



EAMA RSP Hybrid Meeting Notes March 19, 2025

Welcome – EAMA RSP Chair **Chris Jewell** started the meeting at 9:02 a.m.

Chris welcomed new EAMA RSP member **Lee Sroczenski** of **Century Tool**.

What's Keeping You Up at Night? - Chris invited the manufacturers to share what is causing them sleepless nights. The impact of tariffs was of concern to companies such as SPIROL and Jeffco Fibres. Other companies who are totally U.S.-based, such as Westminster Tool and Linemaster Switch, have seen an uptick in business opportunities and demand. Ray Coombs from Westminster Tool summed up the conversation well when he said, "We are manufacturers; we adapt no matter what is in front of us."

Employer Instant Poll – Manufacturing members were asked to identify the state incentives or policies that would benefit their company. (See results at right.)

Updates from Working Groups

Business 2 Business – **Dan Chaplin, Forge 41** – Dan reported that the group will hold their next meeting at his facility in Moosup in April. He invited more manufacturing members to join the group.

Next Steps: If you are interested in joining the working group, please contact Dan Chaplin at forge41@outlook.com.

Plastics – **Reid Chamberlin, Sonoco** – Reid reported that, at their meeting on February 21, the group set their objectives for the year as follows: Exploring available incumbent-worker upskilling resources, sharing best practices and tools for recruitment, and promoting local entry-level training programs. To help identify training opportunities, members are creating profiles of the key plastics roles and gaps in their organization, including job title, a brief description, and some key skills needed. The group hopes to share candidates that apply to them that may be a better fit for one of the other plastics employers.

Next Steps: EAMA RSP plastics manufacturers are encouraged to join the Plastics Working Group. Contact Hannah Belmont at hbelmont@westminstertool.com.

Workforce & Outreach – **Jeff Dickey, The Lee Co.** – Jeff reported that, at their February meeting, the group discussed their general business outlook. Some employers, including The Lee Company and Myoshi, reported that business was relatively flat, but Morgan Corp. is up from 122 to 150 employees and is increasing their workforce

Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance – A Connecticut Regional Sector Partnership

Instant Poll Results

19 manufacturers replied

What state incentives or policies would benefit your company? Check all that apply.

• Healthcare costs savings	14
• On-the-Job Training funding	13
• Incumbent Worker Training funding	12
• Energy costs savings	10
• Automation assistance	8
• Childcare cost savings	8
• CMMC 2.0 assistance	4
• ISO or other Certifications	3
• Housing incentives	1

Which state incentive or policy would be of the greatest benefit to your company? Choose one.

• Healthcare costs savings	5
• On-the-Job Training funding	4
• Energy costs savings	4
• Automation assistance	2
• Incumbent Worker Training funding	2
• CMMC 2.0 assistance	2
• ISO or other Certifications	0
• Housing incentives	0
• Childcare cost savings	0

further. The group continued their conversation about safety and risk management. The group looked at the Safety & Risk Assessment questionnaire which was sent to all EAMA RSP employers.

Tony Benoit noted that we are interested in determining which topics might be of interest for safety programming, such as a webinar. He asked: "What would you like to learn more about?"

Brian Grossguth from **Myoshi**, who is a safety expert, stressed that employers should not get complacent when it comes to safety and should be proactive. He also suggested that, because today's workforce is different, it is important to constantly get feedback from the younger employees and to keep safety in the forefront. Jeff commented that younger people today grew up in a much more inherently safe world.

Brian also suggested that EAMA RSP members' safety experts consider visiting each other to see how safety is handled at another company. This idea will be developed further as there was interest among the employers.

Next Steps: Members are encouraged to review the Safety Assessment they received and/or share it with the person responsible for safety at their company to identify topics of interest for a webinar or other programming. Send your ideas to Tony Benoit at eamarsp@gmail.com. Also please tell Tony if you have an interest in participating in a "safety swap."

Youth Pipeline – Jessica van der Swaagh, SPIROL - Jessica shared that the working group has been primarily focused on the Adopt-a-School concept. She encouraged employers to think of it as a bridge that addresses the gap between the future workforce and employers. Adopting a YMPI school creates strong partnerships and can look different at each company. It can include tours, job shadowing, and opportunities to open your doors to show students a "day in the life" at your company. Currently, at least eight EAMA RSP members have started building relationships with 11 comprehensive high schools in the region. She encouraged members to get involved with an existing YMPI school or another school in their area.

