

Program History

The Shakopee Chamber Foundation's workforce development scholarship program was established through a direct appropriation from the Minnesota Legislature to address critical workforce shortages in high-demand industries throughout Scott County. The program provides scholarships for training in Advanced Manufacturing, Health Care, Hospitality, and Law Enforcement—sectors experiencing significant workforce needs in the region.

The initiative builds on existing workforce development efforts in Scott County, particularly the Career Lift program under the Drive for Five initiative, which has established successful partnerships with educational institutions and community organizations. The program requires a 25% non-appropriated match beyond the state appropriation, demonstrating community investment and commitment to addressing workforce development needs.

The Shakopee Chamber Foundation, working through staff including the President and Vice President of Community Development, has led program planning and development efforts. The program was initiated to create pathways for individuals throughout Scott County, with particular emphasis on serving individuals from underserved communities, to access quality training and certification programs that lead to meaningful employment in high-demand occupations.

Shakopee Area Workforce Scholarship Pilot – Overview

The program operates through a collaborative partnership involving the Shakopee Chamber Foundation, Dakota County Technical College, Inver Hills Community College, and the Dakota-Scott Workforce Development Board, functioning closely with Scott County's Career Lift Initiative. Minnesotans access services through scholarship opportunities that cover training costs for eligible degree, diploma, certificate, or industry-recognized credential programs in four designated high-demand sectors: Advanced Manufacturing, Health Care, Hospitality, and Law Enforcement.

The program is open to all schools and individuals throughout Scott County, with emphasis on folks from underserved communities. Outreach efforts are coordinated through partnerships with organizations like Mi C.A.S.A. and Community Resource Center to ensure equitable access to training opportunities. The program leverages the existing Career Lift infrastructure to expand training opportunities in these high-demand sectors.

Training is delivered through established partnerships with Dakota County Technical College and Inver Hills Community College. We're also exploring bringing certification programs directly to Shakopee High School for students 18 and older, which would make these opportunities accessible to high school students throughout Scott County.

The integration with Career Lift provides scholarship recipients with connections to a network of participating local employers representing the program's target industries. These Career Lift employer partners include:

Healthcare:

- St. Francis Regional Medical Center
- Allina Health
- BrightStar Care
- Accelerated Care Solutions
- Benedictine Living Community – St. Gertrude's
- Benedictine Living Community – Windermere Way
- All Saints Senior Living
- Friendship Manor
- Oak Terrace Senior Living
- Amada Senior Care
- The Lutheran Home
- The Lutheran Home – Hope Residences
- River of Life Savage
- Mala Strana Care & Rehabilitation Center

Advanced Manufacturing:

- Rahr Corporation
- Anchor Glass
- Amazon

Hospitality:

- Canterbury Park

While these employer partners haven't provided direct financial contributions to the scholarship program—the required 25% match was secured entirely through the Shakopee Chamber Foundation's fundraising efforts with nonprofit and community foundation partners—their involvement through Career Lift creates employment pathways for program participants and demonstrates the comprehensive, interconnected approach to workforce development in Scott County.

Eligible programs are reviewed and updated through regular collaboration with the Dakota-Scott Workforce Development Board, ensuring programming stays aligned with high-demand industries and legislative priorities. The program's application processes and implementation guidelines are designed to align with eligibility requirements set by the Dakota-Scott Workforce Development Board, with any proposed additions to eligible industries submitted to the Board for approval as needed.

Background Data (Name with appropriate description of data - Ex. Childcare Access in Minnesota)

The program addresses critical workforce shortages in four key sectors identified as high-demand occupations in Scott County and the broader region: Advanced Manufacturing, Health Care, Hospitality, and Law Enforcement. These industries represent significant economic drivers in the region and face ongoing challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified workers.

The program focuses primarily on Advanced Manufacturing and Health Care sectors, which have been identified through ongoing dialogue with the Dakota-Scott Workforce Development Board as areas with evolving workforce needs in the region. These focus areas are evaluated continuously to ensure they meet labor market shifts and emerging occupational demands.

The need for workforce development interventions in these sectors is evident in the strong community support demonstrated through the fundraising effort, which resulted in over \$150,000 in private matching funds from community partners including the Shakopee Lions, the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, HEART Ministries, and West Bank Development. This level of private investment reflects local organizations and businesses recognizing the urgent need for trained workers in these high-demand industries. Additionally, Career Lift's network of employer partners across healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and hospitality sectors demonstrates the business community's engagement with workforce development efforts, even as challenges exist in securing direct employer financial contributions without tax-credit incentives or hiring assurance mechanisms.

Program Results in SFY 2025 (grant start date through present or grant end date)

During State Fiscal Year 2025, the Shakopee Chamber Foundation has achieved significant foundational accomplishments that position the program for successful implementation and service delivery throughout the remaining grant period ending June 30, 2027.

We've focused this period on establishing the critical infrastructure necessary for program success, including securing required matching funds, building educational and community partnerships, and developing comprehensive program guidelines aligned with legislative requirements. These foundational achievements ensure we can move swiftly into service delivery and achieve meaningful outcomes for participants.

