



# Northern Illinois Coordinated Workforce Report Executive Summary

## Background and Study Recommendations

In 2018, business, workforce, education, and public sector leaders came together to examine the prevalence of middle-skills in the region and present a way to move forward with meeting the skills needs of employers within the region. The resulting report examines the middle-skills needs within the region through workforce data, jobs postings, occupational projections, and a middle-skills needs survey on regional manufacturing companies

As a result of our data and survey analysis, as well as ongoing workforce-related engagement among partners, we have also included a shortlist of recommendations for our regional workforce system.

The **Manufacturing Workforce Strategy Team** will consist of multiple public economic, workforce, business, and educational partners. The committee will serve as a steering and evaluation body for the CCMS, as well as any other middle-skills related programs. The Team will be housed at the Region 1 Planning Council, and should serve in an advisory role for the future Advanced Technology Center. Many necessary additional actions, such as outreach, were not covered in the report. Thus, we recommend pursuing a **corresponding strategic plan** to build upon the report to determine how all current and future programs meet the skills needs and fit into the role of advancing our regional workforce, solidify the role of the Regional Workforce Strategy Team, and supplement the other regional workforce and economic development strategies.

The **Critical Core Manufacturing Skills (CCMS)** curriculum will be a program through Rock Valley College where students can earn a certificate, or portfolio their course completions and demonstrations of aptitude which show that they are proficient in the specific skills demanded by regional employers. The specific skills demanded within the industry will be determined through guided employer outreach through the College.

The **Advanced Technology Center (ATC)** represents one of the region's largest scale public investments into training and educating its workforce to date. The redevelopment project is also representative of the cross-organizational collaboration among workforce, economic development, and educational partners in order to advance the regional workforce. Many of RVC's existing programs will be re-located here. It is intended that the CCMS Program will be housed within the ATC as well.

Organizations to be Represented in the Committee: Include:

