



Research Brief

Outreach and Recruitment Strategies for a Diverse Workforce in Buffalo Niagara

August 2022

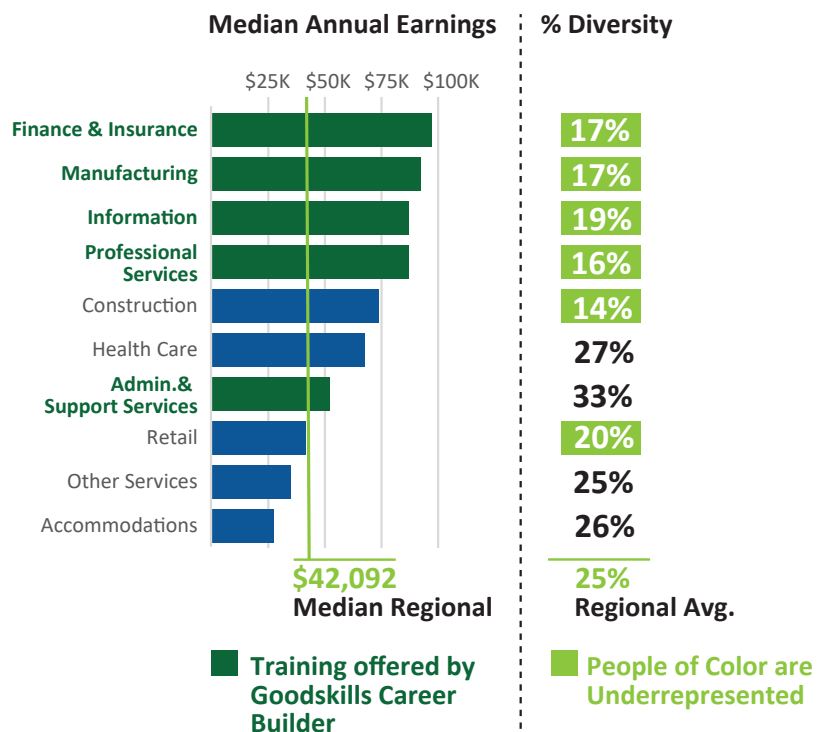
This is the fourth in a series of research briefs produced by Goodwill of Western New York, in partnership with the University at Buffalo Regional Institute (UBRI). The research is intended to drive data-driven decision-making in workforce development that benefits underrepresented, underserved populations in the Buffalo Niagara region. This brief is part of a collaborative effort to expand access into higher-paying careers for all individuals, as part of Goodwill's Goodskills Career Builder program. This brief shares insights on the efforts it takes and the volume of people that must be reached to recruit and cultivate a diverse and more inclusive workforce in the Buffalo Niagara region. Funding for the brief is from a phase 1 Build Back Better Regional Challenge grant from the US Economic Development Administration.

Regional Context

People of color are underrepresented in many industries and occupations in the regional economy, especially higher-paying sectors such as manufacturing and tech.¹ In manufacturing, people of color make up 17% of workers, while across the nation people of color represent approximately 35% of the workforce.² Black and brown workers comprise 24% of workers in tech occupations in Buffalo Niagara versus 40% across the nation.³ Greater workforce diversity contributes to household incomes, wealth generation, and economic impact.

While many hiring companies are trying to grow diversity in their workplace and talent pipelines, diversity goals are not always easy to achieve. This sheds new light on outreach and recruitment methods, including the barriers that training providers and individuals face, drawing from early findings from Goodskills Career Builder. Goodskills Career Builder is a training initiative at Goodwill of Western New York that prepares underserved adults for higher-paying career pathways in advanced manufacturing, tech, and sales and services. Goodskills Career Builder provides industry-driven training and supportive services that reduce barriers to learning and work.

People of color are underrepresented in many higher-paying industries in Buffalo Niagara.



Source: Emsi, Industry data, 2022. The chart shows the region's largest private industries, including Information.

