

National Council for Workforce Education Exemplary Program Award Application

Hawkeye Community College, WE Build Waterloo, Noncredit Workforce Development Program

Executive Summary

Hawkeye Community College is located in Waterloo, Iowa, and was founded in 1966 as Hawkeye Institute of Technology. Waterloo's population 66,934 (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 2017-2021), is one of the largest and most demographically diverse cities in Iowa. Waterloo has a 24.4% minority population, well above the state's minority population of 8.4% (ACS, 2017-2021). 16.4% of the residents of Waterloo live at or below the poverty levels, and our county, Black Hawk, is one of the highest in the state at 15%. The national average for those living in poverty is 12.6% (ACS, 2017-2021).

State of Iowa Department of Education (IA DE) data indicates Waterloo Community School District's high school graduation rate was 81.1% in 2021, while the state average was 90.2%. Students with a low socio-economic status have a graduation rate of 76.9% with the state average of 82.3%. Reviewing this data of the largest 15 school districts in Iowa, Waterloo has the sixth highest dropout rate.

Hawkeye launched WE Build Waterloo in June 2020 to help address these challenges. A community-based quality pre-apprenticeship program, WE Build Waterloo provides a 12-week tuition-free non-credit competency-based education to individuals with employment barriers. In addition to learning high-demand construction skills, students earn industry-recognized certifications and receive career counseling, resume assistance, interview preparation, team building, and leadership and personal skills development. During the program, students engage in a residential construction or rehabilitation that is later sold to a family connected to Iowa Heartland Habitat for Humanity.

WE Build was founded on principles of redefining access to college education, redeveloping neglected neighborhoods, and serving the community holistically, while creating a talent pipeline for the construction industry. Our goals are 74% of all enrollees obtain their high school equivalency credentials, high school diplomas, and/or industry-recognized credentials, 90% of program completers continue their education or transition to full-time employment, 73% of those placed in education or employment retain their placement for at least six months, recidivism rates within one year of enrollment for court-involved students average 15%, and rehabilitate or build new at least one property for low income families per year.

WE Build is more than a workforce training program; it is a community development program providing a talent pipeline to local registered apprenticeship employers and sponsors. It helps reduce poverty through education, increases access to quality affordable housing, and revitalizes blighted neighborhoods.

Project Description: WE Build Waterloo

Partnerships and Collaborations: The strong support and collaboration with our industry and community partners has played a major role in WE Build's success during its first two years. Our largest partnership is with Iowa Heartland Habitat for Humanity (Habitat). Acting as general contractor, Habitat provides building materials and coordinates with subcontractors, allowing the college to focus on providing students with quality education and workforce training. In May 2023, Habitat hired one of our graduates as a site supervisor to lead volunteer build crews, a testament not only to our partnership, but to the quality education we provide. Habitat has been able to increase the number of homes they build and rehabilitate each year in response to our partnership.

WE Build created a network of employers who provide curriculum input, communicate workforce needs, and provide job opportunities for graduates. This includes general, plumbing, electrical, and HVAC contractors; with plans to expand as programs grow. For example, a new flooring installation apprenticeship is providing another avenue for graduates, and another sector of construction in which to find potential partners. Our targeted outreach efforts with numerous community organizations has resulted in a dramatic increase in program referrals. These relationships provide us with new pathways to connect WE Build students with community-based resources to address transportation, childcare, housing, and food assistance needs.

Economic Impact: Today, Hawkeye serves more than 25,000 individuals annually, with a community impact of \$444.5 million that supports 6,343 jobs. Since 1966, the college has graduated more than 50,000 students, with 94% staying in Iowa. Every \$1 students invest in their education at Hawkeye produces a \$4.70 return in future earnings, an average return rate of 23.9%. For every \$1 invested in Hawkeye by the public, our taxpayers receive \$1.70 in return, an annual 4% return rate of return.

WE Build plays a key role in our community's growth and revitalization by developing quality, affordable housing in blighted neighborhoods. Recent studies in cities like Chicago, Illinois, and Des Moines, Iowa, have estimated that vacant and public nuisance properties cost taxpayers upwards of \$34,000. In contrast, over the last three years, the six properties revitalized by WE Build produce a direct economic impact on the City of Waterloo valued at \$154,590-\$204,000. This does not include the indirect economic impact revitalized homes have on a neighborhood that can reach 5-7 times higher, per house.

WE Build has enrolled 75 individuals to date, with 86% earning a credential, and 91% of our graduates have entered full-time employment or continued their education. Our graduates are entering the workforce with family-sustaining occupations while literally building the infrastructure of our local economy, producing an immense positive impact.

Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity: Women and minorities are severely underrepresented in the construction trades. National studies show just 6.1% of carpenters are

Black/African American, and only 3.1% are female. Part of WE Build's mission is to increase diversity in the construction workforce and remove barriers to education and workforce training. Efforts to recruit from underrepresented populations, coupled with ongoing collaboration with local employers, have helped to dramatically improve the diversity of our local workforce pipeline. Of the 140 individuals who applied to WE Build Waterloo, 51% were Black/African American and 34% were female. The latest cohort was 50% female, 50% Black/African American, and 6% white male.

We continue to work on removing financial barriers associated with workforce training programs. Each WE Build student is enrolled in Hawkeye's Introduction to Construction Trades, with tuition and equipment costs totaling \$5,900. To cover these expenses, the college utilizes a variety of local, state, and national grants; local individual and business donors; and Workforce Training and Economic Development (WTED) funds. To date, 100% of participants have had their costs covered, totaling \$442,500. It has been an important program model to ensure that students are able pursue an education path without accruing student debt which is addressing socioeconomic barriers.

Since 2022, WE Build students have the option to apply for an AmeriCorps service position that runs concurrent with their course. Participants receive a \$3,600 living allowance paid in \$600 installments twice monthly. Once students complete their coursework, AmeriCorps participants are eligible for a \$1,342.86 education award that can be used for further education or to pay down previous student loans. This unique earn and learn quality pre-apprenticeship model allows students to prepare for the workforce, while paying their bills, and sets them up for future educational advancement. These efforts have been recognized at the local and state level, most recently in a Women in Construction Month feature by Iowa Workforce Development (Video: fb.watch/kAI5Y-Z6aJ).

Program Results: WE Build Waterloo was founded on principles of redefining access to college education, redeveloping neglected neighborhoods, and serving the community holistically, while creating a talent pipeline for the construction industry. To date our retention and success rates are: 86% have earned at least one credential; 73% of graduated from the program; of the 54% students have a criminal background, 0% of the graduates have reoffended after on year; 91% graduates entered new employment or continued their education; 86% have retained employment or schooling for six months; and 36% of graduates have started careers on the registered apprenticeship track. WE Build students work toward earning their OSHA 10 safety cards, National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) Core Curriculum: Introduction to Basic Construction Skills, NCCER Construction Site Safety Orientation, and an Introduction to Construction Skills certificate. To date, we have awarded 171 credentials.

WE Build has received numerous recognitions, honors, and awards since its inception. Projects have been featured by local ABC, CBS, and NBC affiliates, in the *Waterloo Courier*, and *Connect* magazine.

Learning Resources Network International (LERN), the world's largest association in continuing education and lifelong learning, awarded WE Build with the 2021 Best Business & Industry Award. In March 2022, Hawkeye's president recognized WE Build with a President's Award for Innovation, and in February 2023 the program won the "I Built This" contest hosted by NCCER's Build Your Future Foundation.

Replication: WE Build was created to serve Hawkeye's urban service area, with an eye on later expanding into our rural communities. The high demand for skilled workers across the U.S. makes WE Build ideal for replication, with WE Build's signature partnerships and quality curriculum easily customized to meet the needs of communities large and small.

Strong partners are key to WE Build's success. We started small, managing construction, materials acquisition, student recruitment, education, etc. We quickly realized it was important to engage quality partners to ensure the program was successful and sustainable. Our partnership with Habitat does that, providing project management, materials procurement, code compliance, permitting, etc. Habitat serves all 50 states and more than 70 countries worldwide, making a similar partnership viable for those interested in building a similar program.

Hawkeye reviewed multiple curricula prior to launch: NCCER curriculum, Multi-Craft Core Curriculum (MC3), and the Home Builders Institute Pre-Apprenticeship Certificate Training (HBI PACT), before selecting NCCER. We wanted a curriculum that was industry recognized, with competency-based modality, access to stackable credentials, and could be integrated into multiple skilled trades programs at the same time. It should be noted that your partnerships may dictate your curriculum, such as a local home builders association preferring HBI PACT over other options.

Safety training is an integral part of any training program. Your local partners and curriculum options will play a role in how safety training is offered, and your organization's insurance providers may also have input. Connect with all three before deciding. NCCER's curriculum includes safety training, which is important to our community partners, and our insurance provider preferred OSHA 10 as a course requirement. With this insight, we opted to offer NCCER safety training and OSHA 10. Most community colleges have an OSHA 10 trainer on staff, or under contract, which eliminates this integration barrier.

Hawkeye has a great set of skilled instructors, but we ran into issues as we attempted to fit WE Build into their busy schedules. We used this as an opportunity to refresh our instructor pool and began meeting with small business owners. We contracted with a local small business owner who had the experience required to teach construction trades, but was still developing his independent contractor business and as a result lacked steady work. WE Build offered him steady work, flexible scheduling, and access to future employees, while we gained a high-quality instruction. We have grown at such a fast pace that we hired a full-time construction instructor in January 2022 and a full-time career pathway navigator in May 2023.