



Greater Peoria Essential  
Abilities and Knowledge

## Supporting Career Readiness in the Greater Peoria Region



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The Greater Peoria Essential Abilities and Knowledge (GPEAK) system is a partnership between Illinois Central College, Peoria's CEO Council and Regional Workforce Development Alliance, the Greater Peoria Economic Development Council, the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), JFF, and Education Systems Center at Northern Illinois University.

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The process to develop performance indicators aligned with the State's Essential Employability Competencies, and their associated progression levels, begins with an overview of existing resources in order to effectively leverage existing national data, state-level case studies, local labor market information, employer evaluation samples, and work-based learning assessments among other resources and reports.

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With the performance indicators and curricular resources developed, pilot sites from throughout the greater Peoria region were engaged to participate in a pilot program.

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GPEAK Mentors and Participants provided input on the value of GPEAK, Participant experience, and the resources/supports provided through a virtual discussion and survey in early January 2021.

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Feedback from Fall pilot sites is being incorporated as the Illinois workNet system continues to be built out and prepared to launch in Summer 2021.

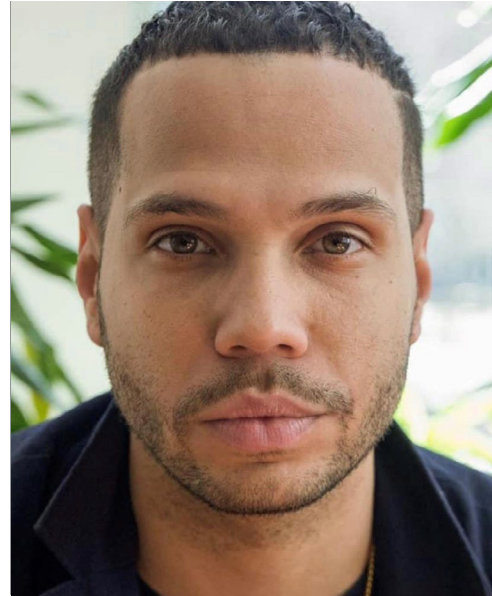
## 16 FROM THE PARTICIPANTS

Read examples of how Participants described and reflected upon their performance through GPEAK assessments.



“GPEAK is a unique collaboration between local businesses, community-based organizations, and educational partners. After reviewing the needs of employers, we were able to create an essential skills program, including curriculum and behavioral measures, that is available for free to local organizations. Illinois Central College is pleased to take the leadership role for GPEAK. GPEAK’s regional certification system will develop workers with ten essential skills needed to obtain and retain employment. Strong essential skills can also support the advancement of workers to higher-wage positions. We look forward to the expanding impact of GPEAK in developing an essential skills-certified workforce in Central Illinois.”

– Sheila Quirk-Bailey, DM  
President, Illinois Central College



“As we work to build a more equitable Peoria region, and an economy that works for all of us it is vital that we find innovative approaches to address the needs of both our workforce and our employers. GPEAK is a remarkable innovation in building our workforce development ecosystem, as it addresses the challenge of building a workforce that possesses the essential skills necessary to not only obtain a job, but to excel in that position and advance their career. GPEAK is a key component of our overall strategy to address the workforce gaps in our region, increase workforce equity and build a skilled, credentialed workforce for jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage. I could not be more excited about GPEAK and what it means for the future of our region.”

– Joshua Gunn  
President & CEO, Peoria Area Chamber  
of Commerce and CEO Council

# Overview of GPEAK

## Greater Peoria Essential Abilities and Knowledge

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The Greater Peoria Essential Abilities and Knowledge (GPEAK) system is a partnership between Illinois Central College, Peoria's CEO Council and Regional Workforce Development Alliance, the Greater Peoria Economic Development Council, the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), JFF, and Education Systems Center at Northern Illinois University. In order to provide robust work-based learning opportunities that prepare individuals for fulfilling careers and meaningful employment, these partners engaged in a six-month process to determine performance indicators and associated levels for each of the State's Essential Employability Competencies. The State's Essential Employability Competency statements serve as quality guidelines for an individual's readiness to enter an industry or to pursue further education. Performance indicators unpack and make explicit the actions and behaviors within each Essential Employability Competency statement. These performance indicators provide a common regional approach to validate the competencies and skills individuals acquire through each work-based learning experience, as well as consistent methods for measuring and communicating what they learned to demonstrate work readiness.