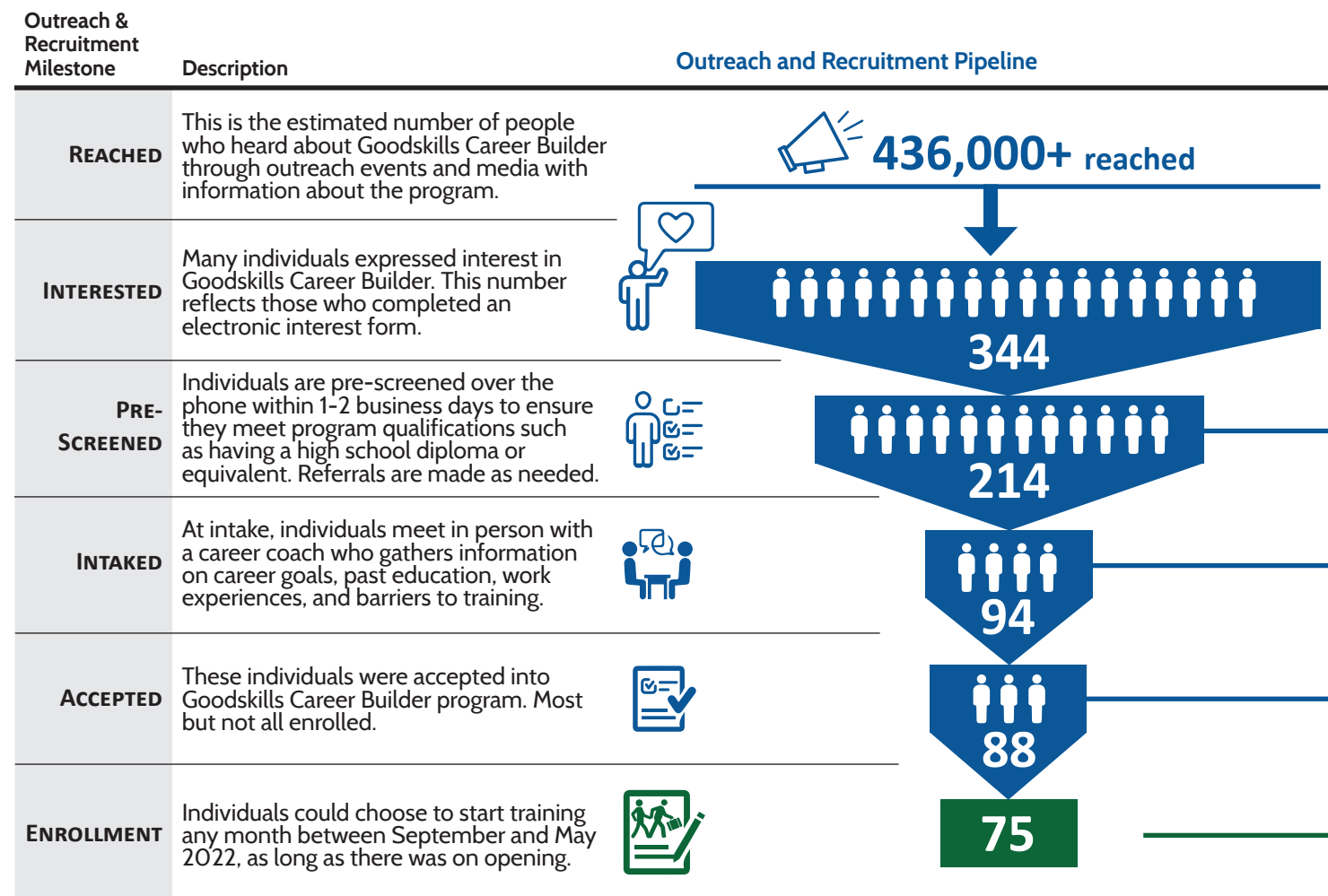
Goodwill implemented a comprehensive multi-prong strategy for outreach and recruitment.

A communications toolbox supported Goodwill staff and community partners with outreach materials and resources for promoting Goodskills Career Builder using consistent messaging. Multiple outreach methods were used to raise awareness of the training and establish contact with potential applicants. These methods included flyers, an updated website, community events, email, social media, traditional media (print, television, radio), word of mouth and referrals by community partners, professionals and recent graduates. Through these outreach methods, an estimated 436,000+ individuals were reached with information about Goodskills Career Builder between August 2021 and June 2022.⁴

The recruitment process included multiple touchpoints with potential candidates to create a trusting relationship with Goodwill staff, while determining participant eligibility for training. The process was also intended to minimize application barriers faced by individuals. It generally involved receiving an electronic interest form, a pre-screening telephone meeting, and a two-hour, in-person intake meeting with a career coach.

