

Responding to the Renaissance in Manufacturing:

Opportunities and Challenges to Diversify the Workforce in Buffalo

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Introduction

Buffalo, New York is one of many cities in this country impacted by deindustrialization, with decades of manufacturing layoffs leaving behind scars for those who still reside there. Yet, as with many former manufacturing hubs, Buffalo is seeing a revival of the industry. Companies in the city and across the region are struggling to hire entry level production workers, as well as facing a shortage of skilled production workers as journey level workers retire. According to a manufacturing consulting firm, employers will need to fill 17,000 production jobs by 2020 due to attritions and retirements in the region's manufacturing sector.¹ Though manufacturing employment in Western New York has declined from 80,000 in 2000, the last ten years has seen employment levels stabilize at roughly 51,000 workers.² For the Black community in Buffalo, which has suffered from generations of poverty and discrimination, the current drive to fill openings offers a chance to access skilled, family sustaining careers in advanced manufacturing. Opportunities are also open for women, people with disabilities, the formerly incarcerated and other underrepresented populations in the industry.

This report examines how organizations in Buffalo are taking advantage of the employment opportunities in manufacturing to diversify the workforce. Through a series of focus groups and one-on-one interviews conducted in August and September 2018, 23 representatives from business, government and community organizations weighed in on three questions: What are the barriers preventing targeted populations from accessing careers in advanced manufacturing? What are efforts underway to address those barriers? What else needs to be done to achieve diversity in the manufacturing sector? What follows is a summary of those discussions.

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Key Findings From Interviews On Expanding Workforce Diversity in Manufacturing

Challenges	Efforts to address challenges	What more could be done
Limited access to jobs and training opportunities via public transit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplementing buses with app-based trips • Employer provided shuttles • Training facilities offer bus passes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand NFTA service • Expand use of employer shuttles • Re-launch car buying program • Legal services for those without driver's licenses • Credit card system for bus passes
Applicants failing drug tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education on what's at stake • Encourage open communication • Individualized testing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow re-testing
Poor image of manufacturing jobs= lack of applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manufacturing career day • Facility tours • Market longer term career path • Social media promotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase entry level wages • Marketing to students, parents and guidance counselors
Lack of employer investment in training & apprenticeship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer incentives to expand apprenticeship • Employer education and outreach • Entry level apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship launched and expanded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater employer investment in on-the-job training • Integrate pre-apprenticeship into school system
Applicants fail to meet minimum criteria for entry level jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach soft and hard skills • Pre-apprenticeship launched 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect math and literacy teaching to technical education
Lack of relationships and trust between employers, recruiters and communities of color	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate training programs within diverse neighborhoods • Personal relationships between recruiters and employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater racial diversity of company leaders • Training for recruiters on importance of diversity
Manufacturing culture not always welcoming to underrepresented populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership development initiatives for women and people of color 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modernize the culture of manufacturing
Poorly coordinated workforce development system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating job placement services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centralized info on apprenticeship and job opportunities

Challenge: Limited access to jobs and training opportunities via public transit

This was raised as the most critical challenge to diversifying the manufacturing workforce. Many of the region's manufacturing facilities are outside of Buffalo's bus system. Even if plants are accessible by bus, work shifts often fall outside the schedule. Catherine Muth supports the Northland Workforce Training Center through her position with the Buffalo Niagara Manufacturers Alliance (BNMA). She described the problem: "My greatest fear is actually placing someone in a company and then they can't get there. The credibility of [Northland] is lost. The transit issue leads to difficult workforce development issues and a bigger difficulty in gaining a diverse workforce."³ Several recruiters we interviewed noted that they do not attempt to place their clients at companies that are not accessible by transit, and others mentioned that particularly for women, the safety of the bus and rail stations is an issue.

Efforts to address the challenge:

Employers offer shuttles

During their peak holiday season, Fisher Price runs shuttles for customer service employees between their facility and two main NFTA stops. Some companies either pay for private van service or reimburse their employees for operating their own van pools.

Training facilities and recruiters offer bus passes

Western New York Catholic Charities regularly purchases bus passes for their clients to access training and jobs. Northland WTC also offers bus passes for students and is coordinating with the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) to ensure that bus schedules are aligned with their expanding training schedule.

What more could be done:

Expand NFTA service to access more facilities

Several years ago, when New Era Cap Company ball cap company had a need for new employees, the NFTA initiated shuttle service to transport the mostly immigrant, transit dependent population to and from the company's facility outside the city. Interviewees noted that effectiveness of the program and felt that it should be replicated.

