

Deaconess Foundation
2025 Annual Report

**LET'S
GET
TO
WORK.**

CLEVELAND'S WORKFORCE COMMUNITY HAS BEEN PUTTING IN THE WORK FOR DECADES.

True to our roots in this hard-working town, we in workforce development are no strangers to rolling up our sleeves and getting it done. That's why thousands of people are prepared for careers and placed into jobs each year.

But without a doubt, 2025 was a pivotal year in workforce development.



Rising cost of living, changing digital tools, and slower economic growth were just a few of the trends contributing turbulence to employment in 2025.¹

To gain further insight into why and how we must address this challenging environment in the coming years, Deaconess Foundation asked for input from 22 experts who do this work every day.

Here, we share their thoughts about how we can all get to work—together—to strengthen the workforce ecosystem our region has and deserves.

Hundreds of hardworking professionals are developing our workforce in Greater Cleveland; you'll see key insights from these 18 throughout our report, as well as thoughts from four experts who chose to remain anonymous.



LET'S MEET OUR EXPERTS.



TOP ROW

Aaron Bandy **Employment Team Lead, Family Promise of Greater Cleveland**

Ronnie Cannon **Senior Manager of Community Engagement, Towards Employment**

Craig Dorn **President & CEO, Youth Opportunities Unlimited**

Bethany Friedlander **President & CEO, New Bridge & Central School for Practical Nursing**

Marcus Harris **Director of Programs & Services, Greater Cleveland Works**

MIDDLE ROW

Jeri Mason **Workforce Development Manager, Fairfax Renaissance Development Corporation**

Dave Megenhart **Executive Director, United Labor Agency**

Chef Patrick McCune **Workforce Operations Manager, West Side Catholic Center**

Jazzmine Peters **Career Pathways Navigator, Youth Opportunities Unlimited**

Jill Rizika **President & CEO, Towards Employment**

Michelle Rose **President & CEO, Greater Cleveland Works**

Adaora Schmiedl **Chief Advancement & Community Engagement Officer, Towards Employment**

Michael Schoop, Ph.D. **Senior Vice President, Talent, Greater Cleveland Partnership**

B. Deonn Strathman **Senior Manager for Young Adult Workforce, Youth Opportunities Unlimited**

BOTTOM ROW

Sarah D. Taylor **Community Engagement Manager, HHW Ohio**

Kiersten Watkins **Executive Director, Program Operations, OhioGuidestone**

Shana Marbury White, J.D. **Executive Vice President, Workforce Innovation, Cuyahoga Community College**

Bryan Wortmann **CoachU Director, Lead Facilitator, MAGNET**

In 2025, workforce development was hit with a confluence of changing environmental factors.

ANONYMOUS: Workforce is undergoing its most rapid, significant, and structural transformation since the industrial era.



KIERSTEN: Demographic shifts, evolving employer expectations, funding changes, and rapid technology changes are reshaping the labor market.

And our broader community continues to have much need.



SARAH: Funding and programs that help people upskill are being cut. There are fewer resources to support workers, and the cost of living is rising faster than many people's skills and opportunities can keep up.



DEONN: Young adults entering the workforce are aware that the career they may be training for could be replaced by AI in the next decade.



ADAORA: Uncertainty in federal workforce funding is causing leaders to be more cautious at exactly the moment we are best positioned to build on decades of thoughtful forward progress.

But great opportunities lie ahead.



CRAIG: Cleveland has plans—from [a revitalized] airport to [a new] stadium to neighborhood housing. These plans and projects will not be viable without a strong workforce.



DAVE: The next decade will be remembered as equivalent to the Industrial Revolution, except it won't take 80 years to develop.

Successfully navigating this new landscape will require adaptability and fortitude.

To support organizational resilience, Deaconess Foundation is creating networking opportunities to strengthen peer relationships, organizing discussion tables for shared learning, and sparking collaborations between systems to make careers—and bold new ideas—a reality.

LET'S GET TO



Our experts agreed that the future of work is wildly uncertain and always changing; as Deonn put it, “adapting is not a choice.”

EVOLVING.

**THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A
MORE URGENT NEED TO FIND
BETTER WAYS TO CONNECT
PEOPLE TO OPPORTUNITY.**

— Michael



TRY NEW THINGS,



Deaconess Foundation has funded more than 15 innovative new initiatives and pilots since 2021.