► [Learn more about GPEAK and the performance indicators](#)

The GPEAK certification system includes three main components:

**1. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

GPEAK Participants are assigned a mentor who will review and assess the Essential Employability Competencies and the regionally developed Performance Indicators.

**2. CURRICULAR RESOURCES**

GPEAK Mentors and Participants receive access to case studies, journal activities, reflection prompts, workshop ideas and mentor moments to help individuals reflect on and develop their Essential Employability Competencies.



### GPEAK MEASURES

an individual's demonstration of Essential Employability Competencies needed for meaningful employment, while encouraging Participants to reflect on their growth and development.



### GPEAK VALIDATES

and communicates this information in a manner recognized by employers and education and training institutions across the greater Peoria region.



### GPEAK SERVES

the greater Peoria region with a free and open platform for students, education systems, community based organizations and employers in the greater Peoria region.

### 3. CERTIFICATION SYSTEM

GPEAK Participants submit pre- and post-assessments and upload evidence to support their attainment ratings of the Essential Employability Competencies. Validators from the Regional Workforce Alliance review the information and award competency badges/GPEAK certification.

The GPEAK system has evolved into a free and open online platform hosted by Illinois Central College that provides competency badges that build towards an overall GPEAK certification. Participation in GPEAK is available to students, education systems, community-based organizations and employers in the greater Peoria region. The performance indicators developed by regional stakeholders guided the design and development of the GPEAK assessments and curricular resources to support individuals in attaining established benchmarks and are a major component of the GPEAK certification and badging system.

GPEAK was piloted in Fall 2020 and is in progress to be released more widely in Summer 2021. Fall pilot sites utilization of GPEAK and details on the plan for the soft launch are outlined in this report.

### GPEAK Lead Partners



Together with the Lead Partners, GPEAK is supported by more than [85 community members](#) from local businesses, high schools, postsecondary institutions and community-based organizations.

# The GPEAK Process

## Developing Performance Indicators and Associated Progression Levels

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August–October 2019

The process to develop performance indicators, and their associated progression levels, began with an overview of existing resources in order to effectively leverage existing national data, state-level case studies, local labor market information, employer evaluation samples, and work-based learning assessments among other resources and reports. Evaluation of existing resources was followed by local stakeholder verification in order to ensure regional applicability.

► [Read the research memo](#)

November 2019–April 2020

The first step in the process was to bring more than 85 community members from diverse employers, educational institutions, and community-based organizations together to establish a common language and shared understanding. Over a six-month period, Education Systems Center, JFF and Illinois Central College planned and facilitated a series of meetings to discuss the Essential Employability Competencies, create detailed descriptions and develop progression levels to capture when those competencies had been achieved.

► [Read the Working Group Breakout Session Facilitator’s Guide](#)

► [Read the Thought Process worksheet](#)

► [Read the Self-Regulation worksheet](#)

► [Read the Working with Others worksheet](#)



Along with these performance indicators, regional stakeholder groups defined a 3-point [progression scale](#) to rate Participants' skill levels on each of the performance indicators.



#### March–June 2020

An additional component of the GPEAK system was to build a curriculum to support development of the Essential Employability Competencies that is accessible and applicable for high school and community college students as well as early and mid-career employees. Illinois Central College collaborated with the [NIU Center for P-20 Engagement](#) to design curricular resources aligned with the regionally developed key performance indicators and create materials that could be used by individuals on their own, in the high school or community college classroom, and by employers to train interns or employees.

#### April 2020–April 2021

The final component of the GPEAK system is the certification system to capture individual's attainment of the Essential Employability Competencies. Based on feedback from regional stakeholders, the GPEAK system is building out a platform through Illinois workNet, which is set to be released in Summer 2021.

