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National Urban League Wireless Infrastructure Apprenticeship Access Initiative Members Host and Join Workforce and Apprenticeship Sessions at Connectivity Expo

Charlotte, NC – From May 21st – 24th, the Wireless Infrastructure Association (WIA) held its annual Connectivity Expo (Connect(X), formerly the Wireless Infrastructure Show) in Charlotte, NC. Connect(X) is a ground-breaking event designed to serve all elements of the expanding and evolving wireless ecosystem. Representatives from the Multicultural Media, Telecom and Internet Council (MMTC), WIA, and National Urban League (NUL) Affiliates served as panelists and moderators throughout the conference, educating industry leaders on workforce development, diversity, and Registered Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship programs. MMTC and WIA are members of the Wireless Infrastructure Apprenticeship Access Initiative (WIAAI) Consortium, along with the National Urban League (lead contractor under the Department of Labor’s Office of Apprenticeship), to create, expand, and diversify Registered Apprenticeship programs in telecom and other industries.

MMTC, WIA, and National Urban League Affiliates from Charlotte and Houston played a major role in several sessions constituting a four-part Workforce Workshop and Mini-Accelerator: WIA’s Training Consultant and Director of Apprenticeship Deb Bennett; MMTC’s Acting President and CEO Maurita Coley Flippin, Vice President Dr. Rikin Thakker, and Director of Communications Marcella Gadson; and Urban League of Central Carolinas (ULCC) Director of Marketing and Communications Maya Norvel and Houston Area Urban League (HAUL) Director Eric Goodie spoke at each of the sessions:

- Risk Assessment – Ensure a Competitive Advantage Through Effective Workforce Development Planning
- Building Alliances to Jumpstart Talent Acquisition & Retention
- Accelerate Potential: Get More People on the Job Faster
- Optimize Your Workforce through Apprenticeship” (Gadson)

Deb Bennett planned and developed the entire workshop series, also collaborating with other Industry and Equity Partners from Chicago Women in Trades, Jobs for the Future, and Warriors4Wireless, who served as panelists. Dr. Thakker also spoke on the panel “Edge Infrastructure, Transitions from 3G-4G; 4G-5G, What does 5G look like?” on May 21st.

Session 1: Risk Assessment – Ensure a Competitive Advantage Through Effective Workforce Development Planning

This session opened the discussion about the workforce planning process and provided guidance on conducting a skills inventory, evaluating the gaps, and how to convert the results into a successful talent acquisition strategy.

MMTC’s Maurita Coley and Rikin Thakker served as moderator and panelist, respectively, in addition to panelists Shelby Scales, Director, Office of Civil Rights, North Carolina Department of Transportation; Eric Lewis, Director of Business Services, Charlotte Works; Kevin Dick, Director of Economic Development, City of Charlotte, North Carolina; and Nicholas Wharton, President, Wharton and Wharton Associates, and former Interim Director of ULCC.



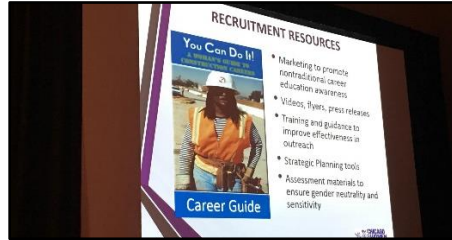
The panelists outlined the skills and workforce gaps in the wireless industry and the importance of Registered Apprenticeship programs as a solution. Dr. Thakker noted the role of the WIAAI Consortium and NUL Affiliates, and all panelists highlighted impressive work with the Urban League of Central Carolinas to train diverse communities to fill wireless jobs and skills gaps

through programs including Project P.I.E.C.E. and its Corporate Advisory Council that creates and leverages strategic partnerships with industry partners to better hone and shape its training programs.

Session 2: Building Alliances to Jumpstart Talent Acquisition & Retention

This session focused on internal steps and external resources companies can use as they source, recruit, and bridge skills and workforce gaps through talent pipeline management strategies that combine 1) career advancement from their existing workforce, 2) job-ready workers accessible through networked recruitment and staffing partners, 3) new entrants to the workforce with recent customized education and training, and 4) from alliances with workforce development partners. The panelists further expounded upon Registered Apprenticeship as the “best model out there” to bridge workforce gaps, focusing on the key roles public-private partnerships play, and best practices for inclusion and retention of diverse candidates.

Broadstaff President Carrie served as moderator, and panelists included Dr. Ronald Johnson, Chief Strategist for Diversity and Inclusion, WIA; Lauren Sugarman, National Policy Director, Chicago Women in Trades; Amelia DeJesus, President, Women’s Wireless Leadership Forum; Gen. Kevin Kennedy, President and CEO, Warriors4Wireless; and Nicholas Wharton, President, Wharton and Wharton Associates, and former Interim Director of ULCC.