Expand use of employer provided shuttles

Heather Gresham of the Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Investment Board wants to see more employers adopt a shuttle system like Fisher Price: "If more employers would buy into that model, particularly employers along a corridor, it would be beneficial...There are ways to construct a program like that that would be a win-win for everyone."⁴ Karen King of the Erie County Commission On the Status Women on women agreed: "At a certain point you have to get the business community to come to the table. They have to meet the workforce where they're at. Transportation and drug testing will continue to be hot button issues until we figure out viable solutions in a collaborative environment."⁵

Re-launch car buying program

The Urban League and a set of social service agencies used to have a program called "Ways to Work," which offered people who were out of work or of limited means a low interest loan to purchase a car. Assistance with obtaining insurance and accessing low cost repair services were also provided. Carolyn Bright of the NYS Department of Labor found the program to be effective in helping people access to jobs and thinks it should be re-launched.⁶

Increase legal services for those without driver's licenses

For people with low incomes or no income who have not been able to pay parking tickets, or for those returning from prison who have fallen behind on child support payments, having a suspended driver's license severely impacts their ability to access manufacturing jobs. Patty Riegle of Erie 1 BOCES sees this problem often and is aware of some attorneys who help resolve these issues.⁷ However, she would like to see a larger scale legal aid program that can work with more clients, as well as policy solutions that allow for conditional licenses that enable people to drive and work while paying back child support or parking fines.

Credit card system for bus passes

Jeff Conrad of Western New York Catholic Charities expressed his frustrations with the NFTA system and urged both an increase in public spending to cover bus passes for low income riders, as well as a card that riders can use that enables employers, social service agencies and others to add money electronically: "I will buy bus passes that are only good for one day. NFTA is grossly behind when it comes to other systems. They do not make it easy for individuals with low incomes to travel around Buffalo...Why can't we put \$10 on a card and allow them to have it and use it instead of one day?"⁸

Challenge: Applicants failing drug tests

Manufacturing, like construction and trucking, is an industry that poses physical dangers to the workforce and thus typically requires applicants to submit to a drug test before they are hired. In Buffalo and throughout the region, nearly all interviewees cited failure to pass drug tests as a major barrier to not only diversifying the sector, but to filling open jobs. Several interviewees shared anecdotes of hundreds of applicants being turned away due to positive drug tests, and marijuana use was thought to be the primary cause.

Efforts to address the challenge:

Education on what's at stake

Most interviewees cited marijuana as the primary drug being used by those who fail tests, so education is used by recruiters to deter potential applicants. Ken Colon of the Urban League speaks to the formerly incarcerated groups he works to place into advanced manufacturing jobs: "I hold up a clear bag with fake money and say, 'How many of you want to earn \$50,000 per year?' I hold up the 50k bag in one hand and a blunt in the other hand to show this is what you're throwing away, to make the visual example."⁹

Encourage open communication

Erie 1 BOCES Workforce Development, which offers training in advanced manufacturing to adult students, is not allowed to drug test students. However, Patty Riegle and the Workforce Development Staff encourages their students to be honest about their drug use and underscores the negative impact on employment opportunities. They will often wait until they know they are clean before submitting their applications.¹⁰

Moving to individualized testing

Several interviewees mentioned that companies are beginning to do away with drug testing on the outset of employment. Instead, as they do with alcohol, they only drug test employees when an incident occurs. When we shared this with the focus group of union leaders, several expressed concerns about the impact of this development on workplace safety.

What more could be done:

Allow for re-testing

One suggestion was to follow the lead of the building trades unions, which jointly operate apprenticeship programs with contractors and where drug testing is universally applied. Rich Evans of the U.A. Plumbers & Steamfitters Local #22 shared that their apprenticeship program drug tests everyone involved.¹¹ If someone fails a test, they are kicked out of the program. However, they are given the option of appealing. If they can demonstrate that they have gone through a program and are clean, they are allowed back in and are subject to more regular tests. Angela Blue of the WNY Area Labor Federation would like to see this approach expanded to other training programs, where programs institute counseling for individuals and give them a chance to get clean before dismissing them from the possibility of employment.¹²

Challenge: Poor image of manufacturing = lack of applicants

One oft-cited barrier to diversity is convincing women, people of color and other targeted populations to pursue careers in manufacturing given their image of the industry. Part of the image problem is that Buffalo residents remember all the layoffs and are skeptical that it won't happen again. Don Needham of Moog Aircraft Group noted, "There is definitely a need for manufacturing jobs, but can you break that image that they're not sustainable or that they're going to go away?"¹³ Many also noted the pervasive and outdated view that people have of manufacturing as dark and dirty environments.

