

Equitable Credential Attainment Case Study

York County, Pennsylvania

Background

The York County Economic Alliance (YCEA) took critical steps to reduce barriers that prevent job seekers from accessing meaningful career pathways. Utilizing connections with organizations like the BLOOM Business Empowerment Center and Harrisburg Area Community College, YCEA focused on addressing obstacles such as language accessibility, childcare and transportation that often hinder workforce participation and credential attainment.

YCEA played a formal role in outreach and ecosystem building, connecting workforce providers, employers and training institutions. The community wanted to strengthen and connect what existed and focused on aligning its efforts with current workforce initiatives and industry demand. Construction, childcare, and manufacturing quickly emerged as priority sectors. With input from employers and community organizations, the team began mapping out potential credentialing pathways.

Approach

Recognizing the distinct needs of target populations, especially Spanish-speaking, Haitian Creole-speaking and formerly incarcerated individuals, partners prioritized inclusivity in design and delivery. York Hiring Fairs now offer interpretation services in Spanish and Haitian Creole, helping to attract over 500 attendees so far this year. Language support, transportation and access to childcare were mentioned as key barriers to credentialing and employment. Partners explored ESOL classes, United Way-provided transportation cards, and training employers on culturally aware onboarding practices. A survey launched to capture these barriers confirmed what was evident anecdotally: people were ready to work and train, they just needed the right supports.

“Nearly 40% of respondents noted that access to childcare, housing, food, transportation, or resources as a justice-involved individual inhibited their ability to become employed with a family-sustaining wage,” said Marlena Schugt, BLOOM Program Manager. “Many respondents shared experiences detailing their frustrations, including an inability to pay bills and a decline in mental health, when faced with these complicated challenges.”

Through collaborative community engagement and strategic planning, they developed solutions that are already showing tangible results. The pilot machine operator training with the Central Pennsylvania Talent and Innovation Defense Ecosystem was completed, and there are plans underway for further offerings in CNC machining, welding and industrial maintenance.

A Whole-Home Repair training program, in partnership with the York Builders Association, launched in summer 2025. This hands-on, no-cost training provides over 60 instructional hours in weatherization and carpentry and culminates in industry-recognized certifications like OSHA 10, NCCER CORE and Basic First Aid. Delivered in English and Spanish, YCEA hopes to add lead and asbestos abatement to the curriculum in the future. The program will also include employer engagement opportunities to help trainees directly connect with job openings.

“This pilot training program attracted a diverse cohort with a strong interest in hands-on trades and career development. The cohort spans ages 22 to 63, represents multiple races and ethnicities, and is rooted in communities across the county. Some of the driving motivations for this cohort include seeking a new career path, aiming to transition into the construction industry, and the desire for steady income, job security, and the ability to support families, especially in underserved communities. This type of public-private partnership with the county planning commission, York Builders Association’s Workforce NOW and YCEA demonstrate a community’s ability to work together and innovate on skill building opportunities for in demand industries,” said Sully Pinos, Executive Director of the BLOOM Business Empowerment Center, a program of the York County Economic Alliance.

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

YCEA’s experience in the ACCE Foundation’s Equitable Credential Attainment Cohort reinforced the importance of coordinated, community-led efforts in talent development and increasing economic mobility. Their roadmap included robust outreach strategies, employer engagement and data tracking with sustainability at its core. The project also highlighted the realities of system-wide collaboration. Whether it was adjusting timelines or editing pilot language, the York County team embraced flexibility.

As the cohort ends, York County is preparing to launch several training programs, expand employer engagement, and continue refining its intake and support models. The journey is far from over, but the groundwork laid through this cohort has positioned York County to advance credential attainment in ways that are equitable, employer driven and deeply connected to the real-life experiences of residents.