

Created to encourage international trade and support domestic job growth, FTZs offer a range of logistical and financial benefits for manufacturers, logistics providers, and other businesses involved in global supply chains.

What are the Benefits?

Companies operating within an FTZ may benefit from:

- **Duty Deferral** – No duties are paid on goods while they remain in the zone.
- **Duty Elimination** – No duties are paid on re-exported goods.
- **Inverted Tariff Relief** – If finished products carry a lower duty than the raw materials used to make them, companies can choose the lower rate.
- **Improved Cash Flow** – By deferring or reducing duties, companies retain more working capital.
- **Customs Efficiencies** – Streamlined customs procedures, including weekly entry filings, can reduce paperwork and administrative costs. This can be a particularly valuable benefit for companies importing high volumes or high-value goods, as it can significantly reduce Merchandise Processing Fees.
- **Inventory Control & Security** – FTZ operators are subject to rigorous inventory tracking and security standards, often improving internal operations.

FTZ vs. Bonded Warehouses

While both Foreign Trade Zones (FTZs) and bonded warehouses offer ways to defer duties on imported goods, they operate under different regulations and serve distinct purposes. Bonded warehouses are located within U.S. Customs territory and allow goods to be stored for up to five years without duty payment. These facilities are generally used for storage and limited handling, such as repackaging or labeling, with duties paid when goods are withdrawn for domestic use. Under current regulations, the duty or tariff rate is determined at the time the product leaves the bonded warehouse and enters U.S. commerce.

FTZs, on the other hand, are considered outside U.S. Customs territory for tariff purposes, and goods may be stored indefinitely. They also allow for a broader range of activities, including manufacturing and assembly. A key advantage under FTZ rules is that the duty or tariff rate is locked in at the time of entry into the zone, which can offer protection against future increases. FTZs are often more integrated into ongoing production or logistics operations and may provide greater flexibility and long-term cost savings. The choice between the two depends on a company's specific supply chain needs, regulatory requirements, and operational goals. Companies should also consider the administrative oversight, recordkeeping, and security measures required under each model when determining which option best aligns with their operations.

Want to Learn More?

If your organization is involved in importing, exporting, or managing global supply chains, exploring FTZ designation could be a valuable strategic move. If you're interested in learning more about how FTZs work and how they compare to bonded warehouses, feel free to reach out to the Center—we'd be happy to connect you with resources or discuss how this tool could benefit your operation. We also hosted a webinar on this topic, which you can view at your convenience [here](#).

Ohio Manufacturers Association Workforce Committee Meeting

The Center was proud to sponsor and participate in the Ohio Manufacturers' Association's inaugural Workforce Committee meeting, where manufacturers and partners from across the state gathered to address Ohio's most pressing talent challenges.

The meeting featured opening remarks from Lt. Governor Jim Tressel (pictured right) and Jessica Voltolini, Chief of Staff at the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce. Discussions focused on 2025 workforce priorities, recent developments in Industry Sector Partnership (ISP) initiatives, and upcoming policy considerations shaping the state's workforce strategy.



Kassie Cooper, Marketing Projects Manager at the Center, was honored to share a few words about the Center's mission and our ongoing efforts to connect industry, education, and workforce partners across Northwest Ohio. Events like this are a powerful reminder of the momentum building around talent development statewide—and we look forward to continuing these important conversations in the months ahead.

Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce Capitol Conversations

Leaders from across Northwest Ohio convened in Columbus for the Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce's annual Capitol Conversations event, which offered timely updates from key officials in state government on a wide range of policy issues.

Ford Weber, Center Program Manager, attended the event alongside regional partners for discussions that covered small business support, energy policy, workforce development, childcare, and Ohio's state budgeting process.

The event brought together key voices to discuss the policy landscape shaping Ohio's business and workforce environment.



Ohio Department of Development Director Lydia Mihalik addressing attendees during the event.

Center for Automotive Research Industry Briefing Explores Trends Shaping Automotive Manufacturing

Center staff attended the Center for Automotive Research's (CAR) Q2 Industry Briefing in Toledo, held under the theme "Powering a New Era: Electrify, Compete, Transform."

The event, sponsored by the Regional Growth Partnership and JobsOhio, provided updates on electric vehicle adoption, policy developments, global trade dynamics, and emerging risks in the industry. Sessions also addressed broader workforce and economic trends influencing the future of automotive manufacturing.

The agenda included a spotlight on the Northwest Ohio Automotive Manufacturing Sector Study, a collaborative effort between the Center and CAR that examined the regional automotive landscape and provided actionable recommendations for industry stakeholders.



CAR Industry Analyst Tyler Harp presenting findings from the Northwest Ohio Automotive Manufacturing Sector Study during the briefing.

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