



## Knox County Workforce Development Alliance: 2025 Annual Report

A collaboration of dedicated professionals working to improve the workforce climate of Knox County by connecting qualified workers with in-demand career pathways.

### WorkDev Member Organizations:

WorkDev had 44 active members in 2025 from the following 29 organizations/businesses:

Area Development Foundation	Knox ESC: Career Navigator	Kokosing
AMG Industries	Knox County Board of	Mauser Packaging
Centerburg Local Schools	Developmental Disabilities	Mount Vernon City Schools
Knox County Chamber of	Knox County Commissioners	Mount Vernon Nazarene
Commerce	Knox County Foundation	University
East Knox Local Schools	Knox County Resource	Ohio Eastern Star Home
Fredericktown Local Schools	Navigator	Ohio Means Jobs
Heating & Cooling Products	Knox Ohio Means Jobs	Owens Corning
Junior Achievement	Knox Public Health	Sanoh America
Knox Community Hospital	Knox Technical Center	Schafer Driveline
Knox County Career Center	Touch Pointe Family Resources	Team 7 Ohio

### Introduction:

In January 2025, the WorkDev group approved its 2025–2026 Action Plan, establishing a clear two-year roadmap for advancing workforce development efforts across Knox County. The plan was shaped by insights from the 2024 Workforce Demand Study and a strategic survey of WorkDev members, ensuring that priorities reflect both local employer needs and member perspectives. The two-year structure was intentionally designed to align with school district calendars and allow for sustainable, measurable progress on shared workforce initiatives.

The Action Plan identifies five key focus areas that will guide all WorkDev activities through 2026:

1. **Young Talent Recruitment & Retention** – Expanding pathways to connect young people with local career opportunities and encouraging them to build their futures in Knox County.
2. **Schools & Employer Alignment** – Strengthening collaboration between education and industry to ensure students graduate career-ready and informed about local opportunities.
3. **In-Demand Skill Alignment** – Addressing skill gaps by promoting training and education aligned with current and emerging workforce needs.
4. **In-Demand Careers Awareness** – Increasing public understanding of high-demand career fields through targeted outreach, events, and communication campaigns.
5. **WorkDev Member Development** – Enhancing collaboration and capacity among member organizations through shared learning, data insights, and coordinated programming.

This framework not only directs WorkDev’s ongoing projects but also provides the organizational structure for the **2025 WorkDev Annual Report**, allowing progress and outcomes to be presented within each of these five focus areas. By reporting through this lens, WorkDev ensures transparency, accountability, and a clear connection between strategic goals and measurable community impact.

# WorkDev 2025 Operations:

## Section 1: Young Talent Recruitment & Retention

### Knox ASPECT Program

Description: A coalition of Knox County manufacturers and WorkDev operates a program called Knox ASPECT, which is designed to prepare interested candidates for careers in manufacturing by teaching necessary skills for the industry. The payoff for the participants is that any candidate who completes the program will have a guaranteed job interview with 12 participating Knox County-based manufacturers, all of whom are seeking to hire for open positions. This program is made possible through a partnership with Columbus State Manufacturing Extension Partnership. This program has been operating since 2021 and, since its conception, has had 85 graduates.

- Spring 2025 Results: 22 high school seniors completed the program, receiving interviews with 12 local manufacturing companies.
- Knox ASPECT includes tours of the manufacturing facilities as part of the curriculum, which greatly increased student interest and enabled them to make more educated employment decisions.
- Columbus MEP funded a video that showcases the ASPECT Program, which can be found at this link: [Knox ASPECT Video](#)

### Healthcare Expo:

Goal: To provide information to Knox County students about the diverse employment options available in healthcare and how they can become connected with local job and educational opportunities to ensure students are making educated decisions regarding their future career pathways.

- Over 20 healthcare professionals presented in four employment pathway stations focusing on Nursing, Technicians, Office & Emergency Services, and Support Services.
- Healthcare partners included Knox Community Hospital, Ohio Eastern Star Home, the Mount Vernon Developmental Center, Knox Public Health, and Knox Technical Center.
- Danville High School hosted an expo on May 13th for all (high school) grade levels, reaching about 200 students.
- Centerburg High School hosted an expo on October 28th for all (high school) grade levels, reaching about 275 students.
- Knox County Career Center hosted an expo on December 9th for multiple technical labs, reaching about 80 students.

### Knox County College Internship & Job Fair:

A college internship & job fair exclusively for Knox County employers.

- A partnership between Central Ohio Technical College, Kenyon College, Mount Vernon Nazarene University, Knox County Chamber of Commerce, and WorkDev.
- The event was held on March 18th, 2025 10:30am-1pm.
- The event was for all college students, primarily Central Ohio Technical College, Kenyon College, and Mount Vernon Nazarene University.
- The event was held at MVNU.