Session 3: Accelerate Potential: Get More People on the Job Faster

This session focused on the value of learning and development as a strategy for organizations to position themselves to address skills gaps and get up to speed quickly on the latest technologies, standards, and procedures. Panelists explored options for providing training and knowledge transfer that include mentoring, traditional training, and Registered Apprenticeship programs.

Urban League of Central Carolina’s Maya Norvel served as moderator, and panelists included General Kevin J. Kennedy, President & Chief Executive Officer, Warriors4Wireless; Gerry Ghazi, Subject Matter Expert, Manufacturing Apprenticeships, Jobs for the Future; Eric M. Goodie, Director of Asset Acquisition and Management, Houston Area Urban League; Curtis Hill, Regional Director, OnePath; and James Burns, ULCC Instructor, ULCC Fiber Optic/Broadband (FOA) & Premise Cabling Certification Program.



Panelists stressed that standardized Registered Apprenticeship programs to train a new workforce, utilizing strategic partnerships and national industry standards, benefits industry by resolving workforce needs and provides training and jobs to overlooked, underutilized candidates.

Session 4: Optimize Your Workforce through Apprenticeship

This session is focused on helping employers seeking to initiate or expand apprenticeship programs by introduction the Telecommunications Industry Registered Apprenticeship model and WIA's role as National Sponsor; provided an opportunity for companies to engage directly with subject matter experts to assist them in determining how an apprenticeship program might become an integral part of their workforce development strategy; identified resources and partners that can assist in the development of a new program or sustainability of their existing programs; and highlighted the importance of diversity and inclusion, as well as an overview of the 29 CFR 30 EEO standards.

WIA's Deb Bennett served as moderator, and MMTC's Marcella Gadson served as a panelists, in addition to panelists Gerry Ghazi, Subject Matter Expert, Manufacturing Apprenticeships, Jobs for the Future; Scott Kisting, TIRAP Chair, PTS Advisors; and Charles F. Vaughan, South Carolina State Director, US Department of Labor, Office of Apprenticeship.



During this session, panelists engaged one-on-one with industry representatives in the audience, addressing questions and concerns with implementing, expanding, and diversifying their Registered Apprenticeship programs. Workshop sponsor Energetech representative, Dale Schumaker, joined the lively discussion and weighed in with both concerns and solutions.

Infrastructure Developers' Forum Panel: "Edge Infrastructure, Transitions from 3G-4G; 4G-5G, What does 5G look like?"

Dr. Thakker of MMTC was also invited to speak at the Infrastructure Developers' Forum (IDF), which met as part of the special programs of Connect(X). Dr. Thakker spoke on a panel examining current state of 5G and its impact on future of cellular infrastructure. Dr. Thakker also addressed the need for Registered Apprenticeship as an avenue for training a skilled workforce for future wireless networks. He was also acknowledged at the Innovation and Technology Council's (ITC) annual meeting for his contribution for the "Preparing Skilled Workforce for Future Wireless Networks" white paper. The paper was published by WIA in April and can be found [here](#).



More information about the Connectivity Expo, including information on other panels and presentations such as remarks from FCC Chairman Ajit Pai and Commissioner Michael O’Rielly, is available on MMTC’s Wakelet Blog, [here](#).

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About the Consortium Members:

The Wireless Infrastructure Apprenticeship Access Initiative Consortium (WIAAI) is bridging the employment gap by exposing underrepresented populations to vocations that support and strengthen America’s wireless infrastructure, through Registered Apprenticeship. The WIAAI Consortium is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. www.nulapprenticeships.org

WIAAI Lead—The National Urban League (NUL) is a historic civil rights organization dedicated to economic empowerment in order to elevate the standard of living in historically underserved communities. NUL serves as the WIAAI lead partner and will cultivate apprenticeship opportunities in the areas of seven of its Regional Affiliates. www.nul.org

WIAAI Subcontractor—The Multicultural Media, Telecom and Internet Council (MMTC) is a nonprofit organization with a 30-year track record of increasing diversity in media and telecommunications access, ownership, and employment. MMTC develops and implements the curriculum, technical assistance, and training and marketing material for DOL-approved occupations under the WIAAI Consortium, and conducts program evaluation. <http://mmtconline.org>

WIAAI Subcontractor—The Wireless Infrastructure Association (WIA) is the principal trade association representing over 230 companies that build, own, upgrade, and maintain the U.S. wireless communications network. WIA’s role in the Consortium is to provide access to Registered Apprenticeships through identified and committed employers. <http://wia.org>

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