

The EcO Network of Southeast Indiana

At a Glance

The EcO Network (Economic Opportunities through Education) is a vibrant regional organization in Southeast Indiana serving a 10-county region and facilitating work around raising education attainment for all youth and adults, and strengthening the talent pipeline into high demand, high skilled careers in the manufacturing and healthcare sectors. The EcO Network plays an intermediary role, helping develop sustained collaboration among employers, industry-based organizations, K-12 education, career technical education, adult education, postsecondary education, and workforce development partners. All the talent ecosystem partners utilize a well-constructed and tested “Stakeholder Engagement Process” developed and facilitated by the CivicLab, a key member of the Network.

Origin

The EcO Network was originally formed in 2007 by the community foundations of Southeast Indiana, coordinated by the Heritage Fund, the Community Foundation of Bartholomew County, in partnership with the Community Education Coalition (CEC) of Columbus, Indiana (which has served as the region’s backbone organization since its inception). The EcO Network serves a ten-county region that mirrors Indiana Economic Growth Region 9 (EGR9). The ten counties participating include: Bartholomew, Dearborn, Decatur, Franklin, Jackson, Jefferson, Jennings, Ohio, Ripley, and Switzerland.

The EcO Network began as EcO₁₅, a name that represented “Economic Opportunities through

Education” and alluded to shared goals that were to be completed by 2015. The EcO Network was launched with an unprecedented \$38 million grant provided by Lilly Endowment Inc. to support educational infrastructure and common support services focused on economic opportunity. It is estimated that the EcO Network stakeholders have leveraged an additional \$19.7 million (cash and in-kind) over the nearly nine years of working together. Kathy Oren, executive director of EcO Network, explains that, “When the network was formed, members focused on developing collaborative thinking, and over the first three or four years, emphasized the work of developing relationships and shared regional goals.”



Management Structure

The management structure of the network has significantly evolved during its lifespan. Originally, funding supported county-based coordinators

with program dollars focused on each individual county. As trusting relationships have grown across the region, the work has transitioned from a county-by-county approach to that of a regional network approach.

This regional approach is particularly important to area manufacturers, who recruit and hire workers from across the entire region, not just from the county in which a manufacturer operates; thus, it was somewhat duplicative for employers to work with schools and colleges on a county-by-county basis. This regional approach is also important to employers in the healthcare sector, another major area industry.

In November 2014, the network members conducted a review of needs and opportunities and reconfigured the Network to focus on three major initiatives: educational attainment, manufacturing, and healthcare. This coincided with the award of a three-year “Community Partnership for Attainment” grant from the Lumina Foundation, which provided funding, technical assistance and networking opportunities with 75 communities across the country. As a result of this planning effort, EcO₁₅ was reconstituted as the EcO Network. In 2016, the Network received a significant grant, “Skill Up Indiana”, from the Indiana Department of Workforce Development that provided support as it rolled out the updated network structure.

There are now three networks managed as part of the larger EcO Network: Attainment, Manufacturing, and Healthcare.

Attainment Network

Kathy Huffman is the manager of the Attainment Network, which includes all 10 counties. The shared goal is to increase educational levels of all residents in order to foster stronger economic growth and therefore enhance family and community prosperity. The specific goal is to help every working-age resident to raise their educational attainment by at least one level. For example, someone without a high school degree would earn a diploma or diploma equivalent. Someone with a high school degree would earn at least an industry-recognized skill certificate, and so on. The overarching goal is for 60 percent of working-age residents to have a postsecondary credential by the year 2025.

Some examples of strategies of the Attainment Network include:

Fast Forward. This initiative is based within the adult education system and is aimed at helping high school students know about adult education programs that can help them quickly gain workforce competencies so they can enter high-skilled, high-demand careers. The Fast Forward program offers a viable option for continuing education, after high school graduation, to high school students who are not interested in pursuing traditional routes of postsecondary education. Fast Forward is working with school counselors in two pilot school districts to raise their awareness about available quality training programs so they can share this information with interested students.

Gateway Community of Practice. This initiative is focused on increasing student success in postsecondary gateway courses and is a collaborative partnership between faculty at both Indiana University Purdue University Columbus, (IUPUC) and Ivy Tech Columbus Campus, and the IUPUC Center for Teaching and Learning. There are two dimensions of the initiative, 1) faculty professional development in Gateway teaching strategies and, 2) development of Supplemental Instruction Student Leaders. Aligning these two complementary strategies across programs will build a community of practitioners to strengthen student achievement of entry-level “gateway” classes and ultimately move students toward degree completion.

Manufacturing Network

Stephanie Weber is EcO’s director of the regional manufacturing network. The network facilitates regional work between the manufacturing sector and education, and targets seven counties that represent 98% of manufacturing employment in region 9. At least once a month, education and manufacturing representatives meet to coordinate and check on progress for implementing and aligning manufacturing career pathways. The manufacturing network was built upon earlier success from a manufacturing outreach awareness program called “Dream it/Do it” that was originally launched in 2007 and was affiliated with the National Association of Manufacturers. The purpose of the program, now known as the EcO Network High School Champions, is to help young people understand that modern manufacturing is safe, clean and offers excellent opportunities for a good career with solid earnings and advancement.