The Workforce Connection

Rock Valley College

Rockford Area Economic Development Corporation

Boone-Winnebago Regional Office of Education

Region 1 Planning Council

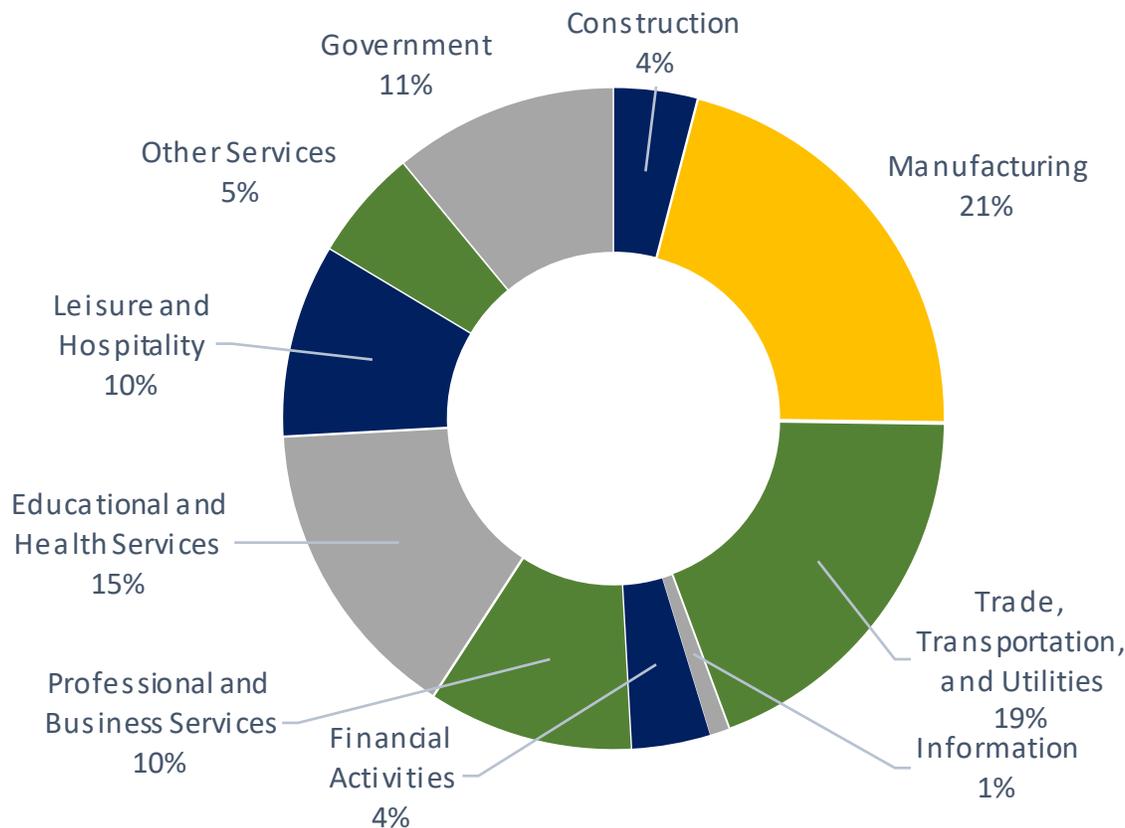
Rockford Chamber of Commerce

Illinois Bank and Trust

Using publicly and privately available data, we identified the region's industries, calculated the number of jobs in the region that could be classified as middle-skills, the most common jobs postings, and compiled other workforce related information.

Our data is based on the 4-county Northern Illinois Region of Stephenson, Winnebago, Boone, and Ogle Counties.

**Figure 1: 4-County Industry Employment Breakdown**



21% of the region's employees work in the manufacturing industry.

Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security, July 2018

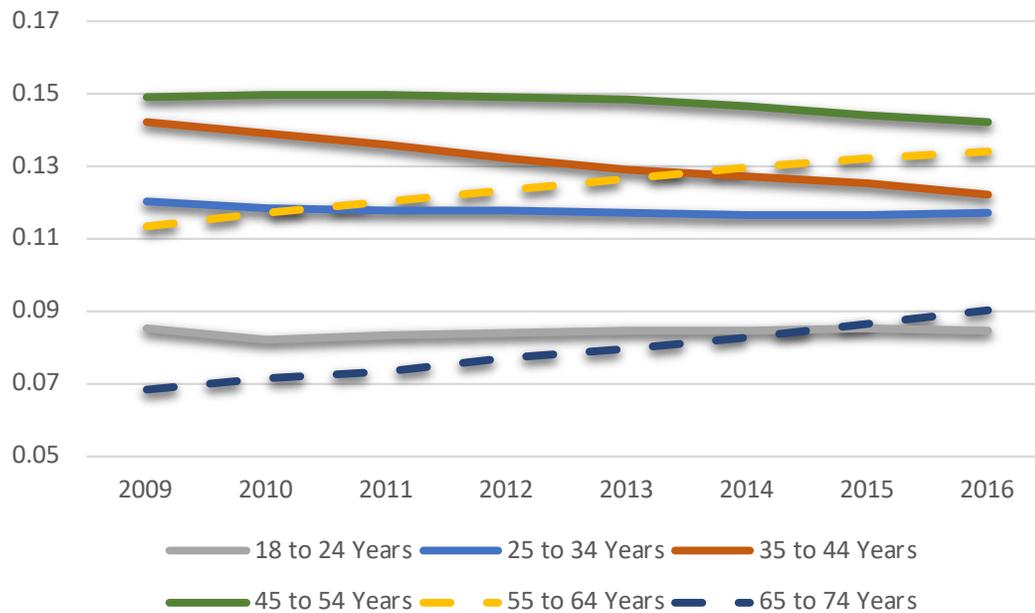
A regional definition of middle-skills was made in order to project job occupation data. An occupation is a middle-skill occupation if it fulfills one or more of these criteria:

1. **Requires more than a high-school, but less than a 4-year degree**
2. **Requires some kind of vocational training or certification**
3. **Requires moderate to long term on-the-job experience**
4. **Requires previous work experience in a related field**

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Using our definitions and projecting public workforce data, 43.4% of occupations in the region are middle-skills, and 39.2% of openings within the next five years are projected to be in middle-skills occupations.

**Figure 2: Trends of Working Age Groups in the 4-County Region**



While the prime working age group have remained stable since 2009, those aged 55 and up have been increasing as a percentage of the workforce.

Source: ACS 5-year Estimates 2012-2016

**Table 1: Jobs Postings by Occupation in the Northern Stateline Region**

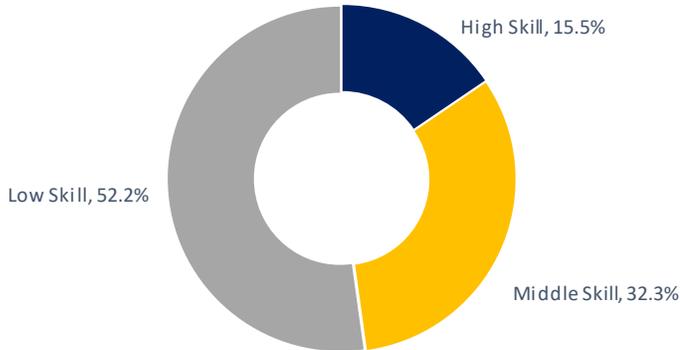
Jobs Postings by Occupation in Northern Stateline Region		
Occupation	Ads Closed	Total Ads
Retail Salespersons	1,736	2,218
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	1,526	1,878
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	829	1,198
Registered Nurses	865	1,083
Sales Representatives, Services, All Other	792	926
Customer Service Representatives	761	890
Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	733	864
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	706	777
Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers, Including Fast Food	417	667
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	501	590
Production Workers, All Other	515	585
First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers	491	572
Medical Secretaries	456	532
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive	477	514
Computer User Support Specialists	432	485

