

WRTP/BIG STEP: Selected to join new national project aimed at advancing racial equality in manufacturing

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MILWAUKEE, WI (July 28, 2020) — Milwaukee-based WRTP/BIG STEP has joined a cohort of eight leading workforce organizations to advance a racially inclusive future for the manufacturing industry. The new national project is concentrated in the Midwest and is led by The Century Foundation (TCF), the Urban Manufacturing Alliance (UMA), and seven other urban workforce development organizations. The groups, selected through a competitive process and funded by Lumina Foundation, will strategize solutions for the manufacturing sector's national recruitment challenges, deepen relationships between employers and communities, and develop credential-based training programs to forge a more racially inclusive future for manufacturing.

Rhandi Berth, WRTP/BIG STEP's Chief Innovations Officer, recently represented Wisconsin's workforce intermediary at a national virtual conference introducing the Industry & Inclusion (I&I) Cohort. Ms. Berth discussed WRTP/BIG STEP's existing efforts to advance racial inclusion and equality in the manufacturing space, mentioning its Entry Level Manufacturing Skills (ELMS) training, the Industrial Manufacturing Technician (IMT) Apprenticeship, and the Industrial Joint Apprenticeship Committee (IJAC).

The coalition launched at a pivotal time for U.S. manufacturing and the nation as a whole.

As the country's manufacturing capacity recently shifted to produce millions of pieces of medical and personal protective equipment (PPE) to fight and recover from a deadly pandemic, COVID-19 has brought renewed attention to the need for a

strong U.S. manufacturing sector. Pre-pandemic estimates indicated that the United States needed an additional 2.4 million manufacturing workers over the next decade.

“The Industry & Inclusion Cohort is not just an incredible opportunity for WRTP/BIG STEP to network and brainstorm with like-minded organizations across the Midwest, but a true landmark in our shared history,” said Sheila D. Cochran, WRTP/BIG STEP’s Interim President & CEO. “Investing in a more racially inclusive workforce isn’t just the right thing to do, it is imperative to the survival and success of the manufacturing industry and the skilled trades.”

With unemployment rates at record levels, especially for Black and Latinx workers, and a renewed focus on addressing systemic racism throughout our society—including employment practices and patterns—manufacturing’s rebirth presents a critical opportunity to open the sector’s sustaining jobs to more workers of color.

As part of the I&I 4.0 cohort, WRTP/BIG STEP will work with TCF, UMA, and seven other Midwest-based organizations: Jane Addams Resource Corporation (JARC; Chicago/Baltimore), LIFT (Detroit), MAGNET (Cleveland), Manufacturing Renaissance (Chicago), Menomonee Valley Partners (MVP; Milwaukee), MxD (Chicago), and Northland Workforce Training Center (Buffalo).

The project is supported by Lumina Foundation, a national philanthropic entity focused on equity and educational attainment and based in Indianapolis.