Examples of activities sponsored by the EcO Manufacturing Network include:

- » EcO Network High School Champions, a program designed to create broad awareness of manufacturing/STEM careers and increase enrollments in targeted manufacturing courses while showcasing the industry’s growing range of career opportunities. (The EcO Champion network recently had the largest touchpoints/participation counts of students, parents, & educators (228,438) in the program’s history. That is a 154% increase from the overall baseline established in the fall of 2010);

- » Advanced Manufacturing Center of Excellence, a 43,000 sq. ft. facility located in Columbus, shared by Ivy Tech, IUPUC, and Purdue Polytechnic Institute;
- » Project Lead The Way, a pre-engineering curriculum for middle and high school students (5,106 students enrolled this fall in these courses: that is a 1,012% increase from the overall baseline established in the spring of 2008);
- » Teacher Externships, a weeklong learning experience providing educators with access to technology, machining and tools utilized in multiple manufacturing facilities. (Summer of 2016: 49 educators participated at 29 regional host manufacturers);
- » High School Student Internships, a six-week summer advanced manufacturing and/or logistics internship for rising high school juniors and seniors. (Summer of 2016: 24 regional students interned at 16 regional host manufacturers; Summer of 2017: 35 regional students will intern at 21 regional hosts); and
- » The Project-Based Learning Academy, a teacher development program to support the use of project-based teaching strategies in classrooms across the region (over 600 educators from region 9 have received this training).

Health Care Network

The Health Care Network is the newest activity, which is facilitated by Kathy Oren of the Community Education Coalition. This network is bringing several county-level initiatives into better coordination and alignment with a goal of increasing health care program enrollments and success rates. This network will better align education and career opportunities as part of a “next level up” strategy for the healthcare industry and associated education offerings in the region. The network is currently completing a workforce needs survey with ten of the region’s largest healthcare employers. The objective of this survey is to identify the critical and hard to fill healthcare jobs specific to the region’s employers. With that demand-side data, the network will map out existing education pathways in place that meet the workforce demand, identify any gaps in the education pipeline, and co-create regional strategies to increase the pipeline of students in the high-demand fields.

Examples of strategies sponsored by the EcO Healthcare Network include:

Addition of Healthcare Pipeline Director - A Healthcare Pipeline Director was hired by IUPUC to coordinate the regional healthcare navigation strategies. The director coordinates activities among Ivy Tech Community College (ITCC), regional healthcare employers, East Indiana Area Health Education Center (EI-AHEC), and middle and high schools. The Skill UP grant provided seed funding to launch this position which is intended to increase awareness and enrollment in health care career programs, and to increase success rates for students entering these education pathways.

Addition of the Accelerated BSN program at IUPUC - The bachelor’s in nursing (BSN) accelerated program is designed for adults with previous non-nursing degrees. The BSN can be obtained in 12-18 months. This provides another entry point into the BSN pathway, increasing the region’s overall capacity to produce BSNs, which are in high demand. This program can turn out 10 to 20 quality BSNs every year to help meet the 18,000 additional nurses needed in Indiana by 2020 (ICN, 2015). By training them locally, they are highly likely to enter the local workforce. Funding to launch this program was provided by the Skill UP grant.

The Stakeholder Engagement Process

The Stakeholder Engagement Process has been the key tool used by EcO Network for developing each of the networks and helping them develop shared goals and strategies. This detailed engagement process follows four phases - Who, Why, What and How.

WHO: GET THE SYSTEM IN THE ROOM

- » Start here: Identify a key community issue
- » Focus on the System
- » Identify the right people who want to address the issue
- » Establish and build trusting relationship

WHY: HELP PEOPLE SEE THE SYSTEM

- » Gather and understand the data

WHAT: CO-CREATE SOLUTIONS TOGETHER

- » Create a current and future state picture
- » Identify and prioritize catalytic projects

HOW: REDESIGN THE SYSTEM BY CHANGING WAYS OF WORKING TOGETHER

- » Conduct a project with Deliverables and metrics
- » Disciplined continuous improvement

Next Steps

As the EcO Network is implementing its current plan of work, members are also considering strategies for long-term financial sustainability of the work. Options under consideration would blend time-limited grant funding with an approach that utilizes tax incentive funding for economic redevelopment, as well as operational support from participating industry, workforce and education partners.

Impact

The work of the EcO Network has contributed to improvements in educational outcomes for the ten-county region. A few key success measures include:

- » Postsecondary Attainment: Up by 14%, from 26.7% in 2009 to 30.4% in 2015

- » High School Graduation rates: Up by 12%, from 82.2% in 2009 to 92.2% in 2015
- » Career Awareness Events: Participation up by 154% since 2010. Participation totaled over 228,000 students, parents and educators during the 2015-16 school year
- » Increased enrollments in a number of targeted Manufacturing/STEM Career Technical Education and Postsecondary programs.

To find out more, contact:

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About IN-PIN

With backing from the Center of Excellence and Leadership of Learning (CELL) at the University of Indianapolis and in cooperation with the Indiana Department of Workforce Development, the Department of Education and the Commission for Higher Education; the Indiana Pathways Innovation Network is coordinated by the National Center for College and Career Transitions (NC3T), an organization experienced in all aspects of college and career pathways development.

The IN-PIN is designed to identify and share promising practices and replicable strategies that help support the development and implementation of college and career pathways systems. By bringing together leaders from forward-thinking schools, adult and postsecondary institutions, business organizations, workforce development providers, and non-profit organizations effective and innovative pathways can be designed or expanded to increase learner achievement and address workforce demands.

By joining the IN-PIN, organizations can accelerate their efforts to develop scalable and sustainable solutions that strengthen connections between education, employers, and economic development in order to prepare today's students for tomorrow's careers. There is no cost to join the IN-PIN. Visit www.pinmembers.com and click on the PIN tab to join.