# The Fall 2020 Pilot

## Engaging Pilot Sites from Across the Greater Peoria Region

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With the performance indicators and curricular resources developed, pilot sites from throughout the greater Peoria region were engaged to participate in a pilot program. As pilot sites confirmed their interest, Illinois Central College and Education Systems Center at NIU provided one-on-one orientations with pilot sites. To participate as a pilot, sites were expected to:

- Commit to offering an experience that both develops and provides an opportunity for Participants to demonstrate the Essential Employability Competencies
- Designate a Mentor for each Participant
- Complete assessments through the GPEAK Certification System (for the pilot, sites used the Qualtrics platform)
- Utilize some of the GPEAK curricular resources to support Participant attainment and growth
- Provide feedback and suggestions on curricular resources and buildout of Illinois workNet GPEAK Certification System (ease-of-use, value, etc.)





# Fall 2020 Pilot Sites

## Tri-County Urban League



- The Employment Department of Tri-County Urban League has programs that assist disadvantaged people to secure employment. Job readiness workshops, job search, placement and retention are services offered.
- Tri-County Urban League utilized GPEAK for their 4-week job readiness training cohorts.

## Illinois Central College – Industrial Maintenance Apprentices



- The ICC Industrial Maintenance Pre-Apprenticeship program uses lecture and hands-on laboratory experience to prepare the graduate for employment in industry/business as an electromechanical maintenance technician.
- The readiness class utilized GPEAK to assess students participating in pre-apprenticeships.

## Illinois Central College – Career Foundations Course

- GED preparation program features career pathways that include manufacturing and healthcare fields that are in demand in the greater Peoria region. Students learn about the skills needed, the education and training available and prepare to transition into ICC programs.
- ICC's Career Foundation course teachers utilized GPEAK for students to reflect on their current skill levels with individual Essential Employability Competencies to then lead students through class activities based on the GPEAK curricular resources to further develop and understand the Essential Employability Competencies.

## Illinois Central College – Professional Development for Employees Course

- Course that prepares students for initial entry into a career through the study of professional dress, etiquette, customer service, professional behavior and integrity, workplace adjustments, team membership, meeting professional responsibilities, letters of application and resumes, job interviews, and employment tests.
- GPEAK assessments were utilized in this course to support student self-reflection and awareness of their current performance levels within the 10 Essential Employability Competencies. GPEAK curricular resources were also utilized in this course to provide independent and group work to build understanding and spark conversations around the Essential Employability Competencies.

## PeoriaCorps



- PeoriaCorps is an Americorps workforce development program that provides Participants an opportunity to earn industry recognized credentials in Green Infrastructure while completing a work experience with the City of Peoria's Public Works Department. Members participate in a rigorous professional development program which involves completing self and behavioral assessments, organizing community service projects, participating in professional development workshops, and meeting with community leaders in various career pathways.
- PeoriaCorps utilized GPEAK to evaluate the job readiness competencies of members.

# Badges & Certification

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Participants at approved GPEAK sites are eligible to receive competency badges that build towards GPEAK certification:

- **GPEAK Competency Badges**  
A Participant can earn up to 10 GPEAK Competency Badges by attaining Demonstrating or Leading scores on at least 4 out of 5 of the performance indicators within each of the 10 Essential Employability Competencies.
- **GPEAK Certification**  
An individual can earn GPEAK Certification by receiving GPEAK Competency Badges on all 10 Essential Employability Competencies.

