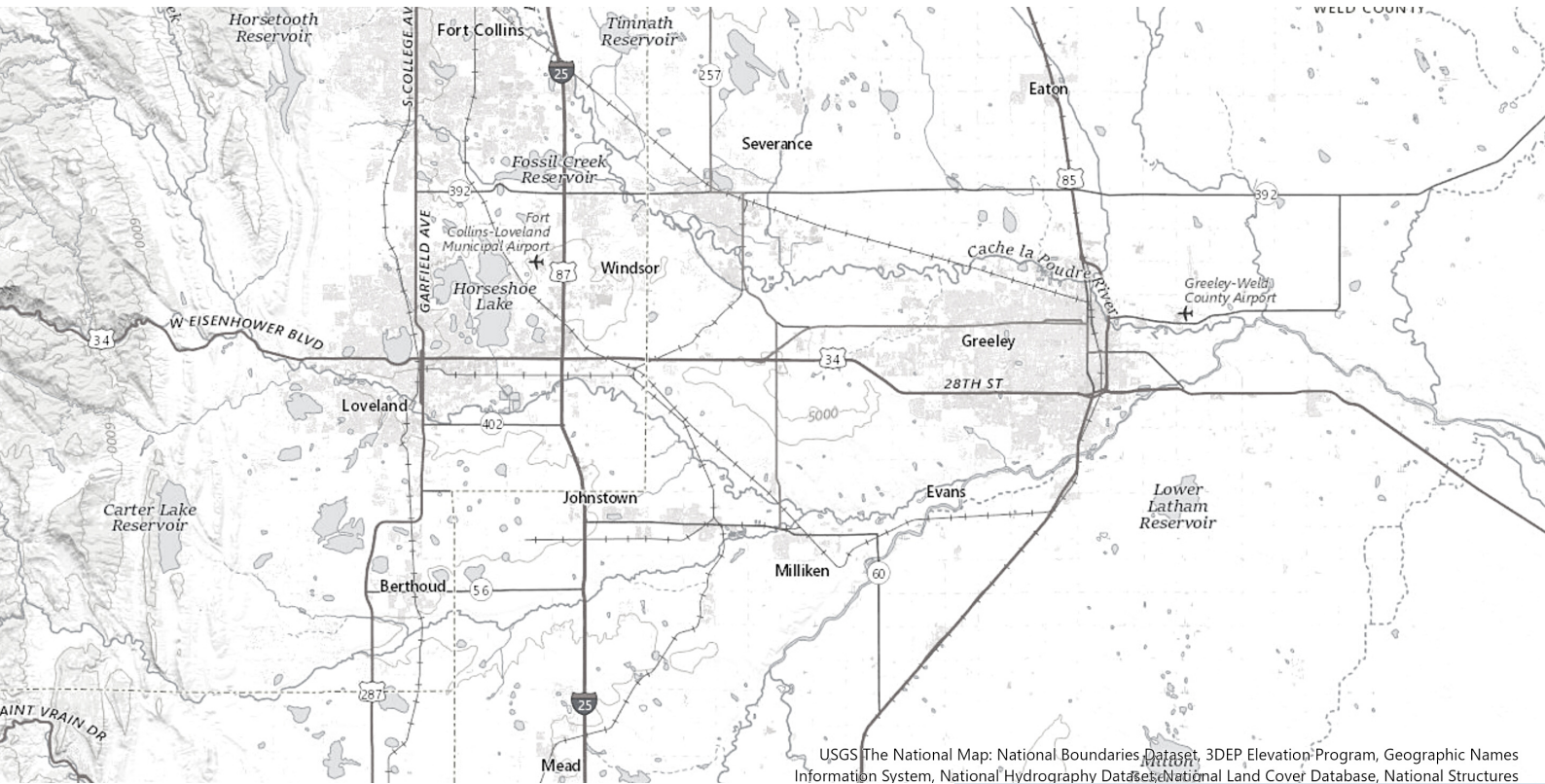


PROFILING THE NORTHERN COLORADO MANUFACTURING AND HEALTH SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

A Benchmarking Project of the Institute for Networked Communities (INC)



