

Gov. Pritzker Announces \$15 Million Investment to Build New Manufacturing Training Academies in Downstate Communities

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CHAMPAIGN, IL– Governor JB Pritzker joined the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) and industry leaders in announcing a first-of-its-kind program to expand manufacturing training opportunities for Illinois residents. Through a \$15 million Notice of Funding

Opportunity (NOFO) released today, Illinois will establish two new innovative Manufacturing Trainings Academies that will expand opportunities for skills training, boost retention of manufacturers in downstate communities, and attract more investment by manufacturing companies throughout Illinois.

“I’m proud to announce today that Illinois is dedicating \$15 million to establish two downstate manufacturing training academies to address the shortage of skilled workers. We’re investing directly in communities and in companies with programs that will allow businesses to grow, retain and attract new talent for higher paying jobs of the future,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “These new Manufacturing Training Academies will provide 21st century manufacturing training to help more of our residents bring the right skills to the workplace, while helping Illinois companies keep up as they retool to remain competitive for the future. And through this program, we will bring investments where they are most needed, specifically for downstate communities, where these cutting-edge training opportunities have not been as widely available.”

Through a competitive NOFO process, DCEO will provide a total of \$15 million for two capital grants to fund the construction of new facilities to house two new Manufacturing Training Academies in downstate Illinois. The NOFO is seeking proposals from community colleges to provide cutting-edge training programs that will equip students for an array of well-paying skilled manufacturing jobs that require specialized training.

The Manufacturing Training Academies are part of the economic vision for growth and equity put forward by the Governor’s 5-year economic plan, which offers a blueprint for growth among the state’s strongest and highest growth potential sectors – including manufacturing. These academies will offer specialized training that’s not widely available at downstate community colleges for high-demand manufacturing jobs such as machinery mechanics and computer numerically controlled (CNC) machine operators and programmers.

“Manufacturing has long been at the heart of Illinois’ economy and with these timely and critical investments we will ensure we capture a large share of the industry’s projected growth in the years ahead—which represents boundless opportunities for the next generation of workers and a pathway to well-paying jobs of the future,” said DCEO Director Erin B. Guthrie. “Under the leadership of Governor Pritzker, we will continue to make key investments to that will not only attract new companies but ensure our current businesses have the talent and resources to flourish.”

Eligible applicants for the Manufacturing Training Academies NOFO include community college districts or coalitions of community college districts in downstate Illinois, which includes all of Illinois outside of Cook and the collar counties, areas which face difficulty in recruiting for manufacturing and retaining manufacturers due to

a shortage in training resources. The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), representing Illinois' 39 community college districts, partnered with DCEO in creating the project proposal.

“As Illinois' largest workforce training provider, community colleges statewide have the expertise to partner with local communities to help guide our residents on the path to meaningful careers through these new facilities,” said Brian Durham, Executive Director of the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB). “Manufacturing remains an important and growing industry for our state, and we are poised, with the right investments, to ensure more Illinoisans get the opportunities they need to train for these 21st century jobs. The ICCB and the community college system stand ready to work with the Governor and other local partners to help lead this initiative.”

Future training academies will address a skills shortage that is being faced by employers across the nation as they adopt new technologies in manufacturing production. These new training centers will help meet the needs of regional employers, located in communities where specialized programming is not broadly available at the local community colleges.

“The future of manufacturing is already here. Technologies like collaborative robots and artificial intelligence are reshaping the skill needs in manufacturing,” said David Boulay, President and CEO of the Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center (IMEC). “New investments by the State of Illinois to create Manufacturing Training Academies offer the promise to not only reimagine manufacturing jobs but also to upskill our talented workforce and ensure our Illinois manufacturers remain globally competitive.”

The new program was announced today at Eden Park Illumination, an Illinois-based start-up company producing one-of-a-kind UV lighting used across several industries. Eden Park borne out of research by professors Dr. Gary Eden and Dr. Sung-Jin Park from the world-leading College of Engineering at the University of Illinois. In recent months the company has increased its manufacturing output by a factor of ten and has tripled hiring. To keep up with current and future demand, the company plans to hire additional manufacturing workers, and like other companies in the region, is seeking skilled labor to fill these roles.

“Given the new demands facing all of our communities due to COVID-19, Eden Park is committed to developing solutions that will bring us back safer and more prepared than ever before,” said John Yerger, CEO of Eden Park Illumination. “To keep up with current and future demand, Illinois companies like ours are making plans today to invest in training and workforce development that will prepare workers for more exciting

innovations that lie ahead. Future Illinois Manufacturing Training Academies will support Illinois employers by ensuring more local residents are equipped for the increasingly technical jobs of the future.”

The academies will also develop extensive partnerships for curricular support, operational funding, recruitment, and job placement, including with private-sector employers, K-12 schools and Illinois’ Local Workforce Innovation Boards.

“Manufacturing is an important pillar in many of our communities and infuses new dollars into our economy,” said State Senator Scott Bennett (D-Champaign). “This critical investment will help rebuild our economy as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.”

More than 18,000 Illinois companies manufacture a wide range of products, employ over 550,000 residents, and produce a wide range goods which account for nearly \$60 billion in exports every year – making Illinois the fourth largest state in the U.S. for international exports, and Illinois-made products in hundreds of countries around the world. By 2028, an estimated 4.6 million new manufacturing jobs will need to be filled nationwide. Illinois, with its productive workforce, central location, high-quality infrastructure, and strong foundation in a diverse range of manufacturing sectors, is well-positioned to compete for these jobs.

“Manufacturing has always been an integral part of the Illinois economy, and today’s announcement will help support companies in addressing their current and future workforce needs,” said Carly McCrory-McKay, Executive Director of the Champaign County Economic Development Corporation. “We appreciate Governor Pritzker and DCEO’s continued support of our Illinois manufacturers and look forward to working with economic and workforce development partners across the state of Illinois to encourage more people to explore the possibilities of modern manufacturing and gain the skills necessary for careers in the 21st century.”

Today’s announcement coincides with October’s designation as Manufacturing Month in Illinois. Throughout the month, DCEO has hosted numerous virtual events and webinars showcasing some of the state’s industry leading companies, allowing residents and communities to engage and learn more about manufacturing growth and exciting opportunities of working in the modern-day manufacturing industry. For more on these events and to receive the latest updates on manufacturing beyond this month, please visit [DCEO’s website](#) or follow along on social @IllinoisDCEO.