Efforts to address the challenge:

Manufacturing Career Day

On Oct 16th, the Buffalo Niagara Manufacturing Alliance (BNMA) and its partners are organizing a career day for Buffalo middle and high schools. Catherine Muth of BNMA is seeking a young and diverse group of manufacturing workers to demonstrate the kind of work they do and encourage students to see themselves in similar careers. There will be virtual reality stations so students can visualize the work of welders and machinists. As Muth observed, "We are hoping the event will launch youth engagement. Our project won't be sustainable unless we can get younger people involved."¹⁴ The Buffalo building trades unions have organized a similar hands-on career day in construction for 12 years. The program has grown in popularity, with over 1400 students participating in the last event.

Facility tours

Several area companies give tours to teachers, students and prospective applicants. When Ken Colon worked with the formerly incarcerated at Urban League, he recalled how they would take regular tours through Multisorb, which produces freshness packets: "They saw how clean it was and what the daily job was like."¹⁵

Market longer term career path

Margaret Shaw-Burnett, who manages an Advanced Manufacturing training program at Buffalo State College, underscores to her students that while starting wages may be similar to other entry level jobs in the area, manufacturing offers more potential to advance to a sustainable wage with additional training. Minesh Patel of the United Way of Buffalo & Erie County affirmed this strategy: "From the perspective of the younger generation, with the insecurity of the economy and not knowing if there will be an opportunity for job growth with an employer, having a career map is extremely attractive. For

example, knowing that if I start out at Point A and in roughly 'x' amount of time I can get to Point B, I am going to be far more motivated to stay in that job with that employer and grow. Why? Largely because I also know that Point B includes financial gains and financial security that can be very motivating to younger generations. Not only that, I know that my employer cares enough to invest in my training and development which will increase my likeliness to stay with them long-term. This is what Registered Apprenticeship allows for and our effort is to market that longer-term career perspective."¹⁶

Social media promotion

The Northland Workforce Training Center, a new state-funded program in Buffalo to recruit and train residents for advanced manufacturing and other skilled careers, is about to launch a video competition called "What's So Cool About Manufacturing." Based on a popular initiative in Cincinnati, organizers recruited 7th and 8th grade classes to tour plants and create videos, which will then be promoted for public voting.

What more could be done:

Increase entry level wages

Sarah Ruth, a job developer with the Center for Employment Opportunities, underscored how entry level wages in manufacturing are keeping her clients from applying: "Right now, manufacturing is the lowest paid trade. I have people working at Wendy's for \$11.75/hour," while many of the regional manufacturers start at \$11.¹⁷ Adding on the cost of transportation, this becomes an added barrier for the formerly incarcerated population she serves: "They need to know now that they're going to make enough money to pay bills so they don't have to sell drugs."

Marketing to students, parents and guidance counselors

The United Way of Buffalo and Erie County is managing the \$2.9 million U. S. Department of Labor grant to expand apprenticeship in the region. Holly Hutchinson directs the American Apprenticeship Initiative (AAI) of WNY. As part of their effort to bring in more diverse populations into advanced manufacturing, Holly would like to see more resources invested in marketing apprenticeship in manufacturing, including highlighting diverse populations in marketing materials. She feels that emphasizing the positives of these careers, and the high level of skills required for them, will turn around the misconception that the students in technical training programs are "the ones who couldn't do anything else."¹⁸ Sheri Scavone of the WNY Women's Foundation wants to take marketing a step further, and educate women and young girls as to how they can take their interest in STEM and apply it to advanced manufacturing jobs: "I'm not sure that many of us can explain what that means and what those jobs look like."¹⁹ Several interviewees noted the importance of convincing parents of the viability of manufacturing careers as opportunities for their children to pursue technical education arise.

Challenge: Lack of employer investment in training & apprenticeship

Apprenticeship and other forms of on-the-job (OJT) training are gaining national attention as effective programs that both help close the skills gap in industries like manufacturing and construction, as well as expanding pipelines for targeted populations to advance into highly skilled, family sustaining careers. The jointly run Ford/United Auto Worker apprenticeship program at Ford's Buffalo Stamping Plant was highlighted as a program that effectively trains many women and people of color to advance in their manufacturing careers. Yet despite businesses' commitments to diversify the workforce and despite projections that the Buffalo region will need 17,000 new production workers by 2020,²⁰ several interviewees noted that manufacturing employers in the region remain reluctant to

invest in apprenticeship and OJT, while only pursuing classroom instruction programs. Apprenticeship would not only help close the skills gap but would ensure that workers have the proper training needed to safely perform the work of electrician, machinist and other potentially dangerous positions.