- The event had eight businesses present to promote 25 different jobs and internship opportunities. Every business received applications for its positions.
- The event had 40 students in attendance.

## **Section 2: Schools & Employer Alignment**

### **Knox County Business Advisory Council:**

In March 2025, the Area Development Foundation (ADF) was appointed by the Knox Educational Service Center (ESC) to chair and manage the county's Business Advisory Council. Under ADF's leadership, the council brings together education and industry to align classroom experiences with workforce needs. Each quarterly meeting includes representatives from the WorkDev group—one each from healthcare, construction, and manufacturing—who share insights and priorities gathered from their industry peers. This structure ensures that every discussion reflects real, current workforce perspectives. The collaboration has strengthened partnerships between local school districts and workforce development initiatives, leading to the creation of the Educational Workforce Experiences program and new tools designed to positively impact the attendance epidemic affecting both schools and workplaces.

- Ohio Business Advisory Council Plan
  - ADF prepared the 2025–2026 BAC Plan and Report to align directly with the strategic priorities outlined in the WorkDev Action Plan, ensuring both documents reflect a unified and coordinated workforce strategy. Once completed, the plan was provided to the Educational Service Center (ESC), which is responsible for formally submitting the report to the state. This process ensures that regional workforce goals, school–employer alignment efforts, and shared initiatives are accurately represented in the state-required documentation.
- Ohio 2025 Business Advisory Grant
  - Because of the strengthened partnership structure between the BAC, ADF, and WorkDev, the group was able to pursue new funding opportunities that support shared workforce initiatives. This coordinated approach made it possible for WorkDev to apply for an Ohio BAC Grant, leveraging the unified goals and collaborative programming outlined in the BAC plan. As a result, WorkDev was awarded \$4,000, which is being used to purchase equipment and supplies for both the Knox ASPECT program and the Healthcare Expo, further enhancing hands-on learning experiences for students across the county.

### **Educational Workforce Experiences:**

The Educational Workforce Experiences (EWEs) were developed from the WorkDev Strategic Plan to strengthen engagement between educators and local industry, and were made possible in 2025 through collaboration with superintendents via the Business Advisory Council. These flexible events are designed to connect teachers with real-world career insights and are typically hosted by WorkDev representatives—most often the chair, career navigator, and county career connections advisory team—during school professional development days. EWEs can range from short, focused presentations to half- or full-day sessions that include workshops, panel discussions, and industry tours. The overarching goal is to equip teachers with the knowledge and tools to help students understand the local economic ecosystem they will enter after graduation. The most recent EWEs emphasized soft skills, offering teachers practical ways to integrate the most in-demand employability skills identified in the 2024 Workforce Demand

Study into their classrooms, giving students opportunities to practice and strengthen soft skills in a structured, measurable environment. Between the 4 events, 170 educators were reached.

The following EWE's were hosted:

- Mount Vernon High School - September 22nd, 2025:
  - Hosted a group of teachers who self-selected into learning more about employment opportunities for students. A 4-hour session including a Knox County ecosystem presentation, overview of healthcare and manufacturing, a tour of Ariel Corporation & Knox Community Hospital, and a presentation on teaching employability skills. Led by Julia Suggs in partnership with Chris Keaton, with 25 Teachers present.
- Fredericktown High School - September 27th, 2025:
  - Led by Julia Suggs, Shelly Laslo, and Sean McCutcheon, this was held for all high school teachers with an emphasis on manufacturing. A Knox Ecosystem presentation was given with a deep dive into manufacturing in Knox County and manufacturing careers. The group toured Divelbiss Corporation, Scahfer Driveline, and Kokosing Construction. Shelly Laslo led a presentation on employability skills and classroom implementation. There were 25 teachers present.
- Knox County Career Center - October 10th, 2025:
  - Julia Suggs led a 2-hour session for all KCCC teachers and staff (some were not present due to training). There was a short presentation about Knox County ecosystem data and information, and a workshop on employability skills. There was an activity for the teachers to explore new ways to practice employability skills in their classrooms. There were about 60 staff/teachers present.
- Danville Local Schools - October 13th, 2025:
  - Julia Suggs led a 1-hour soft employability workshop for the middle/high school teachers, and another 1-hour workshop for the elementary school teachers that had a more elementary-level application portion. There were about 60 in total.

### **Section 3: In-demand Skill Alignment**

#### **Soft Skill Tools & Resources**

- Throughout 2025, WorkDev and the Business Advisory Council (BAC) placed significant emphasis on expanding access to soft skills education for both students and community members. Much of the progress in this area came through the soft skills workshops held in local school districts during Educator Workforce Experiences (EWEs), where educators and employers collaborated to strengthen employability readiness. However, the attendance initiative that emerged from these discussions extended far beyond a single workshop. It began during a BAC meeting where employers and school district leaders shared insights on attendance challenges and their connection to workplace expectations. This dialogue informed a dedicated WorkDev working session, during which businesses offered to share their own attendance policies to help educators better communicate real-world expectations to students. The exchange of ideas and questions—both in meetings and during EWEs—helped the Area Development Foundation (ADF) identify opportunities to develop new tools and resources that directly support conversations around attendance and soft skills. The following section highlights

the primary tools and resources that resulted from these WorkDev and BAC collaborations in 2025.

