



Trends report

DETROIT

As Motown Becomes Tech Town, Filling Higher-Skilled Positions Means Changing Mindsets

The Metro Detroit area has undergone a dramatic transformation in the last decade that shows no sign of slowing down. Once, this region was known for relying on manufacturing and a relatively unskilled workforce. But its urban rebirth is pushing the area beyond its old assembly-line roots.

In fact, Motown is rapidly changing into “tech town” with a demand for skilled talent like never before. This rebirth has also meant a transition in employment, creating unexpected changes and demands for employers. Simply put, there isn’t enough skilled labor in the pipeline to fill available, often attractive positions that are the foundation to support higher-skilled STEM positions that are also in high demand.

Employers across Metro Detroit feel the effects of this shortage every day. Many have open positions that provide a solid career path and offer wages and benefits that can range to six figures. But, these positions often involve a required degree of skill and experience seemingly beyond many job seekers in the market. And, employers typically consider only experienced applicants for skilled, higher-paying position. That line of thinking is no longer sustainable in today’s tight talent market.

So what should employers do? An approach that’s finding success involves a willingness to hire candidates, which organizations once wouldn’t have considered, based on relevant skills or experience, but who align well with the culture of the company and share its core values.

It’s still true that as non-bachelor degree positions transition from unskilled to skilled positions, employers want candidates with some

post-secondary training or education. However, organizations that are filling their talent pipelines successfully are often willing to invest time in helping employees acquire the skills needed to fulfill job requirements after they’ve been hired.

While many high-paying jobs in manufacturing, technical fields and professional skill trades don’t require a four-year degree, candidates often must have an associate’s degree, certification or on-the-job training. Taking the initiative to “up-skill” new hires or those already in the workforce who have plateaued in their current positions is proving to be a winning formula for both employers and talent.

This approach does force organizations to reconsider recruiting and hiring practices and how they evaluate candidates who lack additional training or education but who have the appropriate skills or development potential. Smart employers are growing more flexible with their job requirements, identifying a few non-negotiable skills and helping candidates learn the job. Others are testing candidates’ skill set as part of the interview process and evaluating their potential to learn the job versus prioritizing previous experience.

Exploring new avenues to tap into an existing talent pool can be a path to success. Making the effort to up-skill employees is a win for talent who want a rewarding career, but are unable to invest the time and financial resources into an advanced degree. It’s also a win for employers who have specific skill needs, and a win for the region’s economy, which certainly will continue to grow as a result.

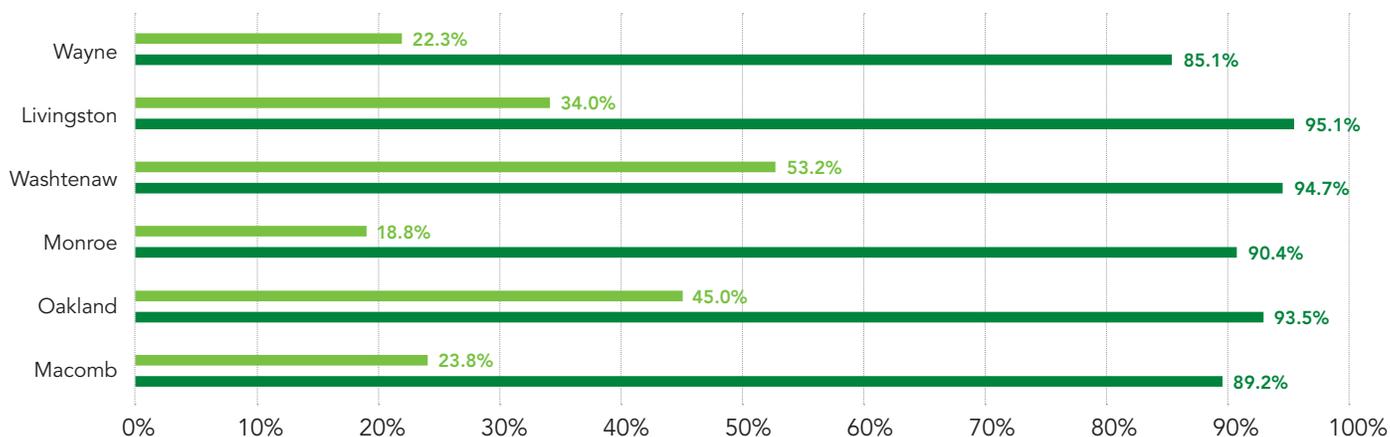
Detroit regional employment exceeded 2.5 million in 2016, including one of the region’s primary assets—highly skilled workers. During the past five years, **skilled workers also increased by 60,000**, led by team assemblers and truck drivers.

– The Detroit Regional Chamber, *State of the Region 2017-2018*

Percentage of persons age 25+ years in Michigan by county, 2012-2016

■ Bachelor's degree or higher ■ High school graduate or higher

The U.S. Census Bureau



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