Next Steps: For more information about adopting a school, contact the Business Services Team: Jeff Martel - 860-428-1854, jeffrey.martel@ctstate.edu or Joelle Garrett - 860-961-6234, jgarrett@chamberECT.com.

YMPI Update – David Allard

David Allard from EWIB reported that, in August 2024, EAMA RSP members met to re-state their vision for the YMPI and to identify priorities to enhance the program. The Youth Pipeline Working Group volunteered to support the ongoing work and report back to EAMA RSP as it progressed. The following is a status update of the action items identified at the August meeting.

Deliverable 1: Grow the number of YMPI schools.

Status: The number of YMPI schools has grown from 8 to 12, with ongoing conversations with several other schools in the region to join the YMPI.

Deliverable 2: Grow partnerships between employers and YMPI schools to increase work-based learning, internships, and hiring opportunities.

Status: As outlined in Jessica's report, great progress has been made using the Adopt-a-School model.

Deliverable 3: Deepen partnerships with YMPI schools to advise on workforce needs related to advanced pathways.

Status: The YMPI is providing support for demand-driven welding programs at two high schools.

Deliverable 4: Increase the number of students taking – and passing – the final YMPI exam and enhance the value of the YMPI credential to employers to increase commitment from schools and students.

Status: CT State has invited YMPI programs to attend workshops to build familiarity with their shops, reinforce critical competency areas, and prepare students for the final exam.

EWIB and CT State are supporting new YMPI instructors with additional professional development.

Electric Boat will offer a higher starting wage for those who earn the YMPI credential.

Two employers – Collins & Jewell and Rand Whitney Containerboard – will guarantee interviews for YMPI completers.

EWIB is piloting an increased stipend incentive for program completers. Students who take the final exam will receive \$250; students who pass will receive an additional \$750 for a total of \$1,000.

Deliverable 5: Expand the quality and reach of employability skills training for YMPI participants.

Status: ReadyCT is currently teaching a 10-part career readiness series to Pipeline students.

ReadyCT is also working to embed more robust career readiness content in the YMPI.

What's Next? David thanked the many employers who have engaged in and supported this development work to date. The priority now shifts to our ~150 students who will complete the program this year, most of whom are seniors. Recruitment is the top priority.

He encouraged employers to participate in the **GNACC Manufacturing Career Fair on Friday, May 9**, to meet with YMPI students who will look to immediately enter the workforce. If you are hiring, please contact your Business Services rep who will work with students for job placement. If you do not plan to hire, we encourage you to consider hosting an internship or participate in the Summer Youth Employment Program. Willie Barber shared that Electric Boat (EB) found that their summer interns are 15% more likely to stay in their job than those who did not intern. This increase in retention keeps EB willing to invest in their intern program.

Next Steps: Click [here](#) for more information and to register for the May 9 GNACC Manufacturing Career Fair.

Employer Spotlight – Dave Parmalee, Wepco Plastics

Dave Parmalee shared that Wepco Plastics, located in Middlefield, is a low-volume injection molder and mold builder. Their average run is 3,000-5,000 pieces. Wepco started in the 1980's as a prototype mold builder, but customers kept asking for production runs which they added. 90% of the tooling they make is aluminum.

Their mission is to provide a good solution for low-cost tooling without sacrificing quality. They provide products to Fortune 500 companies in medical and automotive but love working for people "who just have ideas." They do a lot of bridge tooling as well to get products out. Dave feels his biggest asset is his people. They have a strong practice of lean manufacturing. In the 90's, they employed about 50 people and they now employ 17. They went from 9 mold machines and 9 molders down to 3 machines and 3 molders without any reduction in production.

Wepco is heavily involved in workforce development and does job shadowing with schools in Durham, Killingworth, and East Hampton, as well as several capstone projects and internships with seniors at Quinnipiac University. Dave helped develop a training program similar to the EAMA RSP plastics program at CT State – Middlesex, where he is also an instructor. The program has completed at least 5 cohorts.