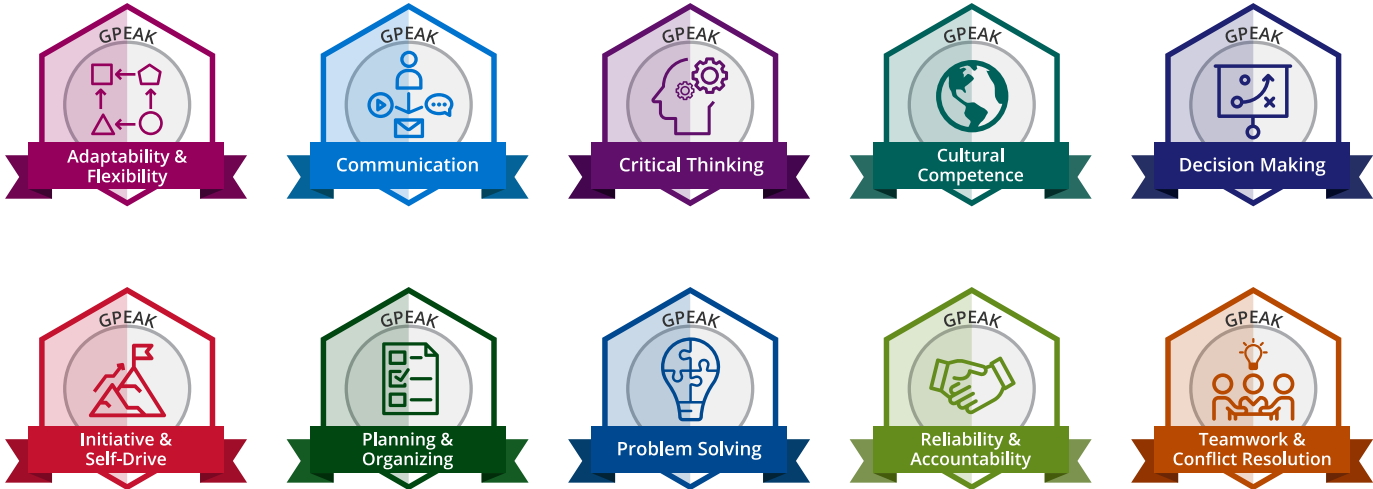
GPEAK Validators representing the Regional Workforce Alliance will review the Participant's self-assessments, uploaded evidence, and the Mentor's assessment to verify the attainment of an Essential Employability Competency to receive a GPEAK Competency Badge.

## Badges Earned by Fall 2020 Pilot Sites

Fall pilot sites engaged 112 Participants in total. While not all pilot sites offered opportunities for Participants to earn competency badges, they utilized the assessments and curricular resources to support Participant engagement in and awareness of their current skill level related to the Essential Employability competencies.

- **Tri-County Urban League**  
16 total badges earned by eight Participants in: Teamwork & Conflict Resolution, Communication, Planning & Organizing
- **ICC – Career Foundations Course**  
All 12 Participants received a badge in Teamwork & Conflict Resolution
- **ICC – Industrial Maintenance Apprentices**  
10 total badges earned by four Participants in: Problem Solving, Critical Thinking, and Communication

# Essential Employability Competency Badges



# Sample Certificate

Greater Peoria Essential Abilities and Knowledge

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Site

and

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Mentor

certify that

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Participant

has successfully earned the

GPEAK Certification

as of

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

Regional Workforce Alliance

Co-Chairs: Dr. Sheila Quirk-Bailey, President, Illinois Central College  
 & Joshua Gunn, President and CEO, Peoria Area Chamber of Commerce and CEO Council

# Feedback from Pilots

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GPEAK Mentors and Participants provided input on the value of GPEAK, Participant experience, and the resources/supports provided through a virtual discussion and survey in early January 2021. Mentors consistently expressed that the GPEAK assessments provided an opportunity to gather more information on Participants which allowed them to better direct their engagement and resources shared with Participants to support their development of the Essential Employability Competencies. As Participants submitted the GPEAK pre-assessments, Mentors were able to have informed conversations with Participants about how they rated themselves, how they would rate the Participant, and what they needed to build their skills. Both Mentors and Participants felt that the assessments and curricular resources were easy to access and complete. Participants did express that the language of the progression scales was difficult for them and not what they were used to seeing on assessments. Based on this feedback, the GPEAK Management Team has established shorter, more concise progression scale definitions to be included on GPEAK assessments Illinois workNet platform.

