



BUILDNORTH CENTRAL

Promoting The Industrial Heart of Massachusetts

January 2019



Recommendations from the Manufacturing Task Force of the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation and the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce regarding promotion and support of the region's industrial base.

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Executive Summary

As a community, Massachusetts built its wealth and reputation on a tradition of innovation, entrepreneurship, and skilled manufacturing. This legacy drove the state's economy and employed tens of thousands of skilled workers for the better part of three centuries. Today, the Commonwealth continues to be seen as the source of some of the nation's most cutting edge research and a creative business ventures. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for its notoriety as a hub of production. With work that was once done in the state's industrial centers being automated or outsourced to regions with lower production costs, recognition of Massachusetts' role in advanced manufacturing has declined among consumers, investors, and policy makers.

This failure has had a particularly strong impact on North Central Massachusetts, home to the largest of the state's remaining manufacturing clusters. Contrary to what many believe, this sector continues to serve as a major employer, providing jobs to roughly a quarter of the region's workforce. Despite the high expense associated with doing business here- incurred by an elevated minimum wage, cumbersome regulatory framework, and significant cost of living- many manufacturers choose to invest in North Central Massachusetts due to the quality of its workforce. As such, the openings these companies provide are often associated with generous salaries or, should they be entry level positions, opportunities for training and career advancement.

If North Central Massachusetts is to continue to stand as an industrial hub, an effort must be made to build on its strengths and address its weaknesses. Below are recommendations developed by a task force of the region's premier manufacturers regarding steps the region should take to address its workforce challenges. Specifically, this group has identified three key areas in which progress must be made. These are *Workforce Development*, *Regional Coordination*, and *Regional Promotion*. To remain competitive, North Central Massachusetts must address constrictions in its employee pipeline, increase cooperation between independent businesses and municipalities, and work to attract new talent and investment to the region. It is hoped that in exercising their role as the regional business community's voice, the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce and the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation will be able to convene the resources and parties necessary to advance these goals.

Workforce Development

Like the Commonwealth's other 19th Century industrial hubs, North Central Massachusetts flourished in large part due to the quality of its workforce. Manufacturers such as Iver Johnson Bicycles and Nypro Molding long flourished- and still do in the latter case- from the precision and reputation these employees lent their products. As workers trained apprentices or moved between facilities, they shared and promulgated skills and knowledge that had initially been brought through years of firsthand experience. This preserved those skills and helped ensure the area's workforce maintained a productive edge compared to more affordable labor pools.

Unfortunately, as the labor force that carried this reputation in recent decades moves towards retirement, the students and young adults who might otherwise replenish it have shown little interest in doing so. Since at least the early 1990s, those entering high school have been told that a successful future requires a college degree and that careers in manufacturing represent menial work with little in the way of remuneration or personal satisfaction. The results can be seen in a 2011 survey conducted by Deloitte and the Manufacturing Institute, which found that 18 to 24 year olds rank manufacturing dead last among industries they would choose to start a career in. Not only has this misperception unfairly characterized an entire class of work, it has endangered the skill base that drives the region's economy for centuries. As experienced laborers exit the workforce, they carry their knowledge with them. If these employees are unable to train replacements before they leave, the loss becomes permanent.

K-12 Education

Any effort to address training and the development of a skilled workforce would be remiss were it not to recognize the region's public school system as a key partner and asset. Across its 27 communities, North Central Massachusetts is home to 15 school systems servicing roughly 41,000 students a year. Unfortunately, as was noted earlier, many of these students believe that occupations in the trades or industry represent monotonous, unrewarding work. The increased focus upon college admissions among parents and school administrators has done nothing to dissuade this fallacy. Given the dire need for qualified candidates to fill highly skilled positions, an effort must be made to better align the region's educational system with market demands. Students should graduate being both college and career ready, ensuring that they are prepared to succeed in the economy of the future.

Working with their partners in the educational system, the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce and the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation should continue to actively promote and support efforts to achieve this end as they are ideally positioned to support programming of this kind. In their dual capacities as a regional advocates and conveners of discussion, they can connect employers with educators and help foster the relationships necessary to perpetuate the conversation. Indeed, convening this task force represents a significant step towards that end.

Connecting Educators to Employers

The first step in this process will involve establishing a regular channel of communication between educators and employers. The North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce and its economic development arm have already begun convening key stakeholders, organizing tours and other programs that introduce the region's superintendents and educators to a number of its prominent manufacturers. Events of this kind allow both parties to meet and learn about the needs of their counterparts.