Manufacturing certifications are not often mentioned in job postings, however, the top occupational job postings closely resemble the job postings for the full range of occupations.

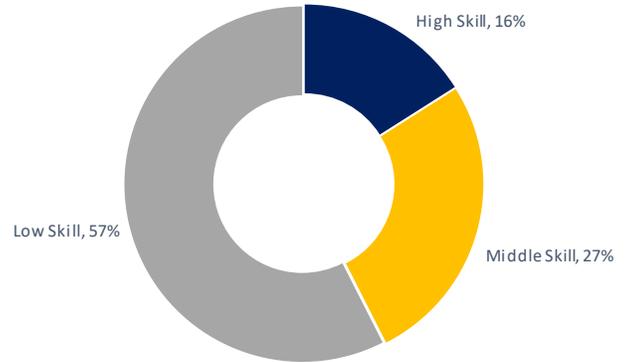
Source: JobsEQ 2017 Annual Postings

An employer survey was conducted as a major component of the report. 80 manufacturing employers from the region, of various sizes and products, were asked about their future hiring patterns, middle-skill and certification needs, and other workforce issues. Highlights include:

**Figure 3: Reported Current Skill Level Needs**

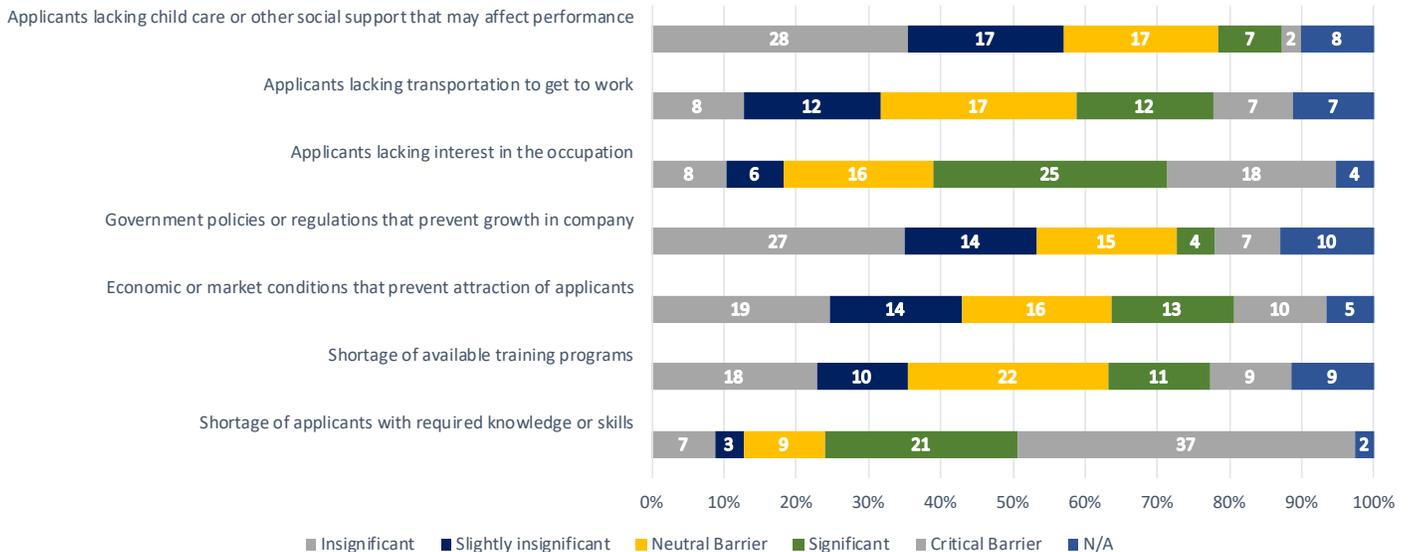


**Figure 4: Reported Skill Level Needs in 1-year**



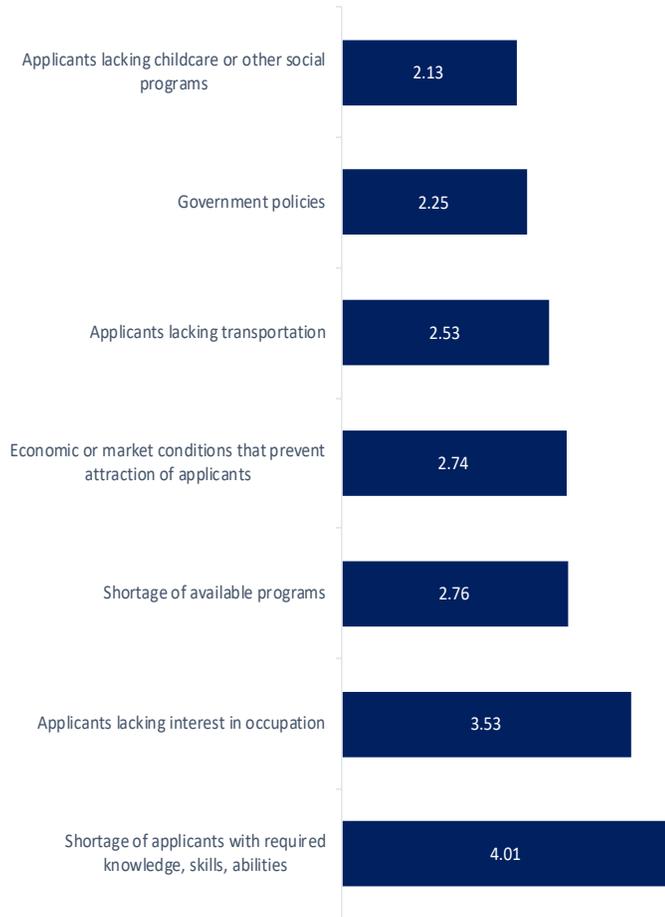
Surveyed employers had a yearly turnover rate of around 12.9%

**Figure 5: Barriers to Expanding Employment**



65% of companies reported expecting to increase their yearly employment levels.

**Figure 6: Average Importance of Barriers (ranked low to high; 1-5)**



**A shortage of required knowledge or skills from applicants was the most common and most important barrier to expanding employment.**

**Table 2: Reported Replacements for Middle-skills Occupations in their Company**

Occupations	Replacement	New
Machinist	92	78
Electricians	50	41
Maintenance	43	3
CNC	33	15
Welders	33	13
Quality Control	16	10
Operators	10	5
Toolmakers	4	7
Sales	2	3

**Table 3: Reported Documented Certification Needs in their Company**

Keyword	% Total Mentioned
CNC	39.7%
Welder	22.1%
Reading	19.1%
Mathematics	14.7%
Measurement	14.7%
Maintenance	14.7%
Quality Control	13.2%
Associates	11.8%
Repair	10.3%
Computer	8.8%
Forklift	7.4%
Previous Experience	7.4%
Leadership	7.4%
CAD/blueprints	5.9%
Accounting	4.4%
Safety	2.9%

