

# Discussion Summary

## Reviving Manufacturing Careers with Stackable Credentials

Presented by:

Text and audio discussion  
from webinar presented  
March 5, 2013.

**Mary LeFebvre**, *senior research associate, ACT*

**Melanie Stover**, *program manager, The Manufacturing Institute*

**Rebekah Hutton**, *director of strategic initiatives, Manufacturing Skill Standards Council*

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

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

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[https://actwdd.ilinc.com/  
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***Did the Ohio training program use eligibility standards? How did the program determine whether participants were capable of earning the Certified Production Technician (CPT) designation? How are CPT standards identified and maintained?***

**Rebekah Hutton** said that, in this particular grant, participants were screened prior to entering the CPT training program. “Basically, MSSC has a recommendation that individuals be at the tenth grade English level and ninth grade math level in order to be successful in the CPT program,” she said. “You can fudge that a little bit, but you can see the pass rates go down pretty quickly if students aren’t at those levels.”

The training program used the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC™) and ACT WorkKeys® exams to determine eligibility levels and set Level 4 scores in Applied Mathematics and Reading for Information as an indication of readiness to proceed with the program. “The original standards [for CPT] were developed by 7,000 workers, 400 companies, and 300-plus subject matter experts,” she said. “They include the actual work performance standards required by front-line workers. In order to ensure the standards are kept up to date with current industry practice, MSSC has national expert panels who are responsible for reviewing and updating the standards annually.”

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***Is TAA (Trade Act Adjustment) funding the same as TAACCCT (Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career Training) grants awarded to community colleges?***

**Sherry Kelley Marshall** said that TAA funds are provided to assist workers employed in facilities meeting criteria established by the US Department of Labor. “Not all closings are deemed eligible for these extra training dollars and resources,” she said. “TAA funding is not TAACCCT— [TAA] is funding based on the company or the unionized labor applying for additional resources depending on the circumstances of the plant closing. Our WIA area did receive a TAACCCT grant of \$20 million, but that is for the health careers collaborative and involves training four other states in our collaboratives’ business practices with health care employers.”



***How does the Southwest Ohio Region Workforce Investment Board apply ACT WorkKeys assessments to individuals and employers who are not involved in plant closings?***

**Sherry Kelley Marshall** said ACT WorkKeys funding is based on two variables. If an employer wants to include ACT WorkKeys assessments in deciding which candidates the WIB sends to them, those tests are funded out as a service to business customers. However, if individuals want to be considered for individual training accounts, “then they take the NCRC as our measure of suitability for the public’s investment in this person getting training dollars,” she said. “So, it’s treated as an intensive service or supportive service.”



***What about other ACT WorkKeys assessments? For instance, is there any connection between ACT WorkKeys Workplace Observation and qualifying assessments for the CPT credential?***

**Sherry Kelley Marshall** said the Workforce Investment Board did not use Workplace Observation because it wasn’t requested by the employer collaborative groups it serves. “Right now, we have construction, advanced manufacturing, and health care, and we are getting ready to introduce this to information technology,” she said. “All three of the existing employer collaboratives have regular monthly meetings. All of the employers involved in the collaboratives have taken the NCRC themselves and agreed that this is the instrument they want to use, and then they report back to us when they place people in our system. ... The reported result from the manufacturing side is that everybody that they hired who had both the NCRC and the CPT were instant contributors in the workplace. [Employers] didn’t have to wait for them to get comfortable for 90 days. They didn’t have to explain new concepts to them. These people came in with an understanding of the language, and they came in with a recognition that they already had reading, math, and information-gathering skills. So, I think they were heard better in the workforce as a result of carrying ... objective credentials that certified them in the minds of employers.”



***What are the characteristics that make the NCRC and the CPT important to the NAM-Endorsed Manufacturing Skills Certification System?***

**Melanie Stover** says the skills certification system was developed as a stackable certification system. “Students who are receiving these certifications have on- and off-pathways in their education programs,” she said. “If they decide to go back to school and get a technical certification, [certification] makes it a lot easier. So, [we view] the NCRC ... as the foundational credential every single person should have. Manufacturers always say they don’t have enough soft skills when applicants come through the door. The NCRC addresses that, and the CPT builds nicely off of that because it’s a step up and it’s more manufacturing specific.”



***Did any of the employers involved conduct profiling of occupations to support the role of the CPT in the program?***

**Sherry Kelley Marshall:** “I am not aware that any of them did.”



***What advice would be valuable for young adult students located in areas in which employers are not completely familiar with the benefits of the NCRC, the CPT, or other industry-recognized credentials?***

**Melanie Stover** said The Manufacturing Institute’s program, Dream It. Do It., attracts students into manufacturing industries. “Industry needs to get behind these certifications and speak to the student. Engage them and let them know that this is what they are looking for in job postings or as they go into schools and promote programs that support the certification.”

***For more information about Dream It. Do It., go here:***

<http://www.themanufacturinginstitute.org/Image/Dream-It-Do-It/Dream-It-Do-It.aspx>

***For more information on how employers use certifications, go here:***

<http://www.themanufacturinginstitute.org/Skills-Certification/Certifications/How-Employers-Use-Certifications/How-Employers-Use-Certifications.aspx>

**Sherry Kelley Marshall** said there is a growing concern that postsecondary education is too expensive—college, in particular. “And there is a growing recognition that people are leaving college with degrees that have no relevance to most industry,” she said. “So, the conversation is beginning to be, ‘How do high schools indicate people’s work readiness, not just their college readiness?’ The ability to interpret the finer points of *Heart of Darkness* by Conrad is a very different reading skill than, ‘Do you know how to get out of the building when the alarm goes off?’”

Marshall said the Southwest Ohio Region Workforce Investment Board possesses exceptional insight into these challenges because it has administered ACT WorkKeys tests and offered the NCRC to nearly 100 youths covered by Workforce Investment Act programs. “We are getting better performance results [from] young people whose school performance is questionable,” she said. “And their comment back to us is, ‘I get why you asked me those questions,’ ‘I get why I need to learn that,’ and ‘I get why someone would want me to figure out that problem,’ [but] ‘I don’t necessarily get why I have to understand a book that was written 300 years ago and its relevance to my life today.’

“I think there is a growing conflict [about] the demand for rigor, which is reasonable,” she continued. “We have let public schools slack too much on rigor. But the population of young people is demanding relevance over rigor. And I think the combination of improved rigor, core curriculum, etc., that many states are adopting, and adherence to a work-certifying instrument like the NCRC is going to get an audience of a large size. We are now using it with General Electric and the advanced manufacturing world, and they have a partnership with the Department of Labor for 100,000 returning [veterans]. The two entry-level credentials for this apprenticeship program for those 100,000 [veterans are] the NCRC and the CPT.”

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