“Part of our GED program is to increase student’s vocabulary. The language in GPEAK and the need to provide detailed comments has supported our work with students to develop their reading and writing skills.” — Mentor

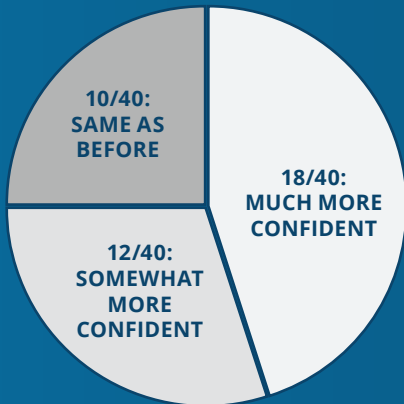
“The GPEAK pre-assessment helped Participants to see maybe you’re not there yet and need to improve and we’re going to help you do that.” — Mentor

“GPEAK was a helpful tool that we were able to add to our workshops and allowed us to gather more information on our clients.” — Mentor

# Survey Findings From Fall 2020

## GPEAK Pilot Participants

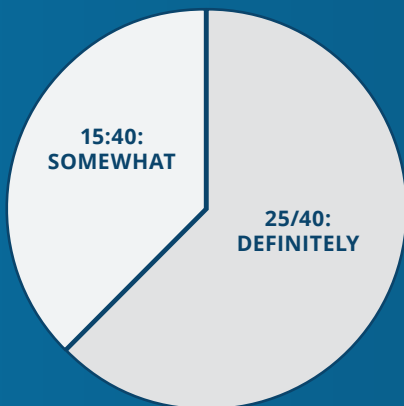
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How confident do you feel about your ability to perform the Essential Employability Competencies as a result of this experience?

### TAKEAWAY

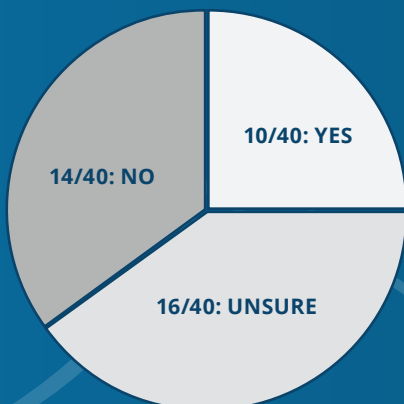
The GPEAK System created a space for Participants to reflect intentionally on their performance and access resources and supports.



Were the Essential Employability Competency statements and performance indicators that you were assessed on clear to you?

### TAKEAWAY

While some Mentors expressed that they appreciated the advanced language of the performance indicators to support Participants reading and writing skills, there is a need to review and ensure that the language is accessible to all Participants.



Are you interested in participating in additional experiences that are part of the GPEAK program to earn competency badges/GPEAK certification?

### TAKEAWAY

While more than half of the Participants expressed some interest in pursuing further GPEAK experiences, there is continued work to be done to communicate the value and determine currency for Participants receiving GPEAK competency badges and certification.

GPEAK

# Next Steps

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Feedback from Fall pilot sites is being incorporated as the Illinois workNet system continues to be built out and prepared to launch in Summer 2021. The GPEAK Management Team is recruiting new pilot sites and preparing for a soft launch this summer. Organizations starting cohorts before the soft launch will continue to utilize the Qualtrics Assessment tools and Organizations starting cohorts in the summer will use the new GPEAK certification system through the Illinois workNet platform. As the GPEAK system becomes more regionally recognized throughout the greater Peoria region, there will be an increased focus on identifying and developing currency for Participants with GPEAK competency badges/certification.



## Summer 2021 GPEAK Sites

There are 212 Participants connected to a GPEAK experience through the Summer 2021 pilot sites. Since the pilot in Fall 2019, GPEAK has engaged over 324 individuals to reflect on their skill development and demonstrate attainment of the Essential Employability competencies.

- **Eureka College**  
Using GPEAK to assess and support student workers in departments across the college campus
- **ICC CompTIA**  
Using GPEAK to review all 10 competencies in a 16-week program. Instructors will dedicate a block of time each week to review GPEAK and prepare students for employment after receiving CompTIA certification
- **ICC CAP-IT Pre-apprenticeship**
- **ICC Career Foundations Course**  
Returning site
- **ICC Innovation Bridge and Transition Program**
- **ICC Readiness Course**
- **PeoriaCorps**  
Returning site
- **Tri-County Urban League**  
Returning site

**For more information or to express interest as a pilot site visit [icc.edu/gpeak](http://icc.edu/gpeak) or contact [gpeak@icc.edu](mailto:gpeak@icc.edu)**

# What Do Participants Have to Say About Themselves?

As part of the GPEAK system, Participants complete self-assessments that their Mentors review to validate their level of achievement in each performance indicator. For any rating of Demonstrating or Leading, Participants are required to leave comments and provide evidence to support their ratings. Here are some examples of how Participants described and reflected upon their performance through GPEAK assessments:

“Most days, I am handed things or made to be in charge of figuring things out. It can be anything from a broken part of a machine or helping a coworker with a Workman’s Compensation case. If I am not able to fix something, I usually am able to connect with another individual who can complete the task.”