Director's Report – Tony Benoit

EWIB Good Jobs Challenge Grant application – EWIB President **Michael Nogelo** reported that EWIB's application for a FY24 Good Jobs Challenge grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration was not one of the 8 – out of more than 100 applications submitted – selected for funding. Michael thanked EAMA RSP members for their support of the application and their partnership on the Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI) and the EAMA RSP. EWIB will continue to pursue other funding opportunities to supplement the State's support and ensure the long-term capacity of the MPI.

EAMA RSP Employer Annual Survey – Tony advised the group that a survey is being developed to determine employer engagement and to update the strategic priorities for the EAMA RSP. This June survey follows up on the 2024 employer engagement survey and the Employer Strategic Priorities survey sent in 2022.

Next Steps: Watch for the survey. We are hoping for 100% participation among our manufacturing members.

CT Manufacturing Collaborative (CMC) legislative priorities – The Connecticut Manufacturers' Collaborative is comprised of all the major regional and statewide manufacturing member organizations across the state, including EAMA RSP. Tony reported that CMC set the following six legislative priorities for this session:

- Allow pass through entities to be eligible for R&D tax credits to encourage innovation among domestic manufacturers and other Connecticut businesses.
- Provide additional flexible options for small and micro manufacturing businesses to provide affordable, high-quality insurance for employees.
- Require a more meaningful regulatory flexibility analysis for small businesses on proposed regulations.
- Support additional long-term investments in the Manufacturing Innovation Fund.
- Develop more skilled workers for critical manufacturing and trades jobs by removing regulatory and other barriers, including modifying existing apprenticeship ratios.
- Provide economic stability for manufacturers by continuing adherence to the state's fiscal guardrails.

Next Steps: If you have concerns, updates, or questions about legislative issues, contact Tony Benoit at eamarsp@gmail.com.

Healthcare Costs Update – Tony reported on a recent meeting with State Comptroller Sean Scanlon, who is working to lower healthcare costs and understands the pain that small groups are feeling. Last year there were two legislative efforts to get some relief, both were shot down; there is nothing in the hopper this year. The fundamental problem is not just that health insurance is expensive, but that healthcare itself is expensive. The state is trying to set up transparency that allows us to see medical charges. Right now, the market is so opaque it is hard to do any comparison shopping. Tony will continue to research this issue.

Updates on EAMA RSP Responsibilities & Initiatives

Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI) – Carol LaBelle from EWIB reported that we completed 28 training classes from July through December 2024. While fewer classes are scheduled, we are on track to finish this program year (July 1 – June 30) with ~36 classes and ~400 participants.

Several classes focused on the needs of EAMA RSP companies start soon: **Intro to Machine Operator** on May 5 and June 2, **Welding** on June 16, and an **Intro to Machine Operator** class targeting recent high school grads on June 30. She encouraged employers to visit classes to meet students and consider hiring from this talent pool.

Next Steps: Contact the Business Services Team - Jeff Martel - 860-428-1854, jeffrey.martel@ctstate.edu or Joelle Garrett - 860-961-6234, jgarrett@chamberECT.com if you are interested in hiring, visiting a class, or learning more about the MPI on-the-job training (OJT) program.

Other

Partner Corner – Eileen Candels, CCAT - Eileen encouraged employers to participate in two upcoming CCAT-sponsored programs. For more information, contact Eileen Candels at ecandels@ccat.us.

- **Connecticut Manufacturing, Engineering & Technology Career Fair 2025**
Wednesday, April 2, 3:00-6:00 p.m. at Quinnipiac University

Details and registration [here](#)

- **Pathways to STEM Careers in Manufacturing**

Tuesday, April 8, 5:30 – 8:30 p.m. at Mystic Aquarium

Details and registration [here](#)

EAMA RSP Annual Meeting/Networking Event – Plans are underway for an Annual Meeting/Networking event on **Wednesday, October 22**, from 4:30-7:30 p.m. at the Holiday Inn in Norwich. This will feature an abbreviated business meeting, keynote speaker, networking opportunities, and an Expo featuring our Support Partners. Members are also encouraged to invite their manufacturing colleagues who are not yet EAMA RSP members.

Next EAMA RSP Hybrid meeting: Wednesday, June 18, 2025, 9:00-10:15 a.m.