Efforts to address the challenge:

Employer incentives to expand apprenticeship for incumbent workers

The aforementioned AAI initiative in Buffalo is charged with expanding manufacturing apprenticeship programs. The five-year \$2.9 million Dept. of Labor grant is primarily geared towards funding employer incentives to add 300 apprentices in advanced manufacturing across six counties. The incentives cover classroom training, OJT, and with additional funding from the Workforce Development Institute, supplies for apprentices. The initiative is halfway to its goal, supporting 130 new apprentices at 22 employers (including an intermediary representing an additional 14 companies).²¹ The program can enroll 300 apprentices through 2020.

Outreach and education with employers on apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is typically associated with unions, given the multi-billion investment by unions and contractors in jointly-run apprenticeship training centers in the construction industry. There is less of a tradition of apprenticeship in manufacturing in the Buffalo Niagara region, and according to Catherine Muth of BNMA, part of the reluctance among non-union companies to adopt programs is that they see apprenticeship is a “union thing.” However, outreach and education have helped debunk that pre-conception. A majority of the companies receiving incentives under the AAI grant in Buffalo are non-union.

Entry level apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship launched and expanded.

Because the AAI grant is focused primarily on expanding apprenticeship opportunities for incumbent workers, the United Way advances the diversity of apprentices through its work to expand entry level apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs. The pre-apprenticeship programs they support are about 85% underrepresented populations, and their staff are focused on ensuring those students get certified and hired into apprentice track positions.²² In addition, working with several union partners, the United Way managed to get New York State to approve the Industrial Manufacturing Technician (IMT) training program recognized as a registered apprenticeship in 2018. The IMT was developed to meet manufacturers' needs to upgrade the skills of frontline production workers. The 3,000-hour (or 18-month) apprenticeship trains workers to set up, operate, monitor, and control production equipment. Upon completion of training, workers earn nationally recognized manufacturing journey worker credentials, which can be applied towards more advanced apprenticeship and training programs. The United Way is working with recruiting partners, including the Urban League, and the Veterans One Stop of WNY, to promote the IMT among targeted populations as a point of entry for careers in advanced manufacturing.

Northland is also launching training programs that prepare students for careers in welding, CNC machining and other positions in advanced manufacturing. The certificate and associate degree programs are intended to get people ready for entry level positions in manufacturing. Catherine Muth of BNMA prioritizes entry-level recruitment over expanding apprenticeship: “We don't have the people we can put into apprenticeship programs yet...It's hard for companies to choose who to go into apprenticeship if they don't have the skills they need at the entry level... Right now I feel like we're in a place where we need to just get people in the door to stay for a year.”²³

What more could be done:

Greater employer investment in on-the-job training

Manufacturing companies recognize that they must ensure that the workforce is trained and ready to address the 'gray tsunami' of skilled production worker retirements. By investing more in OJT, employers can ensure that those new to manufacturing, including underrepresented populations, are getting the mentoring and training they need for retention. Though the AAI grant is supporting the launch of new programs, its resources cannot meet the demand. Inevitably, employers will have to invest their own resources into training. As Frank Hotchkiss of the United Steelworkers notes, "When AAI came in, employers were thrilled. But now they want OJT covered. When are companies going to have their skin in the game? Their biggest fear is that they train employees and they move on. Well if you're treating your employees well, they're not going to move on."²⁴

For smaller companies that cannot afford to invest in their own apprenticeship program, workforce intermediaries can develop multi-employer programs. And for employers that receive taxpayer subsidies, such as the Tesla plant operating in the state-owned and subsidized Solar City facility, one interviewee suggested legislation requiring that they fund training programs.

Integrate pre-apprenticeship into school system

A number of interviewees felt that for the apprenticeship model to expand and draw in a more diverse population into manufacturing, there needed to be increased integration between apprenticeship and the Buffalo school system. Those advocating to expand apprenticeship have tried to get the Buffalo city schools to offer the Certified Production Technician (CPT) program, which is a nationally recognized certificate program and comprises of the classroom instruction portion of the IMT apprenticeship. This would enable students to graduate and move right into an IMT program. Several schools in the region are setting up CPT trainings and running train the trainer classes to build technical teaching capacity. The Buffalo school board has not yet agreed to adopt the certificate program, yet there's a clear opportunity to channel the system's diverse student body into advanced manufacturing jobs. Buffalo ranks as the most racially diverse school system in Western New York, with two thirds of the population being non-white.²⁵ Frank Hotchkiss expressed frustration with the lack of interest by the school system, which he sees as playing a critical role in increasing diversity:

