

PROFILING THE MADE IN CENTRAL PA MANUFACTURING PARTNERSHIP

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



MADE IN CENTRAL PA

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This case study is one in a series of profiles of Next Generation Sector Partnerships operating 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 MADE in Central PA Manufacturing Partnership, a nearly three-year-old partnership that has reached new heights during the COVID era. The intended audience for this series is the diverse mix of business, education, workforce development and economic development leaders who are committed to the work of taking their communities to a new level of shared prosperity. The profile is organized into six sections: motivations for launch, mechanisms for change, moments of transformation, measurable results, major ingredients for success, and the future of the Partnership.

WHAT'S INSIDE:

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



MOTIVATIONS FOR LAUNCH: WORKING INDEPENDENTLY NOT OPTIMAL, A NEW PATH OPENS

Comprised of nine counties, the Central Pennsylvania region spans across 5,370 square miles of primarily rural portions of Pennsylvania. Known for its strong manufacturing presence, the region is centrally located between Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and New York City with a wide range of highway infrastructure, making the region well situated as a distribution center for its diverse manufacturers. With nearly 620,000 people residing in the Central PA region and with robust educational, healthcare and social services, and manufacturing industries ranking as the largest employers by sector, Central PA has a solid foundation for launching and fostering successful industry partnerships.

The region's manufacturing businesses range in size and scope from regional to global manufacturers. The leading companies have struggled to find and hire appropriately skilled workers, with many manufacturers searching for their own solutions to common workforce needs. Joe Miller, a Senior Human Resources Professional at First Quality Enterprises, was already working independently with local high schools and career and technical education (CTE) schools to raise awareness about the benefits and careers available within the manufacturing industry. Historically, support partners, including local public, nonprofit and education partners, routinely stepped up to the challenge of supporting and strengthening the region's manufacturing workforce. Still, these solutions did not provide the widespread nor systemic impact that the manufacturers and support partners sought, and all knew the region had greater potential to offer.

When the State of Pennsylvania offered grants to establish regional industry partnerships in 2017, Erica Mulberger, the Executive Director of the Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Corporation (CPWDC), knew that the Central Pennsylvania region was ready to take the leap into creating organized, cohesive partnerships with the manufacturing industry and the healthcare industry. With the support of a Next Generation Sector Partnership (Next Gen) facilitator, the Central Pennsylvania region initiated an industry-driven partnership in manufacturing.



MECHANISMS FOR CHANGE: TAKING THE LEAP TOGETHER, USING A NEW DISCIPLINED APPROACH

With a history of industry partnerships in the region dating back to the early 2000s, the support partners and industry leaders shared a foundational understanding of both the required work and subsequent benefits of launching and sustaining industry partnerships. Still, the launching of what is now the MADE in Central PA partnership required a collective agreement from all involved to focus the partnership initiatives and benefits at the forefront.

The intentionally planned launch meeting served as the springboard for the partnership, allowing prospective business leaders to gain a firm understanding of the Next Gen approach to industry partnerships. Ronn Cort, President and COO of Sekisui Kydex, LLC, notes that he was initially drawn into the partnership because of the way Mulberger, as director of the local workforce board, was able to communicate the partnership's commitment to being industry-driven. Cort also recognized that the Next Gen model is meant to be tailored to the needs and assets of the region, unlike a "franchise model" that requires a strict adherence to all tools within the playbook. Gone were the days of individual outreach to community schools and support partners. The MADE in Central PA partnership was now committed to acting as a coordinated, united front when providing solutions for shared industry challenges.

With manufacturers in the region differing in size, clientele and type of production, there had been limited opportunities prior to the partnership to network and share best practices for tackling shared challenges. Cort describes this connecting thread across manufacturers as "very different businesses but we all had identical issues". After the businesses gathered and began to assess their shared needs, three main interests rose to the top: building a skilled workforce, business-to-business networking and marketing the Central PA region to both prospective employers and employees. With consensus around these three initiatives, both support partners and industry leaders began to consolidate their resources and identify solutions to create a collective approach to solving the three main challenges. Ultimately, three main action teams were formed.