NORTHERN COLORADO MANUFACTURING AND HEALTH SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

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This case study is one in a series of profiles of Next Generation Sector Partnerships from across the country. Its primary purpose is to give practitioners insights into the key milestones and critical ingredients for success that have shaped the journey of the Northern Colorado Manufacturing and Health Sector Partnerships, at seven years two of the longest-lasting Next Generation Sector Partnerships nationwide. Its intended audience is the diverse mix of business, education, workforce development, and economic development leaders who are trying to take their communities to a new level of shared prosperity. The profile is organized into five sections: motivations for launch, mechanisms for change, moments of transformation, measurable results, major ingredients for success, and the future and needed areas for growth.

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- *Motivations for Launch*
- *Moments of Transformation*
- *Measurable Results*
- *Ingredients for Success*
- *Future of the Partnership*



MOTIVATIONS FOR LAUNCH: AN OPPORTUNITY TO BREAK DOWN INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY SILOS

In 2013, Northern Colorado's Larimer and Weld Counties had an increasing number of manufacturers and a growing health care sector. However, manufacturers tended to know little about one another, especially those located in the adjacent county. Health care providers competed for talent, but did not have a forum to work together on common issues. Education and workforce development had limited ties with both sectors. Economic development groups had better business relationships, but restricted the access of others to those companies. Most now describe the situation then as a series of industry and community silos, with the border between Larimer and Weld Counties compounding the separation.

That year, however, the walls would begin to fall. Yvonne Myers, a top health care executive and recent chair of a local workforce development board, knew that her sector needed to work better together and with the community, and began to reach out to others to call for change. Manufacturers were also struggling with lack of skilled labor, experiencing growing delays in their supply chains and limitations in their ability to expand. Some executives were coming to the conclusion that the problem was too big to try to solve as individual companies.

At about the same time, the State of Colorado's top education, workforce development, and economic development agencies co-hosted a summit meeting, inviting every region of the state to send a team composed of local leaders in the three fields as well as a few industry executives. The leaders of each agency announced that they had adopted a common approach: challenging every Colorado region to launch sector partnerships to strengthen their economies and communities, consistent with the Governor's Economic Blueprint.

Each regional team received a detailed profile of their economy so they could identify growing sectors to prioritize, and then develop a launch plan using the Next Generation Sector Partnership approach. Northern Colorado chose manufacturing and health care, and key industry leaders in both sectors, including Myers who had attended the Summit, volunteered to be champions. When the team returned to Northern Colorado after the Summit, they understood that their superiors in state government expected them to follow-through—and they did.



MECHANISMS FOR CHANGE: INDUSTRY IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT, INCLUSIVE MISSIONS, AND SHARED TABLES

The partnerships provided new forums for a certain kind of industry leader to emerge. They were a combination of large and small company executives across different parts of the manufacturing and health care value chains, spanning both Northern Colorado counties. They were recognized as pacesetters and “doers” by other industry executives, so people listened when they spoke up about what needed to change. They embraced the Next Generation Sector Partnership's emphasis on being industry-led. As one of the founding manufacturing champions, Paul Harter has said: “I was initially put off by industry being at the front of the room with community partners at the back of the room, but I finally realized it wasn't about them being pushed to the back, it was about us being pulled to the front to take responsibility for our sector.”

For both sectors, a core group of industry leaders emerged to develop the organizational framework that exists to this day. Both groups developed ambitious mission statements and identified specific priorities for immediate action, enabling them to achieve “early wins” and build momentum.