Still, this discourse will need to be continuously facilitated and encouraged if it is to persist. To that end, the Manufacturing Task Force should establish an Employer/Educator Collaborative. This group, consisting of prominent Task Force members and regional education leaders, would be charged with meeting at regular intervals and developing programs that benefit employers and students alike. Such a program would strengthen the relationship between employers and the surrounding school systems while also ensuring a coherent and regional approach to workforce development. This collaboration will also be essential to promoting many of the recommendations that follow, since any new programs, practices, or policies will invariably require school districts, community colleges, and the business community to work together.

Career Pathways

Partnerships between schools and employers should be encouraged and incentivized by the state to ensure that our educational system aligns with the needs of employers and the career interests of students. Novel approaches such as the state's new Innovation Pathways Program that engage employers and promote college and career routes should be expanded. These initiatives expose students to career options by providing meaningful work based learning experiences alongside rigorous college-level coursework.

Expand Career Exploration Programs to Middle School

Skills are accumulated and built upon one another over months and even years of education and training. In order to expedite this process and better inform students of the opportunities available to them prior to selection of their high school course load, it is suggested that career exploration programs be incorporated at the middle school level. Doing so would expose students who might not have otherwise been aware of these opportunities or their own interest in them to a new field of study. Moreover, should they choose to pursue a career in these fields, it would qualify them for more advanced training or a career pathway in high school and college. Ultimately this would heighten their skillset, increase their earning power, and prepare them for long-term success.

Promote Manufacturing Careers

While much progress has been made by the Chamber around promoting careers in the manufacturing industry, much work is still needed to overcome the historical stigma that manufacturing jobs should only be pursued as a last resort. Outdated perceptions that the field is dirty and unsafe, offering low wages with little job security and few advancement opportunities have impacted the ability of manufacturing firms to fill available positions for years. These employers need a coordinated marketing campaign to promote manufacturing careers to young people. Influencers such as parents, teachers, guidance counselors,

coaches, clergy, and others need to be engaged at the grass roots level. The Chamber, working collaboratively with manufacturers and other industry groups, can work to build off of its past successes in promoting the industry. Better leveraging social media and exploring hosting open houses to showcase advanced manufacturing operations to the broader community should be explored as options.

Expand Vocational Training Programs

Vocational Technical schools in the region serve as models of how to best integrate academics with career preparation. Manufacturers and other employers highly value the caliber of graduates coming out of these increasingly elite institutions. These schools have a strong record of preparing their graduates for both college and career readiness, which in turn has greatly elevated the level of competition and led to long wait lists among those seeking admission. We recommend increasing access to high quality vocational education opportunities for middle and high school students in the Commonwealth by expanding existing Vocational Technical schools. Community colleges could also play a role in filling the gap and supporting adults that want to pursue a trade or vocational career.

Introduce Voc-Tech Best Practices into Conventional Schools

In addition, we recommend introducing vocational technical programs that align with employer demands into conventional high schools. We believe that conventional high schools can adopt some of the best practices that have made Vocational Technical High Schools elite institutions and that contribute to the student's educational experience. These would include rigorous academic coursework coupled with a work-based learning experience, career exploration opportunities, employer engagement, and an emphasis on a career pathway among other things.

Introduce High School Credentialing Courses

Building upon the previous recommendation, the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce and the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation- alongside state and federal government- should support any efforts that would introduce high school students to workplace credentialing opportunities. Such programs could take a number of forms, from internships and other work-based educational programs to learning in a traditional classroom setting, and should be shaped to fit the needs of the students and the course. Not only would programming of this type expose students to valuable training opportunities, it would also create a new pool of potential employees whose skills had been vetted against pre-established standards trusted by employers. This would benefit students, who would leave such a program with valuable and verified industry-recognized skills, and those seeking to hire them, as it would immediately signify the applicant's knowledge level and allow employers to avoid expensive, duplicative on-site trainings.

Standardized Metrics and Credentialing

School systems, educators, and employers should collaborate to establish common metrics, standards, and credentialing certificates. This maximizes their value to students, as the broad implementation of a set of standards will ultimately increase the number of employers exposed to and familiar with them. This benefits employers as well, likewise expanding the pool of potential employees with verified abilities from which to draw.

