

# Business Leaders United for Workforce Partnerships

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Business Leaders United for Workforce Partnerships (BLU) is an employer-led effort to diversify and strengthen the employer voice in federal and state skills policy discussions and to share effective practices throughout a peer network. BLU employers – all of whom have been challenged to fill positions in their own firms – put a real-world face on the skills gaps challenging U.S. businesses, and demonstrate the role that local business leaders and sector partnerships can play to ensure more effective, market-responsive workforce training programs.

## **Diversity of Employers, Unified Message on Skills**

BLU represents nearly 400 employer partners in more than 30 states, covering a wide range of in-demand industries, including construction, manufacturing, health care, information technologies and financial services. Most of BLU's employers are small to medium-sized, though BLU includes a true range of firms: from businesses of less than 10 employees to Fortune 500 corporations.

Despite this diversity of geography, sector and size, BLU employers have faced common challenges finding the skilled workers they need. As employers, they are actively working with local partners to train and hire community residents for skilled jobs; as BLU they ask our country's policymakers to follow suit and invest, aggressively and effectively, in the skills of America's workers. Together they have created a five point platform from which they jointly communicate to national policymakers, the press and the American public about the effective industry-based strategies they've developed which could serve as models for a more comprehensive national skills policy.

## **BLU Executive Committee**

Erick Ajax | Vice President, E.J Ajax and Sons (MN)

Kerry Gumm | Director, Recruiting and Diversity, Principal Financial Group (IA)

Mike Mandina | President, Optimax (NY)

Angel Pineiro, JR. | Senior Vice President, ASI System Integration, Inc. (NY)

Liza Smitherman | Vice President, Professional Development, Jostin Construction (OH)

Michael Tamasi | President & CEO, AccuRounds (MA)



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## Our Platform to Close America's Skills Gap

- **Invest More, and More Effectively:** We need greater and more effective public investments in workforce education and training tied to market- and employer-relevant outcomes. U.S. employers are unable to find skilled workers to fill open positions, and we need to close that skills gap. Business leaders may have varying opinions about government spending, but many of us feel a greater public investment in skills development is a must—particularly if we involve local employers in partnerships with education and training providers to ensure the efficiency and targeting of those investments.
- **Deliver More Industry-Recognized Credentials:** Some U.S. employers are looking for workers with bachelors or graduate degrees. But many employers are seeking to fill good-paying middle-skilled jobs that do not require a college degree, but expect the applicant to have some type of technical, industry-recognized credential or certification. We need to increase the number of degrees *and* industry-recognized credentials delivered by our colleges and training programs, and we need to involve employers in identifying which of those credentials are in demand.
- **Create Regional Industry Partnerships to Improve Education and Training across Firms:** Small and medium-sized employers don't have big training budgets, nor do they hire enough people to influence local colleges or training programs. Larger employers often have their own training resources, but they too face limits in the range of people whom they can serve. Organizing multiple firms, small and large, within the same regional industry allows all of these firms to identify common skill standards that can then be expected of area schools, trainers and colleges. These sector or industry partnerships are at the forefront of workforce training in the U.S. today. We need more of them, in every region of this country.
- **Help Employers Partner with Community Colleges, Service Providers:** There are many effective partnerships between individual employers, community colleges, and / or other community-based service providers that are helping low-income or low-skilled individuals access new training and employment opportunities at these firms. Public policy could do a better job of encouraging such partnerships, including rewarding and recognizing participating employers.
- **Accelerate Hiring with On-the-Job Training (OJT) Assistance:** Employers want to hire again, but too many of their applicants—while potentially good candidates—lack certain basic or technical skills to qualify for open positions. Publicly-funded on-the-job training eases the costs and risks of employers who are willing to lean forward with such hires, with the expectation that these new employees will gain new skills that may later qualify them for permanent hire. OJT policies are particularly attractive to small employers, who rarely make use of hiring tax incentives. Larger employers have likewise demonstrated interest in such learn and earn strategies to accelerate hiring.