- The Manufacturing Partnership's mission is to make American manufacturing great by driving a passionate, collaborative partnership, so that Northern Colorado manufacturing and our communities thrive. Their core beliefs include: altruism, passion about manufacturing, collaboration, manufacturer-driven, integrity and accountability, action-oriented/solving real problems, community-oriented, and learning.
- The Health Sector Partnership's mission is to bring together key stakeholders to promote and improve health within our communities. They collaborate across disciplines, organizations, and communities to seize opportunities, solve problems, and celebrate successes in the region.

MECHANISMS FOR CHANGE: CONTINUED

Notably, both Partnership's missions are broad-based, making explicit reference to helping the communities in which they operate. Both assume that the destinies of their industries and communities are intertwined, and can move forward together in a positive fashion. This philosophy is clearly visible in the specific projects and activities of each partnership, with manufacturers, for example, working with schools to improve curriculum and build career awareness among local youth and health care also focusing on career awareness as well as behavioral health and addressing specific occupational shortages, such as medical assistants.

For community partners from education, workforce development, chambers and economic development, the formation of the partnerships created for the first time truly "shared tables" for collaboration with industry and among fellow community partners. Instead of having to contact employers separately, each of the partnerships provide a shared table at which all the partners can hear about industry needs and develop solutions. This has helped community partners better align their work to industry priorities, engage industry executives as partners in the work, and forge new collaborations with other organizations across education levels, political boundaries, and disciplines.

MOMENTS OF TRANSFORMATION: FLIPPING THE SCRIPT AND WATERSHED EVENTS

Shortly after the formation of the two partnerships, both demonstrated that they represented a clear departure from the past. A small but significant step for the Manufacturing Partnership turned out to be central to their new approach to problem-solving. One of their priorities was to give local high school students an opportunity to see first-hand how their plants operated and to talk to actual manufacturing workers through organized tours. Manufacturers took it upon themselves to recruit companies for tours and develop guidance for those giving the tours to ensure consistent quality.

Meeting with local educators they were told that the schools would not be able to afford the bus transportation costs to get the students to the plants. On the spot, manufacturers took up a collection among themselves for the funds required, and the first tours were able to proceed. Those tours multiplied over the years and continue to this day. Instead of blaming their public partners, accepting defeat, or waiting for the school system to find a solution, the business leaders took charge and came up with a creative solution. They flipped the script," with business shifting from passive observer to active player.



In its first year, the Health Sector Partnership experienced two important turning points. The first was to depart from the traditional pattern of hyper-competition when it came to talent. Early on, there was a recognition that health care providers were playing a zero-sum game, poaching a limited pool of talent from one another. Only if they worked together and with local educators could they hope to grow the skilled labor pool, and move to a positive-sum situation.

This shift first took the form of a unified effort to improve the quantity of effectively-trained medical assistants (MAs) in the region. Two-year MA programs were in place at local community colleges, but industry generally felt that the programs were too long and that some graduates didn't match well with what employers needed, contributing to high rates of turnover. Traditionally, a few providers had representatives on program advisory committees that offered feedback, but had little impact. For the first time, the region's providers approached the colleges together, asking to help develop a different curriculum and a shorter educational program to produce better graduates faster. For a process that usually takes two years, within 8 months local providers had successfully worked with local colleges to make the change, as well as with a larger group at the state level to make changes in colleges across Colorado.

MOMENTS OF TRANSFORMATION: CONTINUED

This shift also took the form of sharing of resources so the entire sector could improve. In early discussions, it became clear that many providers were struggling with staff that did not have sufficient “cultural competency” to serve an increasingly diverse patient population. One provider stepped forward and offered to share their well-developed internal diversity training program curriculum with other Partnership members, as well as local education institutions. A sharp departure, this provider realized that sharing would grow the pool of culturally-competent talent in the region, which would help everyone over the long term.

The second kind of turning point for both partnerships involved watershed moments—events that ushered in a completely new approach. For the Manufacturing Partnership, it was the decision to host “skills panels” to dive deeply into the skills needed for a range of high-priority occupations. Top executives and human resource managers first identified top occupations and, from their perspective, critical skills high-performing workers in those jobs needed to have. Then, panels of high-performing workers in those professions were convened to get a deeper set of insights on what makes them successful and what can be done to prepare new workers for success.