MOMENTS OF TRANSFORMATION: COVID-19 AS A SURPRISING CATALYST FOR PROGRESS

Within the last year, MADE in Central PA has made significant progress and impact. Following a meeting in October 2019, the Partnership collectively decided to brand itself “MADE in Central PA”. Moving forward with a shared identity, the Partnership created and implemented a regional marketing plan focused on increasing the pipeline of skilled workers. With industry leading the effort, support partners rallied to generate funding for a video to market the Central Pennsylvania region. Ronn Cort, from Sekisui Kydex, LLC, notes that “this collective marketing campaign was driven by this partnership and is an example of the kinds of things that I don’t think any one manufacturer would have done alone, or any one support partner would have been able to do that effectively” without the collective effort.

Enthusiasm around the Partnership and the Partnership’s impact truly gained steam when the COVID-19 pandemic struck the region in March of 2020. Building off the foundational work of creating three focused action teams, the Partnership swiftly mobilized to meet the immediate regional needs that surfaced from the pandemic. During the first couple weeks of the pandemic, the Partnership’s manufacturing leaders met virtually to create a game plan for addressing the challenges emerging due to COVID and pivoting the production of their plants. After partnering with the Central Pennsylvania Healthcare Partnership to identify immediate concerns, the manufacturing Partnership activated their networks to rise to the occasion. Within the coming weeks and months, manufacturers switched their production lines to produce a broad range of critical materials--PPE, ventilator parts, bottles for hand sanitizer, to name a few. As the industry leaders led the charge, the Partnership’s support partners played their equal part in response to the industry needs, connecting manufacturers with each other to source necessary materials and connecting manufacturers with the Central PA Healthcare Partnership members to keep track of production specifications and products needed within the region.

As the pandemic wears on, MADE in Central PA’s network is still activated with the businesses meeting monthly to share best practices as they adapt to the ever-changing work environment during the COVID era. Rob Bargo, Vice President of Operations at Videon Central, attributes this quick, collaborative response to the foundational network of the Partnership. The Partnership’s continued response to the pandemic is proof that the region is no longer working in silos and is now tackling shared problems with a networked mindset.

MEASURABLE RESULTS: BUSINESSES FIND COMMON GROUND, COLLABORATE WITH SUPPORT PARTNERS TO BREAK NEW GROUND

With industry needs at the forefront and with all involved adopting the network mindset, the MADE in Central PA partnership has created lasting impact on the Central Pennsylvania region:

- **A strengthened purpose among the regional manufacturers.** Trust and common purpose is eroding the previous highly competitive manufacturing environment in order to solve shared challenges. Manufacturing leaders are now quick to offer support to peers, whether it be in response to producing necessary PPE for the pandemic, sharing best practices while translating COVID regulations, or hosting plant tours during pre-pandemic times.
- **Increased collaboration with local high schools and CTE centers.** Shifting from single manufacturers creating individual connections with local education leaders, the Partnership now offers a common point of contact to link education-business partnerships for college and career awareness and readiness activities, both in the school and in the industry setting. Additionally, businesses with historically successful Manufacturing Day strategies shared their playbook with fellow manufacturers within the partnership. Working as a united front on coordinating Manufacturing Day events every October, the Partnership has doubled the number of students who participate since inception.
- **Sharing the load in economic shifts.** As the Partnership strengthened, one manufacturer faced pandemic related reduced workloads and their workforce faced looming layoffs. Other manufacturers experienced increased work orders and hired the workers in jeopardy of losing their jobs, creating a win-win for the businesses, affected workers and the community.
- **A regional campaign to market the Central Pennsylvania region.** As the outreach and programs continue to build with the local and regional schools and education systems, the manufacturers leverage their ideal location between the major cities of Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and New York City. With a cohort of people in the workforce looking to leave the hustle and bustle of cities, the Central PA region is perfectly situated to offer an escape from the city life and a setting for a meaningful career, all while having close access to the natural beauty of Pennsylvania. Following the industry’s suggestion and their bias towards innovation and action, the support partners are collaborating to create an ongoing campaign for attracting talent to the region.