**When asked about certifications, CNC documentation was the most requested.**

**Machinists are the most important middle-skills occupations employers need, as well as the most common positions needing replacements.**

# Summary

The Northern Illinois region must be active in ensuring that the skills of our job-seekers match the skills required by our manufacturing employers. For years, conversations about addressing the skills gaps have revolved around supporting initiatives that allow job-seekers to succeed in “middle-skill” jobs, which require more than a high-school degree, but less than a bachelor’s degree. These jobs are strong within the region, and with the support of ongoing workforce development efforts, need to continue being a driving force behind our economic growth.

As outlined within our report, coordination with our major industrial sectors is an important strategy for ensuring our region has a strong and competitive workforce. By realizing our common goal in matching employers to the skills they need, public and private sector partners can support robust programs which allow our businesses and workers to thrive.

We believe that reaching out to employers and tailoring workforce programming to their specific skill needs is the most logical way forward. We also believe that success in closing a skills-gap within our region comes through community buy-in and coordination on future and existing collaborative training initiatives. Our three outlined recommendations represent this collaboration and our community taking action towards an outstanding workforce.



Rendering courtesy of Hagney Architects, LLC

A copy of the full report and this summary can be accessed at <http://r1planning.org/>



The Northern Illinois Coordinated Workforce Report is sponsored by the Rockford Area Economic Development Council’s Rockforward! Leadership Council, which supports strategically aligned programs which benefit our region.

The Region 1 Planning Council (RPC) is a special purpose, regional government agency providing cross-jurisdictional, collaborative planning in Northern Illinois.

For questions about the report, please contact Jay Fieser, Community Development Planner at [jfieser@r1planning.org](mailto:jfieser@r1planning.org)