**Teamwork & Conflict Resolution Performance Indicator:**  
Is Committed to Solving Problems/  
Findings Resolutions

**Adaptability & Flexibility Performance Indicator:**  
Embraces New Ideas and Approaches  
When Opportunity Arises

“I demonstrate this regularly, but I wouldn’t say that I am quite leading in this aspect yet because there are occasions in which I don’t agree with change or certain new ideas. In a work setting, I still respectfully listen to ideas from my employees, and I listen to my leaders and jump in on new training processes when they are implemented. I just need to learn how to have a more open mind with some ideas, and approach new ideas with less caution.”



"I am a strong listener and I am able to ask the right questions to help myself and those around me understand better."

### **Communication**

#### **Performance Indicator:**

Builds Understanding Through Active Listening, Asking Questions, Focusing on Context, and Acknowledging Others' Points of View

### **Problem Solving Performance Indicator:**

Selects and Implements the Best Solution to the Problem Based on Evaluation of Advantages and Disadvantages

"Although I can evaluate advantages and disadvantages in a solution I still have an occasionally hard time deciding the best solution. I have cautious moments and sometimes over think the solutions."

"I keep my team members in the loop about solutions to problems, ideas for success in our department and within the organization, and I have even discussed some things I learned from my class with my store manager. He also has a degree in business and I like to share my learning experiences through college with him."

### **Critical Thinking**

#### **Performance Indicator:**

Communicates Conclusions and New Ideas to Appropriate Individuals and Team Members

### **Planning & Organizing Performance Indicator:**

Reflects Upon Goals and Evaluates Processes and People Involved to Improve in the Future

"I always look over my goals I have wrote down and reflect on how far I am from reaching them and what I have done so far and what I need to do going forward to reach them."

## Appendix I: Committee Member Organizations

GPEAK committee members included individuals from these local organizations:

- American Red Cross
- Anderson Windows
- Associated Bank
- Bradley University
- Brio Employee Development
- Career Link
- CASA of the Tenth Judicial Circuit
- Caterpillar Inc.
- CEFCU
- Chase Bank
- CityLink
- CliftonLarsonAllen LLP
- Community Workshop and Training Center
- Dunlap High School
- East Peoria High Schools
- Elmwood High School
- EP!C
- Eureka College
- Excalibur Seasoning Company
- Express Employment Professionals
- Farnsworth Group
- Goodwill Industries
- Greater Peoria Economic Development Council
- Greater Peoria Family YMCA
- Heart Technologies
- Illini Bluffs High Schools
- Illinois Central College
- Illinois Student Assistance Commission
- Jim Maloof/REALTOR
- Junior Achievement of Central Illinois
- Komatsu America Corp.
- Lincoln College
- Manpower
- Metamora Township High School/  
Woodford EFE
- METEC
- Methodist College of Nursing
- Morton Economic Development Council
- Morton Industries
- Neighborhood House
- OSF Healthcare
- P.E.R.F.E.C.T. Peoria
- Pekin Community High School
- Peoria Chamber of Commerce
- Peoria County/Engineering Dept.
- Peoria Citizens Committee for Economic Opportunity
- Peoria Friendship House
- Peoria Public Schools
- Peoria Regional Office of Education
- PeoriaCorps
- Phoenix Community Development Services
- PNC Bank
- Prairie State Legal Services
- RSM US LLP
- Southside Mission
- Special Education Association of Peoria County
- Tazewell County Regional Office of Education #53
- Tazewell County Resource Center (TCRC)
- The Kim Group
- Tri County Urban League
- Unity Point Health
- Washington Community High School
- Wells Fargo
- West Central Illinois Building & Construction Trades Council