Program Highlights

- **Successfully secured \$150,000 in private matching funds, exceeding the required 25% match and demonstrating strong community investment in workforce development. This includes contributions from the Shakopee Lions (\$10,000), HEART Ministries (\$15,000), Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community (\$75,000), and West Bank Development (\$50,000), creating a robust \$748,000+ total program budget.**
- **Established comprehensive partnerships with two major educational institutions—Dakota County Technical College and Inver Hills Community College—building on existing collaboration through the Career Lift program, while also initiating discussions with Shakopee High School to potentially expand training access directly to students 18 and older.**
- **Developed complete program framework aligned with legislative parameters and vetted with partners, including application processes, implementation guidelines, and continuous improvement mechanisms, positioning us to immediately launch services and serve eligible students throughout Scott County with emphasis on individuals from underserved communities. The program operates hand-in-hand with Scott County's Career Lift Initiative, which maintains relationships with 18 employer partners across Health Care, Advanced Manufacturing, and Hospitality sectors, providing clear employment pathways for scholarship recipients.**

Outcomes

At this stage, efforts have been focused on securing the financial foundation and partnership infrastructure necessary to deliver services. With over \$150,000 in private matching funds now secured, we're positioned to start enrolling students and achieving measurable workforce outcomes.

The program framework has been fully developed through regular collaboration with Dakota County Technical College, Inver Hills Community College, and the Dakota-Scott Workforce Development Board. All programming components have been designed, vetted with partners, and aligned with legislative parameters focusing on Advanced Manufacturing, Health Care, Hospitality, and Law Enforcement.

Partnerships have been established with community organizations including Mi C.A.S.A. and Community Resource Center to support outreach efforts and ensure equitable access to training opportunities for folks from underserved communities throughout Scott County. The program's integration with Career Lift connects scholarship recipients to 18 established employer partners across target industries, creating a comprehensive workforce development ecosystem that links training to employment opportunities.

Story of Impact

While individual student stories aren't yet available as we prepare to enroll our first participants, the story of community impact is already clear in the overwhelming support demonstrated through the fundraising effort. Successfully securing \$150,000 in private matching funds from diverse community partners—including the Shakopee Lions, the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, HEART Ministries, and West Bank Development—reflects a shared recognition of how critical workforce development in high-demand industries is for Scott County's economic vitality and the future success of individuals throughout the region.

Learnings

The primary challenge we encountered was securing the required 25% matching funds, which required extensive strategic outreach to nonprofits, community partners, and other funding sources. This experience reinforced the importance of early and persistent relationship-building with potential funders and clearly articulating the program's value proposition to the community. Successfully completing this fundraising effort demonstrates the power of collaborative approaches and community investment in workforce development.

Building business partnerships for direct financial contributions has been challenging because the original legislation doesn't include a tax-credit provision, which limited incentives for employer participation. Additionally, business partners expressed concerns about providing financial support without assurances they'd be able to hire and retain trainees upon program completion. These concerns highlighted the need for mechanisms that better align employer investments with hiring outcomes. While we successfully secured our matching funds through nonprofit and foundation sources, and maintain strong employer connections through Career Lift's network of 18 employer partners, these experiences suggest that future workforce development programs could benefit from legislative provisions that include tax-credit incentives for employer contributions and structured hiring commitment mechanisms.

We continue to engage employers through existing Career Lift relationships across Health Care, Advanced Manufacturing, and Hospitality sectors. These Career Lift employer partners provide valuable employment pathways for scholarship recipients, demonstrating that the program's integration with existing workforce initiatives creates comprehensive support for participants even without direct employer financial contributions to the scholarship fund itself.

The detailed process of aligning all program elements with legislative requirements and workforce board approvals has reinforced the importance of thorough planning and regular collaboration with oversight entities. This approach ensures we maintain focus on high-demand industries while remaining flexible to emerging workforce needs identified by the Dakota-Scott Workforce Development Board.

Conclusion

The Shakopee Chamber Foundation's workforce development scholarship program has successfully completed its foundational development phase, achieving the critical milestone of securing over \$150,000 in private matching funds and establishing comprehensive partnerships with educational institutions and community organizations. The program framework is fully developed and aligned with legislative parameters, positioning it for immediate implementation.

With funding secured and partnerships established, we're ready to start serving eligible students throughout Scott County with training opportunities in Advanced Manufacturing, Health Care, Hospitality, and Law Enforcement. The program's emphasis on serving individuals from underserved communities, combined with its collaborative approach and proven infrastructure leveraged from the Career Lift Initiative, ensures it's well-positioned to achieve meaningful workforce outcomes throughout the remaining grant period ending June 30, 2027. The program operates alongside Scott County's Career Lift Initiative, which maintains relationships with 18 employer partners across target industries, creating a comprehensive workforce development system that supports students from training through employment placement.

The coming implementation phase will focus on enrolling students, delivering high-quality training through partnerships with Dakota County Technical College and Inver Hills Community College, and achieving measurable outcomes in participant completion of credential programs and placement in employment within high-demand occupations. The program's continuous improvement framework and ongoing collaboration with the Dakota-Scott Workforce Development Board will ensure responsiveness to evolving workforce needs while maintaining alignment with the program's core mission of preparing students for meaningful employment in high-demand occupations.

Based on implementation experience, recommendations for legislative consideration include adding tax-credit provisions to incentivize employer financial contributions and developing hiring commitment mechanisms to address employer concerns about workforce retention. Both could strengthen future workforce development initiatives and expand available resources for program sustainability and growth.