"The singular issue that can be used as a stepping stone is to create the educational network, including programs for high school students, for adults, and programs specifically for underserved populations. Training needs to be done as early as possible, and utilizing experienced former workers is crucial. This education effort must also apply to employers to make them understand this is a competitive issue. Without qualified workers, companies will not survive. Employers need to become fully committed to the idea of apprenticeships and all that entails. This includes going into the schools to make the case for manufacturing careers and offering internship opportunities. Education is the priority issue that must be addressed."²⁶

Joe Tomlinson, who coordinates the apprenticeship program with the United Auto Workers at the Ford Buffalo Stamping Plant, talks with schools about restarting the technical education programs that would prepare a more skilled workforce: "The schools really want to start this again but they don't have the teachers, the knowledge, the wherewithal of how to do it. I tell schools, 'First, get your whole faculty embracing the idea. Second, put an ad in your town paper to look for talented folks—electricians, plumbers, a person who know how to read a blue print. That's how you're going to grow those programs...The skills gap—that's why we're all here. We're addressing it with the apprenticeship

program which I'm blessed to be part of, but we're still behind. There's too long of a gap, and that resonates all the way down to teaching an 8th grader how to look at a blue print."²⁷

Karen King of the Erie County Commission on the Status of Women would like to see pre-apprenticeship programs launched in Erie County that are specifically geared towards getting women into non-traditional industries like manufacturing and construction. She described the value of such programs for students: "Women entering nontraditional fields will find them more accessible initially...Creating that cohort of support is really necessary as women enter into these fields. There's not enough critical mass right now."²⁸

Challenge: Applicants fail to meet minimum criteria for entry level jobs

Interviewees expressed concern that many applicants lack a range of hard and soft skills required to succeed at entry level positions, creating a barrier to diversity. As Catherine Muth of BNMA noted, "It's about soft skills. Every time I talk to an employer, the only thing they want is for someone to arrive on time and to not leave at lunch and never come back."²⁹

Efforts to address the challenge:

Pre-apprenticeship and entry level apprenticeship programs launched.

See previous section for details.

Expanded programs that teach both soft and hard skills

According to Jeff Conrad of WNY Catholic Charities, Northland WTC applicants were averaging 7th grade English and 6th grade math. Several groups held classes over the summer to teach math and literacy skills and bring students up to a high school level proficiency. Soft skills are also taught through Northland, the Urban League and other recruiting/training organizations. To underscore the importance of consistency and timeliness, Northland kicks out students if they miss two days in a row. As Catherine Muth notes, "We're not bluffing. It's an honest thing that needs to happen. If you don't prove yourself through education, we are not going to jeopardize our relationship with employers." The Urban League has a 'Bring Your A Game' curriculum that emphasizes accountability, appearance and attitude.

What more could be done:

Connect math and literacy teaching to technical education

Jeff Conrad noted that a best practice that could be adopted by Buffalo schools is to teach math and literacy skills in the context of more technical education, such as for manufacturing or construction positions. He posits that by expanding technical education, students will be motivated to sharpen their core skills and thus be better prepared for positions in manufacturing and construction. Don Needham of Moog Aircraft Group agreed that the school system needed to bring back technical education: "There's no question that there's a gap where programs that may have been there a long time ago when I was a student don't exist anymore, so students don't get any exposure to that."³⁰

Challenge: Lack of relationships and trust between employers, recruiters and communities of color

Interviewees universally acknowledged that Buffalo remains a racially segregated city, and that generations of poverty and discrimination has left the city's Black community with issues of chronic

unemployment and low paying jobs. These systemic issues play out in what people noted was a lack of relationships and trust between communities of color, employers, and workforce development organizations. Whitney Walker of VOICE Buffalo described how workforce development agencies perpetuate the problem of segregation and poverty: "For years, too many people from outside the community receive funding to do work with Black communities and they do an awful job. Without imposing the recommended ratio of caseworker to clientele, caseloads are overloaded, training is rushed, and the impact is as dismal as the service itself. They have terrible retention numbers yet they continue to get grant money. It's just perpetuating the cycle... they know nothing about Black community that they are paid to work with... People are dealing with the most insane crises and you don't have staff offering trauma-informed care, nor the time to implement it because they're just a number or an outcome measure to them."³¹

Sarah Ruth of the Center for Employment Opportunities observed that the people she tries to place into jobs that are temp-to-permanent have been burned by previous experiences and don't trust job recruiters.³² Angela Blue of the WNY Area Labor Federation affirmed the lack of trust of workforce programs: "Historically, training programs were put in place, but there were no jobs at the end of the training. For this reason, it caused a big flop in most of the training programs...this is also why it's so hard for you to build this program up now, because people are still looking at those bad times."³³

