

Working with area employers is a must

Commentary

By Alicia Harvey-Smith, Published September 28, 2015



Report after report has documented the growing need for more skilled labor in the U.S. workforce. In the most recent quarterly survey of the [National Association for Business Economics](#), 35 percent of respondents said their companies experienced shortages of skilled labor, up from about 25 percent in the three previous surveys.

A study by the [Manufacturing Institute](#), “[Skills Gap in U.S. Manufacturing 2015 and Beyond](#),” projects 3.5 million new jobs in that industry over the next decade, with 2 million positions going unfilled because of a lack of qualified workers.

Community colleges are well-positioned to train the next generation to fill the skills gap affecting business and industry in the regions in which they serve. By working with area employers to identify the jobs available and the skills needed to fill them, community colleges can respond quickly to close skills gaps by expanding job-training programs.

This article is an excerpt from the [AACC 21st-Century Center](#). The role of community colleges in supporting and enhancing economic development in their regions is vital, particularly in rural communities like the one in which my college is located. At [River Valley Community College](#) in New Hampshire, we have taken a very intentional and strategic approach to the skills-gap challenge. We are focused on getting students on a clear pathway to reach their education and career goals, and we are aligning our workforce training with the needs of area employees.

The first step

Before we can begin training students for jobs or transfer, we have to get them through the door. To boost enrollment, River Valley is committed to providing early exposure to college for students in grades 11 and 12. We have two early-college programs: [Running Start](#) and Catch the Wave. Running Start, a statewide initiative of the [Community College System of New Hampshire](#), provides high school juniors and seniors an opportunity to earn college credits that

also meet high school graduation requirements. College-certified instructors teach these college-credit courses at the high schools.

New Hampshire's Running Start early college program

Catch the Wave, a local program targeting 11th- and 12th-graders, provides a similar dual-enrollment benefit but is enhanced by offering students the opportunity to come to the college campus to learn in the collegiate environment and participate in student programs.

Once enrolled in the college, our students also have access to a variety of career and academic pathways, including degree and certificate programs, internships and apprenticeships. Several workforce-training grants awarded to the college have made a major impact. We have trained more than 300 students in soft job skills through a [WorkReadyNH](#) grant, while a federal H1B grant has funded technical skills training for dozens of River Valley students.

Our federal [Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training](#) (TAACCCT) grant, which draws to conclusion at the end of September, has been another key resource for job training.

[Read the full article.](#)

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