Basic Work Readiness Training

Today's manufacturers value more than just technical skills and academic knowledge. They want employees that have the important soft skills to succeed in today's economy, including punctuality, a strong work ethic, the ability to work both individually and in a team, communication skills and a friendly and cooperative attitude. Basic work readiness training should be integrated into the schools to ensure that students understand the basic expectations that any employer will have and better prepare them for long term success.

Develop Regional Learning Labs

If our conventional high school schools are to successfully introduce credentialing programs and implement best practices from their vocational technical counterparts, then they may need access to specialized training equipment. We recommend exploring the potential to develop regional learning labs with sourced equipment for students throughout the region to share and utilize as part of the educational experience. A model for this regional approach could be the Blackstone Valley Education Hub, a collaboration of the local chamber of commerce and community college in Blackstone Valley, that provides a regional workforce training center where high school students can develop the technical and career related training needed for today's advanced manufacturing industry. Mount Wachusett Community College's manufacturing center in Devens could also be repurposed or expanded to help in this role.

Diversify the Faculty Pool

Implementation of the recommendations above will require the development of a unique faculty pool whose knowledge and experience complement those of current teaching staffs. The region's schools should investigate methods of recruiting craftspeople into their faculties. Policies and procedures must also be put into place to verify their qualifications prior to employment, as these qualifications may differ significantly from those of a traditional teacher. Those recruited should themselves be drawn from a diverse pool of candidates and be reflective of the region's varied demographic makeup. Teacher externships are another tool that could be used to help existing educators gain some real world experience that they could then take back into the classroom and incorporate into the curriculum. Moreover, whenever possible, these professionals should play an active role in development of training programs and curricula, bringing their considerable expertise to bear.

Develop Tools and Supports to Assist Employers

Support needs to be provided to manufacturers and other employers that want to participate in offering work based learning opportunities, such as internships, co-ops, student tours and apprenticeships. This could take the form of a formal work based learning guide, one-on-one assistance with designing a meaningful work/learning experiences, or providing guidance on legal issues related to having interns at the work site. The Chamber in its role as a convener and business organization may be suited to play a role in supporting employers that want to offer work based learning opportunities.

Measure Schools on Career Readiness

High school success rates are measured heavily by college admission rates, which in turn encourage schools to promote four year colleges to students versus providing them with

multiple options including both college and vocational careers. We encourage public policy leaders to look at reforms that will align school success measurements better to the needs of the workforce and prepare students to be better prepared for careers and long term success.

Non-Traditional and Post-Secondary Education

As important as the region's traditional education systems are, North Central Massachusetts will not be able to resolve its pipeline constraints by relying on them alone. Steps need to be taken that not only prepare for the future, but expand the supply of skilled labor in the near term. Nontraditional training programs for adults and those who have recently graduated from high school will play a key role in this regard.

Reinvigorate the Trades

Across the Commonwealth, employers and homeowners alike have lamented the dearth of experienced tradespeople available to undertake important and even vital projects. This region is no different, and steps should be taken to connect viable candidates of any age to apprenticeship opportunities. This is especially true of underemployed college students and graduates, who are often laden with heavy debts and trapped in overly competitive fields. There can be little doubt that many would be open to launching new careers that provide steady work and a much elevated salary.

School systems, trade organizations, community colleges and industry representatives- such as the Chamber- could collaborate to establish a publicly accessible directory of professionals who have shown interest in taking on an apprentice. Likewise, the Commonwealth has launched programs that encourage experienced craftsmen to take on pupils, ensuring these valuable skills are passed from one generation to the next. Industry groups and guilds are uniquely positioned to educate their members about these incentives and should facilitate the placement of potential apprentices.

Non-Traditional Scholarships

Most scholarship programs are geared towards traditional students and focused on assisting with the costs of a four-year college education. We recommend exploring creative new scholarship options for those individuals that are interested in pursuing careers in manufacturing or the trades. These scholarships could take many forms, but the goal would be to remove financial barriers for entry in a rewarding manufacturing career. They could be structured similar to traditional scholarships in providing direct financial aid to assist students, but focused on those enrolled in manufacturing related programs at a vocational, technical school, community college or university. Alternatively, they could take the form of financial support for adults interested in changing careers, but that may require some technical training to close the gap in skills required to make the transition. They could even take the form of a "Toolship", where students in the trades are provided assistance with the costs associated with acquiring expensive tools that may be needed in their particular field. The North Central Massachusetts Chamber Foundation could play a leadership role by leveraging its existing scholarship program to engage manufacturers and other groups in offering these types of scholarships that directly support the industry.