MEASURABLE RESULTS: CONTINUED

- **Investing in resources for the region and state's collective benefit.** In 2018, SEKISUI contracted an internationally renowned consultant to provide internal training on company culture and the impact that has on employee retention. Seeing how this topic aligned with the Partnerships action teams, Ronn Cort, President and COO of Sekisui Kydex, LLC, offered to sponsor the consultant to present a second day to all Partnership members. Capitalizing on the timing, Erica Mulberger, Executive Director of Central PA Workforce Development Corporation, noted the presentations were the same dates as a statewide Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association Symposium and suggested having the speaker be the keynote at the Symposium which would benefit not just the MADE in Central PA members, but employers and workforce professionals from across the state. Through this coordination, over 220 Pennsylvanians were able to attend the company culture training at the Symposium, and the members and support partners of MADE In Central PA and the Central PA Healthcare Partnership were able to attend the Symposium session at no cost.
- **A united front while working on workforce development plans and state and federal grant initiatives.** Both industry and support partners alike now work as a collective to tackle shared initiatives which brings additional funding to the region. With support from the Partnership, Pennsylvania College of Technology, a support partner, received an \$8 million U.S. Department of Labor Apprenticeship grant in partnership with the New Jersey Technical Institute.
- **Sharing resources and expertise to reduce costs.** When one manufacturer was looking to review the steps on a specific ISO certification, another manufacturer offered up their expertise. Instead of hiring an outside consultant, the company offered for their in-house expert in Quality Management to provide education and guidance. In return, the recipient company reciprocated by offering fabrication work at no charge.
- **An increase in network flexibility.** During the beginning stages of the COVID response, the quick and efficient pivot from quarterly meetings to manufacturers-only monthly sessions was facilitated by the partnership's network flexibility. Due to the relationship-building from previous partnership initiatives, businesses within the partnership quickly crowdsourced both advice and best practices for navigating through COVID impacts.



Above: Rail service provider, North Shore Railroad Company, services several of the MADE in Central PA manufacturers.

- **Collective response to pandemic related healthcare and protective needs.** As previously noted, the manufacturers rallied to help regional healthcare organizations and the broader community regarding emergent protective equipment needs. Sanitizers, gloves, masks and face shield production ramped up as well as the sourcing of materials for the manufacturing of these items. One manufacturing company that made jerseys for sports teams pivoted to produce protective equipment for healthcare and essential workers, again leveraging the supply chains of other companies in the region. Another manufacturer expanded their product line from haircare products to hand sanitizer that was quickly provided to members of the Central PA Healthcare Partnership and given to local non-profits at no cost. This successfully exemplified the role manufacturers could play for the community, and also made the community aware of the large number of manufacturers and their commitment to the region and the local community.
- **A streamlined way for support partners to share relevant resources with manufacturers.** In 2019, a sharing platform, Basecamp, was setup for manufacturers and support partners to quickly share resources. This master database was a critical component to the Partnership's successful response during the early stages of the pandemic. By highlighting each company and organization's areas of expertise, the database ensures a streamlined process for quickly identifying which organizations and businesses should be called upon. Basecamp has continued to be a place for support partners and manufacturers alike to share relevant information. For example, Lauri Moon, the Manager for Training & Outreach at Innovative Manufacturers' Center, uses Basecamp to thoughtfully share resources with manufacturers, ensuring that industry leaders have access and awareness of up-to-date information and available support.

MAJOR INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS: PASSION FOR PLACE, BIAS FOR ACTION, INCLUSIVE APPROACH

Lessons from the Partnership as a Whole

- **A place-based passion from all involved.** The MADE in Central PA partnership is comprised of leaders who have a deep passion and keen understanding about the beauty, merit and heart of the Central Pennsylvania region.
- **Adopting the “bias toward action” culture.** Rob Bargo from Videon Central understands that manufacturers have a natural bias toward action. With the Partnership creating a framework and structure for industry leaders to routinely connect, the natural results include action-based solutions.
- **“20-year vision, not a 20-minute vision”.** Ronn Cort emphasizes the importance of creating and working toward future-oriented goals. Whether it be workforce related or Partnership-structure related, it’s essential to keep the vision focused on longevity and sustainability, to have a bias for immediate actions that advance long-term goals.
- **Inclusion means outreach, outreach, outreach.** It’s no secret that building and maintaining a regional industry partnership takes hard work and consistency. MADE in Central PA leaders have been steadfast in their outreach to their own members and with prospective members, ultimately keeping accountability toward engagement levels during the early stages.
- **A strong and organized initial launch meeting.** The initial meeting sets the tone for the partnership, allowing business and support partner leaders to assess the value of the partnership. This initial meeting ultimately dictates the initial engagement levels, so it’s important to hold a concise, intentional meeting that emphasizes the importance of an industry-driven model.
- **Diversity in roles amongst leadership.** It’s key to include CEOs and plant managers as well as human resource and training managers. Different roles bring different skills and larger companies have been willing to share best practices.
- **A strong understanding of the Next Gen model.** The MADE in Central PA partnership utilized support from a Next Gen coach during the beginning phases. This initial support offered a neutral way for support partners and industry alike to understand the toolbox of a truly industry-led partnership. Additionally, multiple partners attended a Next Gen training to understand the model and many felt it was an invaluable step in creating MADE in Central PA.
- **Visionaries and project managers.** It’s critical to have diverse types of leadership styles within the partnership.