The skills panels led to immediate changes in curriculum at both the local community colleges and high schools, and generated more internship opportunities with local companies. More importantly, it led to the creation of an annual Regional Advisory Meeting, a day in which manufacturing leaders and their high-performing employees regularly update all the local colleges and high schools at the same time about changing skill needs. This approach has proven to produce better information than 15 separate educational program advisory council meetings. In fact, the State of Colorado recognizes this event as an official business advisory meeting required for access to federal funding.

Another watershed event for the Manufacturing Partnership was the creation of a regional trade show (NOCOM). Unlike a traditional trade show that a third-party company organizes and staffs, NOCOM from the beginning was an all-volunteer effort. The Partnership decided that an effective way to advance their goals of better connecting local companies to one another, while also showcasing companies and jobs to youth, would be to hold a high-profile event with booths and educational programming. Seven years running, NOCOM has continued to be an effective business networking vehicle, with many companies developing new customer and supplier relationships, but also as an important avenue for reaching other audiences such as educators, students, and parents.

For the Health Sector Partnership, the watershed moment came in 2020 with the advent of COVID-19. Initially, the pandemic overwhelmed providers and caused the Partnership to pause. Partnership leaders decided to reconvene members to chart a path forward—and the response was resounding, with strong and engaged participants. The result? A recommitment to the Partnership and refinement of its priorities based on new realities. For example, while talent remains a top priority, a major COVID-19 driven change that is likely to remain is the need for a much greater volume of virtual visits and the training needed to prepare health care workers for this growing role.

MEASURABLE RESULTS: KEEPING TRACK, TELLING THE STORY, BREAKING NEW GROUND

The Northern Colorado Next Generation Sector Partnerships have made a lasting commitment to tracking their results, professionally telling their story, and pushing the boundaries of what’s possible. They both make sure to identify meaningful metrics and capture data as they implement their action agendas. Both issue annual written reports, with text and infographics that communicate multiple impact measures. And, while their priorities have remained largely the same over time, each Partnership has continued to add new projects and new dimensions to existing projects based on what they have learned.

The Manufacturing Partnership has grown from a few dozen manufacturers in 2013 to more than 450 manufacturers and direct supply chain companies, 140 public agency partners, and 117 educational partners. It has two main priorities: talent and business-to-business networking. In both areas, manufacturers drive several initiatives that have evolved over the years. More than 250 volunteers from business members drive these initiatives. These include:

- “Manufacturing Rocks” student tours—Middle and high school students tour manufacturers in Northern Colorado with an opportunity to see in person what a career in manufacturing could look like. Tours include a manufacturing floor tour, an interactive activity, and an opportunity to ask questions. Between 2014 and 2019, 2,502 students participated in 162 tours. A “Parents Night” event has been added, and has generated not only measurable interest among students, but successful job applications from parents and coverage in *The Wall Street Journal*.
- “Manufacturing Presents” school presentations—Local manufacturers share about their company, manufacturing applications and career opportunities in manufacturing. Topics include: machining, laser cutting, metal stamping, 3D printing, welding, injection molding, LEAN and more. Between 2014 and 2019, 5,809 middle school, high school, and college students attended a classroom or career fair presentation.