Expansion of Continuing Education Opportunities

Regardless of the field, one's education should not end after the achievement of a diploma or degree. Facilities developed to serve high school and college students can easily be repurposed during off hours to retrain or advance the skills of experienced workers. The region's schools and employers should explore and actively pursue grants that would support this activity, collaborating with one another directly to develop programming that caters to workforce demands. Employees should likewise be encouraged to attend these trainings, deepening their knowledge and increasing the value their work creates. This would further the region's reputation for quality, deepen the relationship between employers and educators, and provide an additional reason for potential investors to choose North Central Massachusetts.

College Graduates

A unique aspect of the manufacturing field is its range of opportunities. While it does enable high school graduates to enter the workforce and embark upon meaningful careers immediately, it can also make use of and build upon the experiences of college graduates. Whether a floor manager who earned his associates degree at night or an engineer who recently completed her doctorate, the region's employers rely on a diverse workforce representing a broad range in training and expertise. To stay competitive, these firms will need to work with educators to clearly identify and raise awareness of courses of study that address regional needs.

Increased Use of Internships, Work-Studies, and Externships

Fitchburg State University and Mount Wachusett Community College both exhibit long standing commitments to experiential learning. We hope that both institutions will continue to build upon this approach, pursuing partnerships with area employers and ensuring that students are granted access to training opportunities that bear directly on their future careers.

Whenever possible, educators should be afforded these opportunities as well. Committing to faculty externships allows the instructors tasked with preparing the next workforce to understand the demands that workforce will face on a deeper level. It also allows them to develop individual relationships with the managers and employees their students will ultimately work for and beside. These connections could prove invaluable when placing the right candidate in the right role, and would facilitate more direct communications between partners in two different but codependent sectors.

Coordination with Institutions of Higher Learning

As with regional school districts, North Central Massachusetts' two institutes of higher learning should be included in the Task Force's dialogue. Mount Wachusett Community College already manages a facility dedicated to training students for careers in manufacturing. They have the staff, experience, and equipment necessary to develop specialized courses and certificates that could be incorporated into a broader associates program. Developing a full degree built around the manufacturing field could be explored as well.

Fitchburg State University offers four year degrees in engineering, business management, and computer science that could potentially offer concentrations specific to this field as well. The Task Force should explore their collective need for more advanced skills, such as programming and machine design, and work with the University to identify courses that would equip a student with those skills. Incentives that encourage graduates of the Community College to build upon their education at the University, such as providing them credit towards a bachelor's degree, might be implemented as well.

Attract Recent Graduates

Employers will need to work with administrators and professors at Fitchburg State University and Mount Wachusett Community College to publicize the opportunities available to college graduates. Competition to recruit students who have earned degrees in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics- often referred to as the STEM disciplines- has grown intense over the last fifty years and the region's employers will need to take note of the incentives and outreach strategies utilized by their competitors in similar markets. The Chamber and Development Corporation may be able to assist in this regard, bringing their experience in marketing and outreach to bear.

Encourage Employees to Pursue College Degrees

While it is essential that employers convince recent graduates to remain in the region, they will also need to recognize the potential of their existing workforce and encourage its members to build upon existing talents. To accommodate those interested in pursuing relevant associate, bachelor, or masters degrees, employers could implement flexible scheduling policies- especially around evening shifts. These employers could also provide reimbursements, removing a significant barrier for many.

Increase the Labor Pool

Employers will need to look beyond traditional workforce sources for solutions to their workforce challenges. With demographics pointing towards a graying of the workforce and constraints placed on immigration, manufacturers need to explore more flexible and inclusive strategies to recruit workers, including hiring ex-offenders, veterans, and single parents. Incorporating policies not usually offered in manufacturing companies, such as flexible schedules or company sponsored day care can help with recruiting single parents. Policy leaders can help by removing the barriers to employment and making it more attractive to work.

Second Chances for Ex-Offenders

For many who have been incarcerated, finding steady employment is an essential step towards reintegration. This can prove challenging however, as employers and members of the broader public often view these individuals with suspicion. Working with law enforcement, the criminal justice system, and the North Central Correctional Institution, the Task Force could assist in the development of programs that identify eligible past offenders and connect them with training and career opportunities. Beyond the benefit to regional employers, doing so has the potential to reduce recidivism and serve the public good.