Between August 5, 2021 and April 13, 2022, more than 340 individuals expressed interest in Goodskills Career Builder. However, only one out of five individuals who expressed interest ultimately enrolled. Attrition was most significant between interest and pre-screening and between pre-screening and intake. Less than a third of those who initially expressed interest completed the intake process.

Goodskill Career Builder Outreach and Recruitment Pipeline, August 2021-April 2022



Source: UBRI analysis of Goodskills Career Builder "Tracker Information" provided by Goodwill on May 25, 2022 with data through April 2022. Total reach is from Outreach Metrics Summary, June 10, 2022, capturing a slightly longer period of time than the other figures shown in the chart.

The most effective outreach strategies underscore the importance of partnerships with organizations that potential applicants trust, utilize and consult for information.

A variety of outreach strategies were implemented by Goodwill to raise awareness about Goodskills Career Builder and generate interest. Interpersonal connections from social media, referring organizations and individuals, and word of mouth accounted for how most individuals learned about Goodskills Career Builder.

Goodwill's outreach strategy captured a diverse audience but one with access barriers. Among all those with a touchpoint who participated in pre-screening, 72% were individuals of color.⁵ (This is over 4 times more diverse than Buffalo Niagara's manufacturing workforce.) Nearly two-thirds (65%) resided in the City of Buffalo.⁶ About 13% of those interested in Goodskills Career Builder lived in Niagara County, an area of the region that was hit hard by COVID-19 job losses.⁷

Males were slightly more represented than females, among those who participated in pre-screening (53% versus 47%). Across genders, those who indicated interest in a particular field of study were more interested in technology (59%) than manufacturing (44%).⁸ Nearly all who indicated so were interested in full-time work.⁹ Nearly two-thirds of those who indicated a transportation need said they needed a bus pass.

Top 5 Ways Potential Applicants Learned about Goodskills Career Builder, August 2021-April 2022

	% Total	Description
Referrals	20%	Referrals were made by Goodwill staff, Catholic Charities, VESID, Spectrum, Buffalo SNUG, ACCESS, Visiting Nurse Service and individuals whose organization or affiliation was not mentioned.
Word of Mouth	19%	Word of mouth included information shared by friends, family and neighbors.
Social Media	19%	Facebook was the social media platform most commonly mentioned.
Websites	19%	Goodwill's website was most commonly mentioned. Indeed and others were also mentioned less frequently.
Traditional Media	13%	Radio was most common among those who mentioned traditional media, followed by newspaper and TV.

Source: UBRI analysis of "Tracker Information" provided by Goodwill in May 2022.

Generating interest in a training program is an important first step. Sustaining that interest through an individual's decision to enroll is fostered by interpersonal connections. About two-thirds of those who enrolled in Goodskill Career Builder heard about the programs through referrals and word of mouth.¹⁰

BARRIERS THAT INDIVIDUALS FACE

- Some individuals may not have voicemail. This made it challenging for Goodwill to initiate further communication with some who expressed interest. Others indicated they mistakenly applied, or were not interested in training for tech or manufacturing.
- Some individuals did not meet the program requirement of having a high school diploma or equivalent. Others fell off the pipeline feeling they couldn't commit to a four-week, full-time program.
- Following intake, a couple of individuals revealed that they could not commit to the program. Another was not accepted because of English language barriers. One candidate did not exhibit the qualities of attitude, aptitude and commitment that are required to complete Goodskills Career Builder.
- For some, four weeks of training without pay may have been a barrier. One individual was no longer interested in either tech or manufacturing.

Insights and Lessons Learned

There is a high level of interest in workforce training initiatives such as Goodskills Career Builder. In the first 8 months after its launch in September 2021, Goodskills Career Builder attracted 344 potential applicants, most from Goodwill's target population of underrepresented individuals from underserved neighborhoods in Buffalo. These graduates will help hiring employers meet/fill job openings in sectors like manufacturing and tech.