MEASURABLE RESULTS: CONTINUED

- Manufacturing high school internships—a summer internship program that places high school students with local manufacturer into 250 hours of paid internship experiences with an opportunity to increase their skills, explore career options and gain exposure to the industry. Fourteen internships and two faculty externships were completed in 2019.
 - Supervisor management training—Designed and delivered by supervisors in the local manufacturing industry through the local community college, this training was added to fill a gap to prepare promising employees to become first-time supervisors, helping companies grow. In 2020, 160 local manufacturing employees completed the program.
 - Scholarships for college students preparing for manufacturing careers—Annually, the Partnership donates funds to AIMS and Front Range Community College to help students pay for tuition and supplies. In 2019, \$38,500 was contributed for these scholarships with funds raised during by the Partnership's annual trade show NOCOM.
 - A new center for integrated manufacturing at Front Range Community College—Leveraging their new ties with the College, the Partnership was instrumental in helping secure federal funding to build the center and acquire equipment.
 - Regional Advisory Meeting—Building on their initial success with “skills panels,” manufacturers host the annual meeting and invite educators to hear about the latest developments in manufacturing and the impacts on skill needs, including input directly from top executives and high-performing employees in key occupations. The event regularly draws between 100 and 200 educators in the region.
 - Insite Tours and Lunch and Learns—Local manufacturers host Partnership members from other companies to tour and share best practices. Lunch and Learns are regular sessions focused on key business topics. In 2019, there were 6 Insite tours with 162 attendees, 10 Lunch and Learns, and 3 other Business-to-Business networking events with 328 attendees.
 - NOCOM Trade Show—The largest manufacturing trade show in Colorado, all-volunteer run. In 2019, NOCOM had 114 booths and 900 attendees. The Partnership has created a written guide to putting on the show, which is used to recruit and train volunteers.
- Similarly, the Health Sector Partnership grew from 30 participating organizations in 2013 to 75 organizations and 530 members by 2020. It has four main priorities: education of the public on health care, coordination of a larger behavioral health solution for the region, increasing workforce skills relative to diversity awareness, and assuring the appropriateness for pre-admission screening and resident review (PASRR). Important measurable results include:
- Medical assistant program overhaul. The Partnership was instrumental in restructuring the medical assistant program into a one-year certificate in 2015, increasing the number of qualified graduates significantly in the five years since the change. An addition of an apprenticeship program for MAs has also helped with retention.
 - Medical assistant education scholarships—The Partnership donated \$3,000 in 2019 for scholarships at Front Range and AIMS Community Colleges. These donations supported 6 medical assistant students at FRCC and paid for CNA certification exams for students at AIMS Community College.
 - "Get into the Guts of Medical Careers" Program—These half day events and tours for middle schoolers provide students with an opportunity to meet with leading health care professionals and educators to talk about different medical careers including medical assisting, surgical technician, behavioral health, emergency medical services, senior care, and other health occupations. Over the 2019-2020 period, 10 providers hosted 187 students.
 - New Healthcare Career Live Virtual Chats—These innovative panel discussions connected individuals interested in healthcare careers with speakers from in-demand jobs in a live, panel presentation and Q&A setting. The first Chats held in November 2020 had panels with (1) a registered nurse, occupational therapist, and social worker (55 attendees); (2) a certified nursing assistant, a certified nursing assistance youth apprentice, and medical assistant (115 attendees); and (3) a licensed practical nurse, certified nursing assistant, and sterile processing technician (41 attendees).
 - Behavioral health career exploration—The Partnership conducts outreach to build awareness for the need for behavioral health professionals. In 2020, it held its first event at the University of Northern Colorado, involving 80 employers, 60 health professionals, 10 government partners, and over 100 students.
 - Pre-Admission Screening and Resident Review (PASRR) process training—The Partnership works regularly with state regulators and industry representatives to ensure the PASRR assessment process is timely, respectful, and fair to the patient, the discharging entity and the admitting skilled nursing facility. In 2019, the Partnership hosted one of only four such trainings in Colorado, with over 125 attendees.

MAJOR INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS: CONNECTED LEADERSHIP, ROLES FOR EVERYONE, INVESTING IN GROWTH

While the Partnerships represent very different industries driven by distinct sets of business leaders, they do share a common recipe for sustainable success. First and foremost, they both rely on well-connected leadership to ensure the right players are in the room to make decisions about priorities and mobilize to act on those priorities. In this case, well-connected means strong relationships with both their peers in industry as well as key public partners in education, workforce development, and economic development.

