

GCP, Cleveland Foundation providing pathway for workers

By **TIMOTHY MAGAW**

Originally Published: April 12, 2015 4:30 AM Modified: April 13, 2015 2:42 AM

The Greater Cleveland Partnership, the regional chamber of commerce, is launching a new initiative aimed at solving one of its members' biggest gripes: finding qualified workers.

That effort — dubbed Pathway Partners — got a major boost recently through a \$125,000 grant from the Cleveland Foundation, which also has taken a greater interest in workforce development over the last year after commissioning a study from a national consulting firm, FutureWorks, which shed light on Cleveland's dire skills gap.

In the most basic sense, GCP said Pathway Partners will serve as a one-stop physical and virtual destination to connect local students with internships and other learning experiences, and it will serve as a resource to help employers develop these sorts of opportunities.

"We really see ourselves as the ideal location to bring this all together because of our deep reach into the business community," said Shana Marbury, GCP's general counsel and vice president of strategic initiatives and research. "A lot of work in this area is going on in the community, but it's not at all connected. We see ourselves as the connector or clearinghouse."

The foundation's study found that more than three-quarters of all two-year degrees and certificates granted by community colleges in the Greater Cleveland area are in three subjects: general studies, health programs and business and management. That figure doesn't bode well for in-demand fields, such as information technology and advanced manufacturing. Because of this disconnect, foundation officials said the business community needed to make a stronger push in this area.

Internship and mentoring programs, of course, are nothing new to Greater Cleveland. What makes this effort so promising, its organizers say, is that the business community's strongest voice — GCP — is taking such a prominent role.

"We can't stress enough how important we think it is that GCP has decided to take on this work and this role," said Helen Williams, the foundation's program director for education. "It was the critical missing piece."

She added, "The business community as a member of the Cleveland community has to organize itself in a way so that it can add value and ensure our education system is aligned with workforce needs."

A key part of Pathway Partners will be a career exploration initiative called True2U, which is a partnership with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, the foundation's MyCom youth development program and other community partners.

As part of that program, GCP plans to recruit 200 business and community members to serve as mentors for eighth-graders within the city's public school system. Within three years, the program hopes to have 600 mentors on board. Interested volunteers can sign up on GCP's website, www.gcpartnership.com.

"This is not a one-off, one-school at a time program," said Shilpa Kedar, the foundation's program director for economic development. "It's more systemic. True2U is about institutionalizing career awareness."

The city's school district, with the help of Pathway Partners, is also in the midst of redesigning the curriculum at its five career academies to focus more on job skills. The redesign will use framework developed by the Ford Next Generation Learning initiative, a growing educational movement launched by the automaker to bring together educators and the business community.