ECONOMIC GROWTH INSTITUTE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Michigan Clean Cities

MAPPING CAREER PATHWAYS IN RIVER ROUGE

MiVTTP Impact Story

THE BACKGROUND

River Rouge, Michigan, has a longstanding industrial history shaped by its connection to the Detroit metropolitan region's automotive and manufacturing industries. Situated within one of Michigan's largest regional labor markets, the city benefits from access to an extensive network of employers, educational institutions, and workforce development organizations. Building on these regional assets, the City of River Rouge sought to strengthen local workforce opportunities through a proposed Career and Workforce Innovation Center, connecting residents with career pathways across a range of industries.



THE CHALLENGE

As advancements in vehicle electrification, manufacturing, and emerging technologies reshape the Detroit metropolitan economy, employers increasingly seek workers with both technical skills and adaptability. Despite its proximity to regional employment opportunities, River Rouge faces barriers to connecting residents with these evolving industries, including low labor force participation and gaps in educational attainment. Community stakeholders also identified the city's relatively small labor market and limited capacity to independently support workforce training as additional challenges.

These conditions highlighted the need for accessible training and career pathways that could better connect River Rouge residents with employment opportunities throughout the region.

THE SOLUTION

Through the Michigan Vehicle Technology Transition Impact Project (MiVTTP), a statewide initiative co-led by the University of Michigan Economic Growth Institute (EGI) and Michigan Clean Cities, River Rouge had an opportunity to explore strategies for strengthening its local workforce development efforts.

To support this initiative, EGI engaged the Workforce Intelligence Network (WIN) to develop a strategic roadmap for the proposed River Rouge Career and Workforce Innovation Center. WIN analyzed local and regional labor markets, engaged community stakeholders and employers, and examined existing programs and workforce development resources. This work informed an approach that considered River Rouge's workforce priorities alongside job opportunities and existing training resources throughout the Detroit metropolitan region.

THE RESULT

WIN's research produced a strategic roadmap for River Rouge's proposed Career and Workforce Innovation Center, focused on expanding access to career pathways through regional partnerships, existing training resources, and employer collaboration.

Expanding Access to Career Pathways:

The roadmap proposed career academies spanning healthcare, advanced manufacturing, skilled trades, clean energy, transportation, logistics, and applied technologies. These academies would connect residents with industry-recognized credentials, apprenticeships, postsecondary education, and regional employment opportunities.

Building Regional Training Partnerships:

To address River Rouge's limited local training capacity, WIN recommended an employer-led partnership model connecting educational institutions, workforce organizations, and regional employers. By leveraging existing facilities, this approach would deliver training while minimizing the need for new infrastructure investment.

> ***"The most valuable part of the project was the technical assistance and connections that helped River Rouge turn ideas into a clearer plan of action. It helped us identify opportunities, build partnerships, and better understand how to connect our youth and adults with training for livable-wage jobs in EV and clean energy."***
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> ***Keith Sabuda**, Economic Development Director, City of River Rouge*

Together, these recommendations provide a foundation for developing the proposed center and expanding career opportunities through regional collaboration and existing workforce resources.