AND KEEP GOING.

— Michelle

LET'S GET TO INNOVATING.



BRYAN: [We need to] build trust with our community and our service providers when new and innovative ideas take root.

At Deaconess Foundation, we champion our partners who try new things based on their insights and knowledge of the needs in their communities.

ANONYMOUS: Employers must rethink how work is structured and how talent is recruited, developed, and retained.



BETHANY: Our industry has to move beyond static training models [by] designing learning systems that build adaptability, emotional regulation, and continuous learning alongside technical skill. We have to design training that acknowledges the full human experience.

For each of the last five years, we have provided funding for at least three new initiatives or innovative pilots. In 2026, we're excited to continue supporting innovations and new approaches informed by the unique insights of our community partners.

Fresh thinking at every step of the hiring and retention journey—from recruitment to training to upskilling—will benefit employers and workers alike.

Cleveland's projected workforce needs are driven by healthcare, manufacturing, construction, logistics, and finance/insurance.



SARAH: We don't need more programs—we need to stay focused on creating clear, flexible pathways to real opportunity.

All these sectors offer career pathways—ways for a person to start in an entry-level role and, through work experience and education, be promoted into more advanced roles with increases in pay.

But there's still an opportunity to smooth the pathway from education (whether high school or post-secondary) into a career through career exploration, internships, and apprenticeships.



Cleveland's workforce is projected to grow by 4.5% between 2020 and 2030—that's more than 42,000 new jobs in our region.²



MARCUS: [We need to] work hand-in-hand with employers to define the skills they feel will be necessary, so we can then take that data and align policies and training priorities to help job seekers be successful.

Better equipping job seekers and eliminating barriers as they transition into a career will make career pathways more available for more people—a benefit not only for hired employees, but their families, neighborhoods, and the broader community as well.

ANONYMOUS: [We need to] create more earn-and-learn programs within companies.



SHANA: Skills and credentials offer a solid on-ramp to family-thriving wages.

LET'S GET TO CAREER ADVANCEMENT.

LET'S GET TO FIGURING OUT AI.

Everyone is thinking about AI, and we want to learn quickly as a community to move that thinking into action.



RONNIE: AI is reshaping jobs and requiring stronger digital and problem-solving skills.



MICHAEL: [We are working to] ensure that incumbent workers develop the AI skills needed to adapt to changes in how businesses get work done.

In 2025, the Foundation brought Tiffany Hsieh, Director, Center for Artificial Intelligence & the Future of Work at Jobs for the Future, to speak about the different use cases for AI that exist within workforce development.

Several workforce providers are conducting AI pilots now, and new efforts will continue through 2026.



JILL: We need to figure out how to leverage AI to supplement, not replace, the human touch.



ADAORA: To succeed in the coming years, our industry must become much more intentional about how we use technology and automation—with worker experience and real-world job outcomes guiding decisions, not just the tools themselves.

THE FUTURE OF WORK IS



AI and big data skills are projected to be the fastest growing job skills by 2030.³

AI-ASSISTED.

—Jazzmine

Deaconess Foundation will continue to support ecosystem players as they consider AI appropriately within their organizations, driving efficiency and impact while preparing workers with the competitive skills needed for an AI-forward future.

Despite the challenging environment, our workforce community has much to be proud of.



JERI: I cheer for our clients who obtain employment, but even more, I celebrate those who retain it.



AARON: I find the most joy in clients' "aha" moments.

ANONYMOUS: [I am inspired by] job seeker successes as a direct result of our program interventions, training, and support.

When creating broader positive change seems formidable, the wins of individual clients motivate people to keep moving forward.



DAVE: Knowing that one can provide solutions and help workers navigate through these vast tides is inspiring. It makes you creative, it challenges you intellectually, and it forces you to understand dynamics beyond your control without losing hope.

The board and staff of Deaconess Foundation celebrate the resilient, inspired, and thoughtful people who lead our workforce system programs and support job seekers and employers every day.

Because of them, we stay inspired even when the work feels daunting.

NOW: LET'S GET TO WORK.



Deaconess Foundation's mission is to help people impacted by poverty build a career which sustains themselves and their families.