Above: Aerial view of the Susquehanna River Valley, located in Central PA.

MAJOR INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS: CONTINUED

Lessons from the Support Partners

- **A collective agreement from the support partners to champion industry needs at the center of the Partnership.** MADE in Central PA support partners have continuously rallied around the industry-driven initiatives, offering their resources and leaving their own agendas at the door to tackle shared challenges.
- **A deep commitment from the convening agency.** When launching the Partnership, the convening agency, CPWDC, led by its Executive Director, Erica Mulberger, had a pre-existing commitment to the development and strengthening of the region through the creation of industry partnerships.
- **Consistent, appropriate follow up.** A key to sustaining the Partnership as industry-led has been tailoring the communications and outreach to best match industry communication styles. The follow up and outreach has always been responsive to the needs and decisions of the businesses and not led by the agendas of support partners.
- **Support partners who are willing to activate their networks for the sake of the partnership.** Lauri Moon at Innovative Manufacturers’ Center elevated the well-being of the Partnership first by reaching out to her pre-established industry connections. Many other support partners within the Partnership did the same, ultimately increasing engagement and scope.

MAJOR INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS: CONTINUED

Lessons from the Business Partners

- **Choosing industry champions who create a culture of honesty and transparency.** The Central Pennsylvania region transitioned from a culture of relative secrecy and competition to a culture of honesty and transparency. From the beginning, industry leaders like Ronn Cort and Rob Bargo set the tone for the Partnership to be a place for sharing both challenges and solutions.
- **Industry champions who are willing to “call in” their peers.** Industry leaders have embraced the responsibility for building out the Partnership by leveraging existing connections and continuing to engage manufacturing peers within the region.
- **Diversity amongst company size.** MADE in Central PA emphasizes the importance of intentionally including small to large-sized companies as it ensures companies of all sizes will feel empowered to join the Partnership if seeing representation of their company size within the member mix.
- **Industry Champions that represent diverse types of businesses.** Ronn Cort, Rob Bargo and Joe Miller represent diverse types of businesses –including a large manufacturer part of a multinational company, and regional and local businesses.
- **An industry champion who is willing and able to articulate and share the vision for the partnership.** Co-champions of MADE in Central PA, Rob Bargo and Ronn Cort, lead all discussions putting the priorities of the partnership above their individual company needs and can quickly reframe conversations to get the most action out of each meeting.

MORE FROM THIS SERIES:

- *Calumet Manufacturing Industry Sector Partnership (CMISP)*
- *Northeast Louisiana (NELA) Healthcare Alliance*
- *Northern Colorado Manufacturing & Health Care Sector Partnerships*
- *Kingman and Mohave Manufacturing Association (KAMMA)*
- *Seattle Healthcare Industry Leadership Table (HILT)*



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LOOKING FORWARD: FORMALIZATION AND CONTINUED MOMENTUM

Since its inception, MADE in Central PA has been intentional about creating an open, welcoming format for meetings and member engagement. The Partnership has emphasized the importance of creating an inclusive, diverse group of manufacturers and support partners. Because of this intentionality, the Partnership is now made up of a diverse portfolio of organizations and businesses. With this core foundation, the Partnership is now looking forward to creating a more formal and transparent framework of vision, mission, goals and operations. The members believe a more formalized framework will ensure a broader footprint, allowing interested parties to quickly get onboard with the mission, vision and initiatives of the Partnership. This formalization will consist of a period of reassessing collective goals, initiatives and action items. Still, it will be crucial to keep flexibility in the framework, ensuring that the Partnership will always be industry-driven and responsive to industry and economic needs.

Finally, the Partnership has experienced high levels of enthusiasm from multiple core partners throughout the course of the 2020-2021 pandemic. Still, many manufacturing leaders have been pulled onto the plant floor due to the increased production demand in some manufacturing sectors. Without the ability to consistently and safely gather in person, there has been a strain on engagement for many. Virtual meetings cannot fully replace in-person meetings during these earlier years of partnership development, yet the Partnership is finding that there is still room for creative solutions. The Partnership will batten down its emphasis on industry-led initiatives, and the accompanying support partners will continue to champion industry needs to ensure relevance, enthusiasm and momentum are sustained.