Accommodate Non-Traditional Employees

For single parents, accommodating rigid, twelve hour shifts or constantly fluctuating schedules can prove untenable. Where possible, employers could develop schedules that appeal to this demographic by implementing regular work schedules that allow these parents to care for their children before and after school. In doing so, employers would expand the viable labor pool and eliminate what is likely a significant force pushing some out of it.

Daycare Programs

Affordable day care is another common impediment to employment for individuals with young children. The cost of these vital services often outweighs the wages that a mother or father would earn by returning to the workforce. Not only does this remove an individual from the workforce, but the extended period of their absence often leads to an atrophy in their skillset. The state could assist by providing access to more affordable and quality daycare, offering vouchers to parents, and providing incentives for other options that could be provided at the local level.

Hiring Veterans

There is perhaps no group more deserving of public and private support than those who have served our country with honor. While this demographic is too varied in the character of its individual members and their unique needs to accurately describe here, every effort should be made to reach out to them. Partnerships should be established with local veterans' organizations, veterans' services offices, and the military presence at Fort Devens in an effort to identify the needs of returning servicemen and facilitate their transition to civilian careers.

Promote Regional Coordination

Beyond the challenges created by workforce shortages, North Central Massachusetts must also position itself to attract and facilitate new developments. Addressing this task will require planning, the development of smart zoning bylaws, the institution of best practices in permitting, and coordination between the municipalities which constitute the region. These steps would increase growth opportunities by expanding the land available for development and allowing investors to navigate the local ordinances of disparate communities with greater ease.

Support Public Private Partnerships

By its very nature, economic development is built on partnerships between the public and private sectors. If North Central Massachusetts is truly going to move forward as a region and act decisively to support a vital sector of its economy, these parties will have to collaborate in a particularly close and meaningful way. Maintenance of this relationship will therefore require considerable effort, extending beyond periodic meetings or loose commitments to mutual engagement. Both sides will have to make significant investments. The North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation, which has already helped to facilitate the meeting of this task force and boasts extensive experience convening regional stakeholders and public sector partners, is likely the best vehicle through which to pursue this goal.

Grants and Public Funding

At the state level, the Legislature could support these efforts through the development of grants and funding mechanisms that promote workforce development directly and indirectly. Updates to the Commonwealth's school funding formula and the development of programs that support for coordination between employers and educators should be explored. Funding must also be set aside that enables regional facilitators to coordinate between the parties involved and ensure the lines of communication remain open.

Private Support

Grants from and partnerships with private organizations that already support these strategies, such as the US Chamber of Commerce or the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, should also be pursued. Beyond funding, these organizations can provide invaluable expertise, introduce best practices, and provide continuous technical assistance as the Task Force develops and executes its workforce strategy.

Smart Growth and Regional Planning

North Central Massachusetts is home to twenty seven communities, each with an independently elected municipal government that oversees a professional staff of planners, engineers, inspectors, teachers, and public safety officials. In all cases, these elements work together in an effort to develop regulations and guidelines that promote the interests of their city or town. Unfortunately, this often leads to a convoluted regulatory landscape, the inefficient duplication of services, and the unnecessary development of competing interests when one considers the region as a whole. If the region hopes to retain and attract the skilled labor necessary to compete in a modern economy, these entities will need to collaborate and promote development of the services, amenities, and housing options that young professionals and craftspeople have come to expect.

Development of a Regional Blueprint

The first step towards organizing any effort is identifying and setting down clear goals. In the Mid-Nineties, the Chamber commissioned a study analyzing the challenges and opportunities North Central Massachusetts was likely to face and how it could most successfully navigate them. *The Blueprint for the Nineties* helped focus the region's attention on key projects and played a vital role in the creation of Visit North Central Massachusetts, the launch of the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation's micro-lending program, and the execution of much needed infrastructure improvements to Fitchburg's municipal airport.

As successful as this plan has been however, there is a clear need to prepare for the future. The Development Corporation should take steps to develop a new plan that builds upon the success of its predecessor, identifying what steps should be taken to direct the region's growth in the coming decade. The regional economic development plan should include a focus on workforce development. Such a project would be of great benefit to both public and private entities, and would therefore be made available to partners in both sectors.

Incentivize and Promote New Development

In conjunction with efforts to expand the pool of skilled labor, efforts should also be made to ensure development of the housing and amenities these professionals expect. There are

numerous programs which the state and its individual communities can bring to bear in an effort to promote development. Private partners, such as the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation and Chamber of Commerce, can also play an important role by offering to coordinate efforts and connect interested parties. Bringing these talents and programs together could prove vital when attracting the type of development North Central Massachusetts will need if it is to maintain its place as a national leader in manufacturing and skilled labor.

