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## Chicago area wins preferred status for federal investment

Metals workforce, community colleges helped region compete for share of \$1.3 billion in manufacturing funds, official says

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By Ellen Jean Hirst, Tribune reporter

May 29, 2014

Federal officials have designated the Chicago area as one of 12 preferred regions nationwide that can apply for a slice of \$1.3 billion in funding to invest in manufacturing.

Chicago's leadership in metal fabrication — the area has 3,700 firms with a combined \$30 billion in annual revenue — gave it an edge in the competition, said Herman Brewer, chief of Cook County's economic development bureau. Seventy communities applied.

"We're now poised to take that next big step," Brewer said. "You hear people talk about retraining. Well, manufacturing is changing; there are a lot of new technologies. ... A lot of that is going to occur here in this region if we're prepared. This allows us to get people prepared in a way that addresses the future problems of manufacturing."

The Chicago Metro Metal Consortium Manufacturing Community — as it was designated by the Department of Commerce on Wednesday — will build off the area's strengths in transportation and an existing metals workforce of 100,000. A network of community colleges that develops skilled manufacturing workers was a factor in the area being chosen. So were the area's two national labs, Argonne National Laboratory in Lemont and Fermilab in Batavia, Brewer said.

If approved, some of the money will likely go toward more workforce training and redevelopment of abandoned or contaminated properties, he said. Other uses for the money could be advanced research or supply-chain support.

Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker said in a release that the selected communities, which also include nearby Milwaukee and southeastern Michigan, were picked based on their existing economic development plans, potential effect in their communities and the quality of their partnerships with public and private sectors. While any community can apply for the money, communities with preferred status will receive a liaison to help them secure federal funds. A preferred designation lasts for two years.

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UI Labs, which this year won \$70 million in Defense Department funding for a digital manufacturing institute on Goose Island in Chicago, will be a close partner as the region invests more in metals manufacturing, Brewer said.

"I don't think it's going to be prescriptive at this point," Brewer said. "They'll be sharing a lot of technologies and innovation. In summary, they're going to be very complementary of each other, particularly as it impacts metal fabrication."

Brewer said the bid was a collaborative effort among the leaders of Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry and Will counties.

[ehirst@tribune.com](mailto:ehirst@tribune.com)

Twitter @ellenjeanhirst

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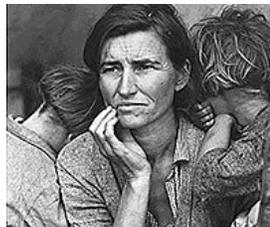
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