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Kroger trains Cincy residents for high paying jobs

Fatima Hussein, fhussen@enquirer.com 4:35 p.m. EDT August 18, 2016



(Photo: Enquirer file/Liz Dufour)

An unlikely partnership may help Cincinnati find its way out of its looming skills gap problem.

The Urban League of Greater Southwestern Ohio unveiled an employment pilot program with Kroger this week, to train workers for high-paying positions at Kroger's Fresh Center Warehouse in Blue Ash.

The program is a result of a strategic partnership facilitated by Partners for a Competitive Workforce, to support qualified candidates find jobs in the supply chain career pathways.

Prospective candidates will work at Kroger's new Fresh Center Warehouse located in Blue Ash and will earn a starting wage of \$15.55 per hour.

Candidates that are offered employment opportunities through the initiative could have the ability to earn up to \$40,000 or more a year based on overtime, wage increases, performance and attendance.

"This partnership enables Urban League Life Ready graduates an essential opportunity to begin careers and create stability for their families with living wages, medical benefits and career advancement with a large company," said Kenetra Mathis, associate vice president of workforce development at the Urban League.

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The Life Ready program equips participants with the skills needed to be hired and remain employed.

Programs such as the Kroger/Urban League partnership may be a way to address the "skills gap" that has affected various industries in the job market, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland.

This week, the bank published a study about how partnerships between employers and representatives from local and regional economic development offices can help bridge skills mismatches.

"While they differ in goals and in how they operate, these partnerships typically involve employers from a particular industry collaborating with representatives from local and regional economic development offices, educational institutions, and nonprofits that serve individuals seeking employment in order to meet the needs of jobseekers, the industry, and the region's economy," writes Kyle Fee, Lisa Nelson and Matt Klesta, the authors of the study.

"And these partnerships appear to be working: Evaluations of sector-based training programs have identified successful outcomes for both workers and employers in the form of increased wages, reductions in turnover, and increased productivity."

"We are excited to be able to help meet the needs of regional employers in this in-demand growth industry," said Chara Fisher Jackson, the Greater Cincinnati Urban League executive director, regarding the partnership.

The partnership also provides a response to the Urban League's State of Black Cincinnati report published in 2015, which illuminated the need for these types of sustainable employment opportunities as a means to alleviate the poverty that blacks are disproportionately experiencing in our region.

Candidates of the Kroger program have already begun training in North Carolina and Tennessee for roles at the new Fresh Center Warehouse.

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