The public transit issue is intrinsically linked to racial segregation and lack of opportunities. Moog Aircraft Group is able to attract women and minority candidates into their professional positions who have the means to get to the facility, but Don Needham believes that their lack of transit accessibility is partially to blame for the fact that they attract few minority candidates to their production jobs. Catherine Muth of BNMA thinks the problem runs deeper:

"I was speaking to one of our companies and asking them about [diversity]. They said 'We tried, and we didn't get any candidates so we're done trying.' That's a really bad way to look at this issue. I'm not sure what needs to be done but there needs to be a better discussion around this. We were trying to populate a board and we needed to think of one person of color. No one thought of one, even on the [production] floor. That to me was shocking and really telling. Because there are people of color, you're just not recognizing them."³⁴

Efforts to address the challenge:

Locate training programs within diverse neighborhoods

Northland WTC is located in a racially diverse neighborhood in Buffalo, which was once the site of tens of thousands of skilled, unionized manufacturing jobs. Judging by the thousands of applications received, Northland is clearly striking a chord with the local community. Pre-apprenticeship classes begin in September 2018, so Northland's ability to place candidates has not yet been tested.

Personal relationships between recruiters and employers

Ken Colon of the Urban League asserted the importance of maintaining one-on-one relationships with employers in order to ensure the success of the diverse population he places into jobs: "With Northland, it's helpful just having employers being part of conversation at these meetings so they know who these agencies are—to make a warm handoff... What's made me successful in helping people get connected to employment is having a relationship with the company... They know how I prepare candidates to meet their hiring needs. The trust makes the referral process a lot easier. We can have a conversation about the candidate and what they're going through. 'This person is great but is struggling with a day care issue.' When problems arise, the employer is more willing to work with them to be a good employee."³⁵

As part of developing one-on-one relationships with companies, Jeff Conrad of WNY Catholic Charities affirmed the importance of supporting individuals' retention: "If you make 1,000 placements that's great, but if only 200 people are working after 90 days, then what did you really do? You didn't help the individual or the company and most likely ruined a lot of relationships...That post placement wrap service is so important. When someone misses a bus who has dealt with trauma, their day is shot, their week is shot, and everything falls apart...Keeping in touch with people post placement is key." Jeff is ensuring clients are made more aware of the wraparound services they offer.

What more could be done:

Greater racial diversity of company leaders

Several interviewees asserted that if manufacturing company leaders were more diverse, it would mend much of the rift between employers and communities of color in Buffalo. Carolyn Bright of the NYS Department of Labor posited:

"What we need are more people of color at higher levels at manufacturing businesses to be in positions as decision makers and role models. We attend meetings with the manufacturers association and there's no one of color who's in a position where they can make decisions or promote the fact that individuals of color are not only welcome to these companies, but have levels of responsibility. Manufacturers who are interested in creating diverse facilities should welcome the opportunity to become mentors to people of color. To increase the number of individuals at higher positions, they should bring in graduates from local colleges as well recruit from HBCUs [Historically Black Universities and Colleges] as well as the National Society of Hispanic MBAs, the National Black MBA, and the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers."³⁶

Catherine Muth of BNMA would like to see young leaders boards created in order to recruit and mentor more people of color to be able to ultimately sit on corporate boards. Her suggestion has not been well received by employers who she notes are reluctant to dedicate resources to take people off the production line.

Training for recruiters on importance of diversity

Heather Gresham of the Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) observed, "There is a lack of training amongst entry level recruiters...a lack of awareness of how to recruit diverse candidates into positions. There is a tendency in this community to go with friends and family, particularly outside of public sector employment where there is not as much of a push to recruit diverse candidates."³⁷

Other interviewees suggested that organizations who work with communities of color need to deepen their understanding of the population they are representing, including the impact of multi-generational poverty and racism. Ken Colon understands the challenges of the young people he works with at the Urban League: "Most of the time kids come [to us] because life hits them. Neighborhoods, stuff they were exposed to. They didn't get enough attention from schools or teachers. But they come here and feel like they're at home. People care, people worry about their personal lives."³⁸

Challenge: Manufacturing culture not always welcoming to underrepresented populations

One challenge raised by interviewees that is preventing underrepresented populations from applying to and/or staying with manufacturing jobs is workplace culture. People with small children may be unable to manage a schedule with 12-hour shifts. Sexual harassment can be an issue in some

facilities. Several interviewees observed that women and people of color are having a hard time succeeding in what can be unwelcoming environments, yet companies often lack human resource staff to support them. Dennis Martinez of the NYS Department of Education continues to observe both a lack of sensitivity and will on the part of manufacturing employers to hire people with disabilities: “I know employers who still ask [job applicants] what their disability is. You can say this job requires X, can you do that? But you can’t ask what their disability is.”³⁹

