

Thought Leaders Dialogue III

3 COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS & THEIR INDUSTRY PARTNERS SHARE INSIGHTS ABOUT ATE-GRANT INSTIGATED COLLABORATIONS

Three successful community college and industry workforce collaborations were the focus of [CCPI-STEM's Third Thought Leaders' Dialogue](#).

The dialogue began with Dr. Rufus Glasper, president and CEO of the [League for Innovation in the Community College](#), welcoming participants. He pointed out that science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) are entry points for many first-generation community college students.

"STEM is more than just a collection of disciplines. It is that open-entry door for coming into our systems," Glasper said. He urged community college leaders to build "a pipeline for those who are unaware of what STEM really means, how they can enter the profession, how they can grow, and go in many directions."

Dr. V. Celeste Carter, lead program director of the [National Science Foundation's Advanced Technology Education \(ATE\) program](#), pointed out that over the past 31 years the ATE program has awarded \$1.5 billion in taxpayer funds to support innovative technician education programs.

She encouraged the community college educators who are unfamiliar with the program to look at it as a funding opportunity for testing new ways to prepare students to work with emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. She said she hoped that faculty who received ATE grants in the past will submit proposals again.

"The funds that are appropriated to support all of the projects and centers are in part dependent on the proposal pressure," Carter said.

The ATE program requires "strong, committed industry partnerships," and the three college presidents and their industry partners who spoke during the dialogue explained how collaborations that were instigated by ATE grants blossomed into other initiatives that have benefitted students, employers, and communities.

Northern Virginia Community College & Google

Dr. Anne Kress, president of [Northern Virginia Community College \(NOVA\)](#), reported that Google has been "an incredible partner" on multiple college programs that prepare students for a wide range of technical roles to build data centers and operate them.

Jessica Forman, a member of the Community Development & Social Impact team for [Google Data Centers](#), said the company's "really wonderful symbiotic relationship" with NOVA on the Skilled Trades and Readiness (STAR) program is "upskilling" people who might not otherwise have embarked on construction trade careers. The STAR program is a five-week, pre-employment program that awards industry-recognized certificates to completers.

"So for Google, it's really a double bonus that we not only get a skilled workforce to help build the data centers that we need, but provide opportunities for those that otherwise might not have to enter the industry," Forman said.

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South Central College & Daikin Applied Americas

Dr. Annette Parker, president of [South Central College](#), explained that [Daikin Applied Americas](#) has been a partner on ATE grants that the college began receiving in 2013 for its Independent Mechatronics Education Curriculum (iMEC) program. These funds from the National Science Foundation have helped the college's faculty embed innovative mechatronics courses at rural high schools.

The college and Daikin, which manufactures advanced heating and cooling systems, have also partnered on a credit-based apprenticeship program and a training program for career switchers.

George Chapple, senior manager of Professional Development & Training at Daikin Applied Americas, explained that before the Covid pandemic the company realized there were many people in Minnesota who were transitioning from non-manufacturing jobs into manufacturing. By working together, South Central College and the company developed a "common skills" program that Daikin uses for onboarding new employees.

"We provide advanced skills to folks that have never stepped foot in a factory before. And we did this in partnership with SCC and the community of Faribault to give free training to folks wanting to transition from a non-traditional [career] like fast food or retail into advanced manufacturing," Chapple said.

Columbus State Community College & Nationwide

Dr. David Harrison, president of [Columbus State Community College](#), shared how Rocky Parker, senior external affairs officer at [Nationwide](#), helped him assemble a "kitchen cabinet" of human resource officers from various industries to advise him about workforce development in Central Ohio.

Parker said the advantage of forming that group early in Harrison's tenure has been that "it created a muscle within the industry or within our region so that when it was time for us to go for grants, NSF grants specifically, we had already built that collaboration, that muscle that allowed us to come together to be able to get additional dollars to put into the workforce."

Harrison cited the "cumulative impact" of Columbus State's 17 ATE grants since 2014 with helping the college achieve "significant growth in engineering technology." Those ATE projects also provided momentum for other college-industry collaborations and led to the federal government designating Columbus State to lead one of five workforce hubs in the nation, he said.

Dr. Sylvia Jenkins, CCPI-STEM's business-industry liaison, moderated the 90-minute dialogue. It can be viewed [here](#).

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