



Sept. 28, 2026

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OMA Concludes Good Jobs Challenge, Exceeds Every Goal Eight Months Early

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA) concluded its four-year Good Jobs Challenge grant, reporting that the \$23.4 million federal initiative exceeded every performance goal it set, eight months ahead of schedule.

The grant, awarded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration in 2022, was the largest workforce investment in OMA's history. It funded the statewide scale-up of WorkAdvance, an employer-led training model that connects Ohioans to manufacturing careers through short-term job-skills and technical instruction, wraparound support and up to a year of career coaching after placement.

Over the life of the grant, the OMA-coordinated effort produced 2,843 credentials earned, and 4,378 Ohioans either landed a quality manufacturing job or increased their wages through upskilling. Among those placed into new roles, the average starting wage was \$22.63 an hour, compared to an initial goal of 3,600 placements at \$17.60 an hour.

Nearly 1,000 Ohio manufacturers engaged with the program – versus an initial goal of 800 – including 623 that directly hired WorkAdvance completers. OMA's endorsed network of Industry Sector Partnerships (ISPs), the regional organizations that delivered the model on the ground, grew from 16 to 20 during the grant period and now covers 85 of Ohio's 88 counties.

"This grant proved something Ohio manufacturers have said for years. Give employers a real seat at the table and the workforce system works better for everyone," said Ryan Augsburg, OMA president. "Our endorsed ISPs turned \$23.4 million in federal investment into a talent pipeline that is still running today. The grant has ended. The work it built has not."

Unlike traditional training programs, WorkAdvance starts with employer demand rather than a set curriculum. Manufacturers identify the roles they need to fill, and training, career coaching and support services are built around those specific jobs. OMA describes its role as a "franchise model," one that gave its regional partnerships a consistent, replicable structure while leaving room for each to adapt to its own manufacturers and communities, from rural counties to urban centers.

"Confidence, not childcare or transportation, turned out to be the biggest barrier we saw. So many people who came through WorkAdvance did not see themselves in a manufacturing job until an employer gave them a real shot," said Jessica Borza, managing director of OMA Workforce Services. "Secondly, employer engagement was among the most impressive takeaways from the grant period. Our ISPs built those relationships with manufacturers one at a time, and that

relational, intentional work is what turned individual employers into a network with real convening power.”

Among those placed in a good manufacturing job was Zoe Smith of Youngstown, who had struggled to get interviews before enrolling in WorkAdvance. She was hired at Gasser Chair and promoted within her first week on the floor, into a role her employer says typically takes more than a year to master.

The Good Jobs Challenge grant closed on June 30, 2026, but OMA said the infrastructure it built will continue. WorkAdvance has officially been approved by ApprenticeshipOhio and is now a state-certified pre-apprenticeship. The same ISP network now powers the Technician Fast Track program, also a registered apprenticeship, developed to address a growing mid-skill shortage among Ohio manufacturers. OMA is pursuing continued public and private investment to expand the model into the Ohio Manufacturing Workforce Blueprint.

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The Ohio Manufacturers' Association is Ohio's largest statewide business association composed solely of manufacturers. Established in 1910, the OMA's mission is to protect and grow Ohio manufacturing. It represents manufacturers of all sizes in every subsector of the industry. Manufacturing is Ohio's largest economic sector, employing approximately 690,000 Ohioans and contributing more than \$138 billion annually to the economy. Visit ohiomfg.com, or follow us on [LinkedIn](#), [X](#), [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#).

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