- Top 10 Employability Skills List (2025): A curated list of the ten foundational skills that support success in any career pathway. These skills were identified through the 2024 Knox Workforce Demand Study and employer focus groups and serve as a guide for shaping soft skills instruction.
- Knox ADF Employability Skill Education Strategies: A collection of classroom-ready strategies—created by ADF with input from local educators—that show how to integrate the top 10 employability skills into daily instruction without disrupting existing curriculum plans.
- Knox County Attendance Matrix: A consolidated table summarizing attendance policies from local employers. Educators can use this resource to show students how attendance expectations in school mirror real-world workplace standards.
- Attendance Habit Overview: A one-page summary of academic research on the importance of strong attendance habits. It includes evidence-based recommendations for how teachers can help students develop consistent, long-term attendance behaviors.
- Knox Skill–Aptitude–Occupation Table: A tool that links common student hobbies and skills to the underlying aptitudes they demonstrate and the career fields that rely on those same strengths. Educators can use this table to help students explore a wider range of career possibilities that align with their natural abilities.
- Career-Focused Language Guide: A resource that helps educators reframe common classroom phrases in ways that emphasize future careers and professional behaviors. This shift in language helps students connect everyday classroom habits to long-term career confidence and readiness.
- Cost of Living - Graduate Expense Calculator: This spreadsheet tool helps students understand the real cost of living in Knox County by comparing expenses across different life scenarios—such as having a roommate, living with parents, or purchasing a new car. By exploring how lifestyle choices impact monthly costs, students can make informed decisions about the income they'll need and the career paths that can support their goals after high school.

## **Section 4: In-Demand Careers Awareness**

### **Manufacturing Matters:**

- The Manufacturing Matters Football Events are held each October in celebration of Ohio's Manufacturing Month, highlighting the importance of the industry to Knox County's economy and community. The first event took place at Mount Vernon High School on October 10th with six manufacturing companies, followed by a second event in Fredericktown on October 17th featuring four local manufacturers. Both events provided a platform for employers to share their company stories, products, and career pathways with families attending the games. Employers noted that they made several meaningful connections with parents and community members, while the majority of engagement came from elementary and middle school students, helping to spark early interest in manufacturing careers. In addition to the company booths, WorkDev hosted a table to share information about manufacturing in Knox County and to represent companies that were unable to attend, ensuring all local manufacturers had a presence in celebrating this vital industry. This is the second year of this program.

## **Section 5: WorkDev Member Development**

### **Meetings:**

The Workforce Development Alliance is a group of local professionals dedicated to removing barriers to the success of workforce development for healthcare, manufacturing, and construction companies in Knox County. Activities include programming for students, resource development, management training, research, collaboration, and many more.

- WorkDev held 11 monthly meetings in 2025.
  - 44 different individuals attended the meetings throughout the year, representing 29 different organizations.
  - 71 people have chosen to be on the WorkDev email chain.
- WorkDev attended 4 tours: MVNU Engineering, Founders Foodhall, and Ohio Eastern Star Home, and the Knox County Career Center
- WorkDev meetings included presentations from:
  - Area Development Foundation
  - Ohio 529: College Advantage
  - National Safety Council
  - Fredericktown High School
  - Knox County Career Center
  - Knox County Foundation & Williams Nonprofit Consulting
  - One Columbus
  - Knox & Licking Behavioral Healthcare Partners

### **Conclusion:**

The 2025 WorkDev Annual Report reflects a year of significant progress, strengthened partnerships, and meaningful action toward building a more resilient and opportunity-rich workforce ecosystem in Knox County. Through the coordinated efforts of WorkDev members, the Business Advisory Council, ADF, and our education and industry partners, we advanced initiatives that directly support students, job seekers, and employers across the region. From expanding hands-on learning through ASPECT and the Healthcare Expo, to deepening school–employer alignment through Educational Workforce Experiences, to creating practical tools that strengthen soft skills and attendance habits, WorkDev’s impact in 2025 was both measurable and far-reaching.

As we move into the second year of the 2025–2026 Action Plan, WorkDev remains committed to addressing in-demand skills, promoting high-value career pathways, and supporting the professional development of our members. The accomplishments highlighted in this report demonstrate the power of collaboration and the shared dedication of our partners. Together, we are building a workforce system that not only meets the needs of today’s employers but also inspires and prepares the next generation of Knox County talent.

**The 2025 WorkDev Annual Report was voted on and approved by the WorkDev committee on January 28th, 2026.**