3000+ CAREER PLANS

**2800+ WORK-BASED
LEARNING EXPERIENCES**

1500+ OCCUPATIONAL TRAININGS

1400+ NEW CAREER JOURNEYS

LET'S TALK IMPACT.

In 2025, the Foundation's funding supported nonprofits and people in Greater Cleveland working every day to help people become employed and launch their careers. With funding from Deaconess Foundation, workforce organizations made a positive impact on thousands of our community members; these metrics reflect their successes.

High school students wrote career plans for themselves that articulate their career hopes, dreams, and plans based on self-awareness and career exposure. Adults and young adults alike participated in work-based learning experiences—like summer jobs, internships, pre-apprenticeships, and apprenticeship programs—and in occupational training to gain technical skills needed to secure a job. And people started their career journey by securing a job.

NONPROFIT PARTNERS

Getting people, and our systems, to work every day

Beat the Streets Cleveland	Greater Cleveland Works	Teaching Cleveland
Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)	Legal Aid Society of Cleveland	The Centers (El Barrio)
Collaborate Cleveland and the Northeast Ohio Worker Center	LISC	Towards Employment
CollegeNow	MAGNET	Youth Opportunities Unlimited (Y.O.U.)
Cuyahoga Community College	McGregor Foundation	
Cuyahoga County Workforce Funders Group	New Bridge	
EDWINS	Ohio Excels	
Esperanza	OhioGuidestone	
Fund for Our Economic Future	Open Doors Academy	
	Re:Source Cleveland	
	Saint Martin De Porres High School	
	Salvation Army	
	Spanish American Committee	

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST (UCC) CONGREGATIONS

Working to meet community needs

Archwood United Church of Christ	Middleburg Heights Community United Church of Christ	Members from these UCC churches support their communities' needs through food pantries, warm meals, and other outreach ministries. Deaconess Foundation is proud to support their work in honor of the foundation's history, rooted in the UCC.
Clague Road United Church of Christ	Mt. Zion Congregational Church, UCC	
Church of the Redeemer	Pilgrim Congregational United Church of Christ	
Denison Avenue United Church of Christ	Ridge Road United Church of Christ	
Dover Congregational United Church of Christ	Saint Paul's Community Church	
Federated United Church of Christ	Saint Peter United Church of Christ	
Imani United Church of Christ	Strongsville United Church of Christ	
Lyndhurst Community of Faith Church	West Park United Church of Christ	

LET’S CELEBRATE THE 2025
DEBORAH VESY SYSTEMS CHANGE
CHAMPION AWARD WINNER.

The Deborah Vespy Systems Change Champion Award is presented annually to honor the legacy of our long-term president and CEO, Deborah Vespy.

This year, we honored Towards Employment for the scaling of their employer-based coaching, which supports the retention and advancement of employees by helping them address other challenges.

- WINNER
- Towards Employment
- FINALISTS
- Greater Cleveland Works
- Greater Cleveland Career Consortium

WORKFORCE PROGRAMS CHANGE LIVES AND CREATE COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS.

— Patrick



TRUSTEES

Serving every day as volunteers
for Deaconess Foundation

Andrea Lyons **Chair**
Tom Littman **Vice Chair**
Carrie Clark
Shakorie Davis
James Hardiman
Justin Horton
Ken Liang
Ann O'Brien
Miguel Perez
Laurie Pogel
Ann Zoller

INVESTMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Bringing expertise to our investing work

Tim Becker
Elizabeth Honold

STAFF

Representing Deaconess
Foundation day-to-day

Cathy Belk
cbelk@deaconessfdn.org | 216-407-0408
Lissy Rand
lrand@deaconessfdn.org | 216-233-5516

SOURCES

1. Future of Jobs Report 2025, World Economic Forum, reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_Report_2025.pdf
2. Ohio Labor Market Information, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, ohiolmi.com/_docs/proj/MSA/Cleveland.pdf
3. Future of Jobs Report 2025, World Economic Forum, reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_Report_2025.pdf

DEACONESS FOUNDATION

deaconessfdn.org

[linkedin.com/company/deaconess-foundation-cleveland](https://www.linkedin.com/company/deaconess-foundation-cleveland)