When customers visit our Greater Boston, Mass., headquarters, they’re often surprised to see the extent of our competence in the field of optics, a field largely unknown to the general public. Other ways to support this effort include advising local colleges on optics curricula, encouraging experienced professionals to serve as adjunct professors, participating in apprenticeship programs, or offering shadow days or tours of our facilities to students interested in optics.

Partnering with academia is an essential part of AmeriCOM’s mission as fellow panelist Dr. Amanda Meier of Front Range Community College (Colorado) confirms, “Our Optics Technology program must stay connected with industry partners and AmeriCOM to provide relevant skills training for optics technicians on state-of-the-art equipment, in addition to helping market our program and career options to fill the optics technician pipeline.” As the Program Director and Faculty in Front Range’s Optics Technology Program, Meier has seen firsthand how acute the need for technicians is. Since joining the program in 2020, she knows of only one student who completed the program not finding a job — and that was primarily due to citizenship requirements by the employers in the local area.

All the way across the United States from Front Range Community College, employers in New York are seeing the same demand for technicians. Director of Technology Mike Hyman says Optimax is looking to their local community colleges, trade schools, and traditional recruitment efforts but has also benefitted from apprenticeship programs offered by AmeriCOM and others. He puts the number of technicians hired over the past three years over 200, making up a large part of their growing workforce. Hyman will be a participant on today’s panel and will present on their strategic partnership with AmeriCOM, including as a technical collaborator with AmeriCOM’s technology and development group. “This helps us communicate what skill sets we think are needed in the future,” says Hyman. “These collaborations address our needs now and ensure there is alignment for our needs in the future.”

SPIE is also working to help address this growing need with scholarships for students pursuing technician certificates or degrees. In addition, they are also hosting educational materials in partnership with OP-TEC and others, promoting the field and jobs through web advertisements, and creating marketing collateral for institutions or companies to use in their recruitment efforts.

With 1300 exhibiting companies at Photonics West all working to develop the next great product, our growing industry will need to come together and collaborate to find solutions to this need, and AmeriCOM hopes to be a catalyst to this collaboration. DeNatale notes, “For every optics engineer focused on innovation, we need ten optics technicians to bring that innovation to market.”

And Hyman sees the benefit of having someone help form the collaborations, “other optics manufacturing companies should consider working with AmeriCOM to help leverage resources within their geographic regions. In areas where resources are not available, AmeriCOM can help those companies with guidance and strategic partnerships to help bridge gaps.”

Business Development Manager at Thorlabs, Navid Entezarian, agrees, “AmeriCOM is the catalyst that can bring public and private sectors together to achieve something greater than the sum of their parts. They’ve formulated the many steps required to set up a new optics training lab in their Playbook, which I recommend reading for anyone contemplating getting involved.”

Like many of the scientists and engineers in attendance this week, AmeriCOM is trying to solve a complex problem and is looking for passionate collaborators and industry partners at Photonics West. They are tackling a big problem, but the optics and photonics industry has repeatedly proven capable of meeting challenging targets and AmeriCOM and its partners are not backing down.

**ATTEND TO LEARN MORE**

**AmeriCOM Panel: Where Have All the Technicians Gone? How Optics Ecosystems Are Bringing Them Back**

February 1, 2023
2:45 PM – 3:45 PM
Moscone Center, Expo Stage, Hall DE (Exhibit Level)