Efforts to address the challenge:

Leadership development initiatives for women and people of color

For manufacturing employers that are union-represented, women and people of color have access to several organizations active in the Buffalo region, including the Coalition for Labor Union Women, the Coalition for Black Trade Unionists and Women of Steel. These groups are sources of support for union members who may not be embraced by the culture of their workplace. The organizations also train members to be leaders of their unions. Richard Lipsitz of the Western New York Area Labor Federation has witnessed a rise in people of color becoming leaders within the industrial unions in the region.⁴⁰

The WNY Women’s Foundation has an initiative called “All In” to increase numbers of women in positions of leadership in the community and business, and to improve workplace culture. One manufacturer is part of their first cohort of businesses that take a pledge to adopt specific strategies to improve the culture of the workplace for women. When they achieve those metrics, the Foundation will then promote the business as a great place to work. The Foundation’s Executive Director Sheri Scavone described the premise of the program: “If we can move more women into positions of leadership, women make decisions that positively impact other women and girls below them...It’s that diversity of thinking, of voice. If we don’t begin to resemble a non-white, non-upper middle-class community in our leaders, they we’re not going to change anything.”⁴¹

What more could be done:

Modernize the culture of manufacturing

Interviewees from community, government and business groups all recognized the need for companies to shift their culture in order to become more welcoming to women and minorities, and to adapt to the needs of a younger workforce. Karen King asserted that the burden of adapting to the manufacturing culture should not just be placed on underrepresented workers: “Everything we do is make accommodations—as women of color, as people with disabilities. It’s not working so we have to start thinking differently about the way we provide work. It involves risk taking and innovation and something that’s very different from a 19th or 20th century work models.”⁴² Heather Gresham agreed with her sentiment: “I think that there has to be a balance. A recognition by employers and industry groups that there’s a shift needed. And there has to be education among job seekers. ‘This is the environment, and the skills you are going to gain are skills that will be transferable anywhere.’”⁴³

Given the tight labor market, those that adapt some of their practices to appeal to young workers may find themselves at a competitive advantage on the hiring front. Catherine Muth agrees that young workers will force more change: “With the BNMA, people will say we did this for the last 30 years so we’re just going to do this for the next 30 years. And that’s not going to work...People are going to take a \$15 an hour MacDonal’d’s job before working in an industry that they perceive doesn’t care about them.”⁴⁴

Challenge: Poorly coordinated workforce development system

Another universally acknowledged challenge was the large number of nonprofits and government agencies that provide job placement and training work but continue to operate in silos. As Richard Lipsitz of the WNY Area Labor Federation asserted, "There are too many workforce development agencies. They all have their own niche. And it leads to politics and narrow-mindedness can have the tendency to lead to a lack of coordination." Holly Hutchinson said that a challenge for the United Way in managing the AAI grant is that the organization did not have an existing workforce development infrastructure. A positive has been that this has allowed for a fresh perspective and the ability to be nimble and flexible.⁴⁶

Efforts to address the challenge:

Coordinating job placement services

Several interviewees noted that employers desire more efficiency in the job recruitment system, so they aren't having to coordinate with many different job recruiters. Even within the same organization, there is room for improvement on this front. Catholic Charities provides a range of services to individuals and families, but according to Jeff Conrad, the staff who handled affordable housing or other services referred clients to outside organizations to help with job placement. After a concerted effort to connect his workforce development department with other departments at the organization, Jeff is getting more referrals for job placements.

What more could be done:

Centralized information on apprenticeship and job opportunities

Sheri Scavone of the WNY Women's Foundation has long engaged in Buffalo's workforce development sphere. Yet it wasn't until her twins reached high school age that she realized how hard it was to find and navigate the myriad job and training opportunities available. She and others interviewed suggested there be a single entry point for those seeking opportunities in advanced manufacturing—not only for ease of finding those opportunities but for efficiencies in application processes. With their survey of apprenticeship programs, the United Way is helping provide recruiters with more detailed information on these opportunities, including details that would help them determine whether the programs would be a good fit for their clients, including considerations for those with disabilities. However, Holly Hutchinson feels that more information on jobs and apprenticeship programs is needed for recruiters: "Accessing employers for these kinds of questions can be a challenge. HR directors are often really overloaded."⁴⁷

Related to centralizing opportunities is Karen King's suggestion that more data is needed to understand the number of job openings that exist now and the projections about the growth or contraction of these jobs: "I'm pushing for women and girls to go into advanced manufacturing and construction jobs because these jobs offer a better quality of life and a bigger paycheck and some form of safety net with benefits and health insurance. But will there be opportunities for them three to five years out?"⁴⁸ Though there is a predicted need for production workers over the next few years as current workers retire, the outlook for manufacturing as a whole is unclear.

