



For Immediate Release

August 7, 2026

Ohio Community College Partnership Awarded \$2.35 Million National Science Foundation Grant for Advanced Manufacturing

Four-year Scale-M Consortium will strengthen curricula, faculty development, and student pathways into skilled technical careers

COLUMBUS, OH – A consortium strengthening advanced manufacturing education and expanding pathways into skilled technical careers has received a \$2.35 million grant from the U.S. National Science Foundation thanks to a partnership of three Ohio community colleges and the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC).

Stark State College, the grant recipient, will lead the Strategic Coordination for Advanced Learning and Employment in Manufacturing, or Scale-M, Consortium in partnership with Lorain County Community College, Owens Community College, and the OACC. The grant will span October 1, 2026, through September 30, 2030.

Scale-M will bring the partner institutions together to broaden the regional reach and impact of advanced manufacturing education. The consortium will strengthen curricula and degree programs, support faculty development, enhance student experiences, and form strategic partnerships that demonstrate the leadership of community colleges in preparing the nation's skilled technical workforce.

The consortium will also work with the Ohio Manufacturers' Association and Ohio TechNet to expand the ambassador program, support faculty recruitment, leverage the competency model and deliver AI-enhanced instruction.

"Ohio's community colleges are at the forefront of preparing the skilled workforce needed for the next generation of manufacturing," said Avi Zaffini, president and CEO of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges.

"This NSF investment will help our colleges combine their expertise, strengthen pathways for students and extend the reach of effective programs," he said. "It is also a strong recognition of the leadership that community colleges provide to employers, students and communities."

The consortium will collaborate with relevant NSF Advanced Technological Education National Centers and regional projects, exchange strategies and resources with other

community colleges, and measure the project's impact on students, institutions and the skilled technical workforce.

Stark State is honored to lead a partnership that brings together institutions with significant experience in advanced manufacturing education and workforce development, said Stark State President Para Jones, Ph.D.

"With more than 3,100 students earning engineering technology and manufacturing-related degrees and certificates each year, Stark State is uniquely positioned to help lead this effort," said President Jones. "By working with partners across Ohio, we are strengthening the connection between education and industry, expanding opportunities for students and helping build the workforce Ohio manufacturers need to compete and grow."

Through OACC, Scale-M will connect the partner colleges' work with Ohio's broader community college network, creating opportunities for institutions to share effective practices, strengthen faculty development, and keep programs aligned with changing technology and regional workforce needs. The collaboration will also help participating colleges identify successful approaches that can be shared with additional community colleges across the state.

Ohio's community colleges already work closely with employers to develop short-term credentials, certificates and degree programs aligned with workforce needs. Scale-M will build upon that work by creating a more coordinated approach to advanced manufacturing education and career preparation.

The National Science Foundation's Advanced Technological Education program focuses on two-year colleges and supports the education of technicians for the high-technology fields that drive the nation's economy. The program assists with curriculum development, faculty professional development, career pathways and partnerships among educational institutions, and industry and economic development organizations.

The OACC represents the presidents and trustees of Ohio's 22 public two-year institutions, advancing community colleges through policy advocacy, professional development, and strategic leadership. Community colleges, serving nearly 250,000 Ohioans annually, connect students to in-demand careers and are the top workforce partner for Ohio employers with more than 1,000 employer partnerships. The OACC champions a classroom-to-career pipeline, advocating for student opportunity and success, fostering collaboration, and promoting the transformative impact of community colleges on students, businesses, and communities across Ohio.