From the industry perspective, these leaders are well respected for both their business acumen and commitment to the community. They are able to express how the Next Gen approach is different and why other executives should join the Partnerships. And, they often understand the underlying strengths and expertise of their business peers so they can help them find the best ways to contribute. Since not all of these leaders are from the most well-known companies, there continues to be a mix of executives representing different company sizes and product areas and markets, ensuring diverse perspectives and, once decisions are made, widely-shared priorities.

From the community perspective, especially in the early years, these relationships were often built by business leaders having served previously on chamber or public boards or worked with chamber or public partners on a specific community project. Today, as new leaders are elevated, they have also had experience and built relationships through the work of the Partnerships themselves.

Both Partnerships have maintained a small, everchanging core of business leaders who have overseen operations and led committees. However, that does not mean that only a few people are doing the work. Both Partnerships have been adept at finding roles for everyone: projects are designed to give other businesses specific options for roles they can play. For example, the Manufacturing Partnership has more than 250 business volunteers that can host a tour, host an internship, provide curriculum guidance to local schools, help with a task for the NOCOM trade show, and contribute funds for specific outcomes (e.g., \$100 to pay for six students to go on a plant tour, \$800 to pay for an entire bus of students to go on a plant tour).



A third critical element that has enabled the Partnerships to enjoy sustained success is a commitment to investing in growth. After experiencing early success, leaders of the all-volunteer Partnerships realized that to move to the next level they would need dedicated staff to expand their reach and grow their impact. However, they wanted to make sure that the Partnerships remained industry-led, rather than staff-driven with a growing overhead burden. They retained flexible consulting help rather than hire permanent employees, someone to project manage, do meeting logistics, and keep track of outcomes in the form of annual reports, which in turn puts a spotlight on tangible results and helps with membership and fundraising.

Leadership also realized that they would need a new funding model. In the early years, costs were low as in-kind contributions from industry, chambers, and public partners sustained operations. This was supplemented by state and local government grants for specific projects. To grow, however, they realized that they would need a more diversified and stable combination of revenue sources.

While they felt it was important to keep general membership free for interested companies, they also began structuring voluntary giving levels for members who felt the Partnership was adding value to their company and the community. In the case of Manufacturing, they significantly expanded the NOCO trade show, creating a reliable annual revenue stream they could use to pay for staffing help and for project costs in other areas. Both also secured regular funding from local government, chambers, and economic development organizations, after having demonstrated the value of the Partnerships to advancing shared agendas for job growth and community vitality. And, other community businesses, such as banks and utilities, education, as well as individuals were given the opportunity to support the Partnership efforts.

MOVING FORWARD: MANAGING SUCCESSION, MEASURING DOWNSTREAM IMPACTS

Although both Partnerships have shown an ability to make successful transitions, 2020 provided a unique combination of challenges. The Health Sector Partnership, in particular, paused as members dealt with the Spring surge of COVID-19 in the region. The Partnership did have a well-attended meeting later in the year that re-energized members, demonstrating the importance of remaining industry-led and adapting to changing circumstances to long-term sustainability.

More broadly, as the years pass, there are fewer of the founding generation of both Partnerships who are still active in leadership. In general, these leadership transitions have been successful, but the more changes that happen, the more variables are introduced that create uncertainty about the future.

Both Partnerships have measured results in some areas, still there are downstream impacts that haven't yet been assessed (e.g., students/parents who participated in plant tours/parent nights who went on to manufacturing careers; the number of medical assistants who have been produced and retained as a result of changes in community college curriculum; the number of new internships/apprenticeships; companies that have experienced growing revenues, secured new suppliers, or recruited new talent as a result of their participation in the NOCOM trade show; measurable changes in curriculum and programs as a result of the annual Regional Advisory meeting). Having been in operation several years, both Partnerships should be well-positioned to measure these and other downstream impacts from their work.

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