Conclusion

For advocates of diversity in manufacturing, the tight labor market and waves of skilled worker retirements have created an opening for underrepresented populations to access good jobs in advanced manufacturing. It's clear from interviewing representatives of workforce development organizations, unions, government agencies and businesses that Buffalo's manufacturing renaissance is motivating increased efforts to get women and people of color into these careers. There is a flurry of new training programs, multiple coordinated initiatives between partners, and an expansion of apprenticeship. Though presented with myriad challenges, people are innovating new programs, learning from best practices across the country, and recognizing where they need to do more to combat the lasting effects of poverty and discrimination.

While there is good reason to be optimistic regarding diversity efforts in Buffalo, there is also a risk that organizations will fall back on the current demand for workers and become complacent—assuming that demography is destiny. Though businesses are in desperate need of workers, they will not necessarily turn to local residents to fill production jobs. Several interviewees noted that a major business in Buffalo is exploring hiring European guestworkers and provide them with housing in order to fill their open positions. This may not be the beginning of a trend, but it underscores the importance of maintaining a persistent, coordinated effort to increase diversity in the manufacturing sector.

Appendix A: Methodology

On September 10th 2018, the Coalition for Economic Justice of Buffalo, together with Jobs With Justice and the Working for America Institute co-hosted a series of three focus groups: one with employers, one with unions, and one with representatives of community and government. In order to encourage candid conversations, we decided to hold separate conversations. To bring context to the discussions and for background information, Erin Johansson held phone interviews with seven individuals engaged in workforce development efforts before the focus groups.

Focus group facilitators:

- Erin Johansson, Research Director, Jobs With Justice
- Kirk Laubenstein, Executive Director, Coalition for Economic Justice
- Beth Shannon, Deputy Director, Working For America Institute, AFL-CIO

Participants in the employer group:

- Jeffrey Conrad, Director of Workforce Development & Education, WNY Catholic Charities
- Catherine Muth, Senior Manager of Northland WTC, Buffalo Niagara Manufacturing Alliance
- Don Needham, Aircraft Group Human Resource Business Partner, Moog Human Resources
- Joe Tomlinson, UAW Joint Apprentice Coordinator, Ford Buffalo Stamping Plant
- Anonymous employer representative
- Anonymous employer representative

Participants in the union focus group:

- Angela Blue, Community Outreach Specialist, New York State AFL-CIO
- George Boger, Field Coordinator, Western New York Area Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO
- Rich Evans, Business Agent, U.A. Plumbers & Steamfitters Local #22
- Frank Hotchkiss, Apprenticeship Coordinator, United Steelworkers District 4
- Mary Martino, former Buffalo City Council, United Way and Communications Workers of

America union leader

- Richard Lipsitz, President, Western New York Area Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO

Participants in the community/government focus group:

- Carolyn Bright, Manager of the Buffalo & Williamsville One Stop Career Centers, NYS

Department of Labor

- Ken Colon, Out of School Youth Program Coordinator, Buffalo Urban League
- Adrienne Easley, Project Support Specialist of AAI, United Way of Buffalo and Erie County
- Heather Gresham, Executive Director, Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Investment Board
- Julianna Janson, VP of Workforce Development, Goodwill Industries of Western New York
- Karen King, Executive Director, Erie County Commission on the Status of Women

- Dennis Martinez, Regional Business Relations Coordinator, NYS Dept of Education, Adult Career and Continuing Education Services Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR)
- Minesh Patel, Workforce Development Specialist- Apprentices, United Way of Buffalo & Erie County
- Sarah Ruth, Job Developer, Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)
- Sheri L. Scavone, Executive Director, WNY Women's Foundation
- Margaret Shaw-Burnett, Associate Vice President for Continuing Professional Studies, Buffalo State College

Pre-focus group phone interviewees:

- Ken Colon, Out of School Youth Program Coordinator, Buffalo Urban League
- Frank Hotchkiss, Apprenticeship Coordinator, United Steelworkers District 4
- Holly Hutchinson, Project Director, American Apprenticeship Initiative (AAI) of WNY United Way
- Karen King, Executive Director, Erie County Commission on the Status of Women
- Mary Martino, former Buffalo City Council, United Way and Communications Workers of America union leader
- Patricia Riegle, Sr. Supervisor Workforce Development, Erie 1 BOCES
- Whitney Walker, Executive Director, VOICE Buffalo

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