Making potential employees aware of these benefits should be as high a priority as attracting new investment. Should the dearth in skilled labor go unaddressed over the short term, the developments North Central Massachusetts attracts will be of a lower quality in terms of accompanying employment opportunities and regional prestige. Cost effective methods of reaching and appealing to this demographic should be explored and pursued. Local governments can assist further by working with banks and leveraging federal funds- particularly through their HOME and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Programs- to provide first time homebuyers assistance. The result would prove beneficial to all involved, increasing the purchasing power of those who relocate to the region, providing our downtown community centers with a new pool of customers, and addressing the need for skilled labor that plagues area manufacturers.

Last Mile Transportation

Perhaps the most common impediment for those seeking to enter the workforce is the region's inadequate public transit system. Due to North Central Massachusetts' broad area and suburban nature, a convoluted bussing system with numerous service gaps, and irregular train service along the commuter rail, those without ready access to a vehicle are often left uncertain as to how they will manage to go about their business on a daily basis. The Task Force should therefore work with local governments and the state legislature to increase public transportation options and identify novel solutions that have been implemented elsewhere. Options such as expanding bus service to employment centers, van pooling, customized transportation options facilitated by transportation authorities, or innovative use of ride sharing apps should be explored.

Raise Awareness and Attract New Development

Lastly, if manufacturing in North Central Massachusetts is to persist for another generation, it will need to draw new investment, penetrate untapped markets, and attract an influx of talent that can complement the skills and knowledge of its current population. This last step towards unlocking the region's full potential will necessitate a concerted marketing effort, promoting and building upon the manufacturing agglomeration that is already present. Increasing the labor pool would not only directly benefit manufacturers and other local employers, but it would bring with it increased spending, assisting local businesses throughout the region, and further promote the exchange in skills and knowledge that has long defined successful cluster developments.

Elevate the Region's Profile

As was just noted, the successful growth and development of North Central Massachusetts will require a deliberate effort to promote it as a place to live, work, and play among potential investors and employees alike. At the same time, steps must be taken to make potential customers aware of the quality of work that defines this region. Ultimately, what arise are three distinct but interconnected outreach campaigns. Once again, the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation is well positioned to take a lead role in this endeavor. Through its affiliation with the Chamber of Commerce and Visit North Central Massachusetts (VNCM), the Development Corporation has access to a staff well versed in promotional efforts utilizing both traditional and digital outlets. These resources should be brought to bear in addressing the challenges which face manufacturing throughout the region.

Attract Skilled Labor

Though the need to prepare the next generation of employees cannot be understated, doing so does little to address the region's immediate demands. In the long term, attracting new talent will allow North Central Massachusetts to complement its existing labor pool and provide the surplus necessary to staff training and teaching positions without straining workflows. More immediately however, it will serve as a stop gap, bridging the current workforce with its nascent replacement.

North Central Massachusetts is fortunate in that conditions make it an attractive alternative for young professionals and skilled workers looking to escape the congestion and high cost of living that define the Commonwealth's metropolitan areas. The region is unique in that it offers both rural housing options with large tracts of land and urban centers with many of the amenities that those currently residing in Worcester or Boston have come to expect. Young trades and crafts people can realistically afford homes while their middle aged counterparts might consider an increased property size as they start or grow their families.

Publicize the Quality of Our Workforce

In conjunction with the recommendations described above, every effort should be made to raise awareness of the region's high quality workforce and the steps being taken to maintain it among potential investors. This would likely involve a more targeted advertising campaign, and could necessitate the enlistment of external consultant services with expertise in this area. With that said, it is safe to assume that this would involve advertising in trade magazines and websites at a minimum.

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About the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce:

The North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce is a business advocacy and economic development organization. The Chamber's mission is to advance the economy of North Central Massachusetts and strengthen its quality of place by connecting businesses, people, and ideas. The Chamber serves nearly 800 member businesses of all sizes from virtually all industries in the twenty-seven communities that comprise North Central Massachusetts.

About the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation:

The North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation (NCMDC) is a non-profit corporation with the mission of creating jobs and improving the economy of North Central Massachusetts. The NCMDC acts as a connector, facilitator and partner and works in partnership with local banks, credit unions, chambers of commerce and area nonprofits to support emerging microenterprises, small businesses, and community projects.

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