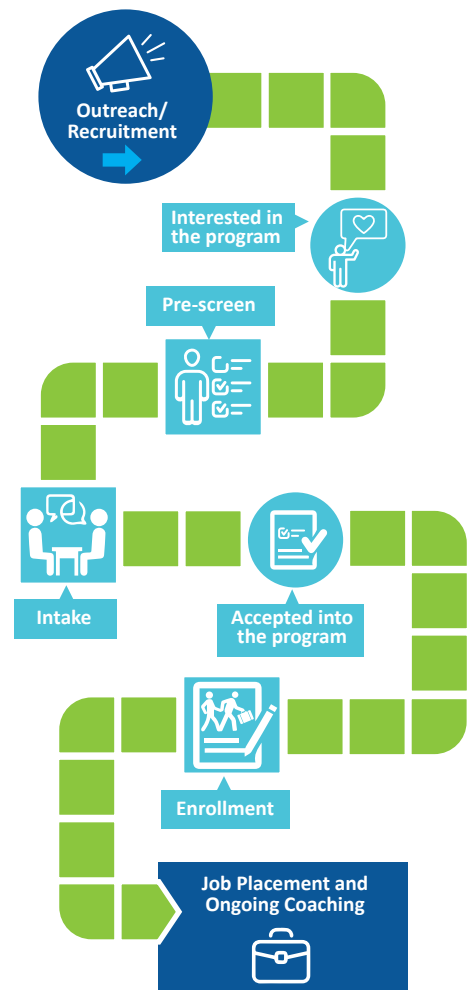
Starting a career in technology or manufacturing is an opportunity that diverse, job-seeking adults are interested in. Only three individuals dropped off the pipeline from "interest" to "acceptance" because they were not interested in these fields after learning more about what the work involves.

Through its staff, programs and stores, Goodwill has a vast social network that it can leverage for outreach and recruitment. About a quarter of individuals with touchpoints indicated they are involved with Goodwill or learned about Goodskills Career Builder through Goodwill staff, stores, programs or proximity in the community.

Many individuals learned about the training through an existing relationship. Developing a communications toolkit to equip trusted community partners with the materials, resources, and talking points they needed to make referrals supported that process. Engaging recent graduates to help promote the training program has also been impactful and is positioned to become a top outreach and recruitment method.

Outreach and recruitment in underserved communities is a resource-intensive process. Trainers who seek to grow a diverse talent pipeline often need to address barriers soon after a point of contact is made, and long before individuals enroll in training. In Buffalo, for instance, where transportation can be a significant access barrier, Goodwill provided 74 bus passes to potential applicants enabling them to continue on in the application process. 45 of these individuals enrolled. An on-site food pantry, store gift cards, and free work attire meet common needs for food and clothing.

Roadmap to higher-paying careers.



Data Sources and Notes

Unless otherwise noted, the outreach and recruitment data presented in this brief comes from an analysis of tracker data for Goodskills Career Builder, provided by Goodwill of WNY to UBRI on May 25, 2022. ¹The chart on page 1 shows the largest private-sector industries in Buffalo Niagara, in addition to Information, a focus sector for Goodskills Career Builder and an industry employing a large percentage of tech (IT) workers. Industry diversity and earnings data are from Emsi, All Industries in Buffalo-Niagara, 2021-22. Some industry names were shortened. The median wage reflects that across all occupations in the regional economy. Similarly, the regional average diversity reflects individuals of color across all industries and occupations in the regional economy. ²Emsi, Industry Snapshot Report, Manufacturing in Buffalo Niagara, 2022. If we looked like the national average for a region our size, we would have nearly 17,400 people of color in manufacturing. This is more than double the 8,575 workers of color that currently exist in the industry. ³Emsi, Occupation Overview, Computer Occupations in Buffalo Niagara, 2022. If we looked like the national average for a region our size, we would have nearly 2,000 more workers of color in computer occupations (representing 40% of workers in these occupations versus 24%). ⁴Goodwill of WNY, Outreach Metrics Summary, June 10, 2022. ⁵Individuals of color include those who indicated a race other than "white" or were Hispanic. The analysis draws from a sample size of 141 where this status could be determined. ⁶This statistic is based on a ZIP Code analysis. ⁷This statistic includes those reporting a Zip Code in the City of Niagara Falls. 1% of those who reported their county indicated they live in Genesee County. ⁸These percentages include individuals who were interested in both manufacturing and tech. ⁹Only two individuals among 138 reported not being interested in full-time work. ¹⁰UBRI categorized the ways individuals reported learning about Goodskills Career Builder, as indicated on their interest form. Individuals were allowed to report more than one response. Other ways individuals learned about the program that are not shown on the chart include community events, email, flyer and other.

Learn More About Goodskills Career Builder

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Recommended Citation:

Goodwill of Western New York and University at Buffalo Regional Institute, State University of New York at Buffalo, School of Architecture and Planning, June 2022. "Outreach and Recruitment Strategies for a Diverse Workforce in Buffalo Niagara."