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5 European companies to visit Philadelphia after trade mission

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Representatives from five European companies plan to scout Philadelphia for possible expansion while local officials are considering incorporating Germany's workforce development model following a six-day trade and investment mission to Europe led by the city's Commerce Department.

A delegation led by Philadelphia Commerce Director [Harold Epps](#) returned Friday from the nearly week-long European trip that included stops in Germany, France and Portugal.

Representatives from [Peirce College](#) were among those seeking to learn more about the workforce development model built around apprenticeship programs sponsored by the government. Members of the delegation discussed the possibility of an exchange program where students and businesses would come to Philadelphia to engage with industry leaders and young people, sharing their apprenticeship experiences and how this pipeline provides a return on investment.

The delegation also visited a vocational training academy and plans to connect with its U.S. affiliates to explore how apprenticeships can be used in Philadelphia. Preliminary discussions are underway with German business leaders to bring a pilot apprenticeship program to Philadelphia.

“Something like that could attack poverty and would also be a fantastic business attraction,” said [Lauren Swartz](#), director of international business

investment for the Commerce Department. “When we told [some German manufacturers] about bringing the program to Philadelphia, their eyes lit up. They said if we did that, they would consider relocating their U.S. operations to Philadelphia”

Swartz said because it would not include financial sponsorship from the federal government like in Germany, making such an apprenticeship program work in Philadelphia would take commitment from schools like Peirce, employers and willing participants.

The delegation spent the bulk of its time in Germany but two key members also splintered off for quick visits to France and Portugal.

Epps visited Portugal to meet with officials and business leaders from the city of Sintra, a visit that emanated from Philadelphia being classified last year as a World Heritage City. Sintra also holds that rare distinction and its mayor visited Philadelphia last year.

So Epps was returning the favor, taking part in a meeting aimed at evaluating the business and investment potential for Sintra in Philadelphia. As a result, Swartz said a Portuguese company software company looking to establish a U.S. headquarters will visit Philadelphia next week with the potential of creating 20 new jobs here.

Commerce Chief of Staff Sylvie Gallier Howard traveled to Lyon, France, to further strengthen business partnerships and student exchange programs. French dignitaries will visit Philadelphia next month and two French companies — one a technology firm and the other in the life sciences arena — have agreed to visit next year on a trade mission.

The first stop on the trip was a briefing at Frankfurt’s City Hall with Mayor Peter Feldmann, where the delegation worked to strengthen its sister city relationship. Swartz said both Philadelphia and Frankfurt also hold sister city relationships with Tel Aviv, Israel, and the two discussed holding three-way meetings to develop broader business relationships.

Members of the delegation made on-site visits to two manufacturers who are considering moving to Philadelphia or expanding their existing operations in the region. They also held one-on-one appointments in Frankfurt, Dusseldorf and Berlin with eight other companies to discuss how the the city can help them enter the Philadelphia market.

Swartz said at least two German companies have agreed to make reciprocal visits to Philadelphia, though no dates have been confirmed. She said many of

those companies noted that the visit showed Philadelphia's commitment to recruiting foreign businesses.

"It's what we usually hear," Swartz said. "They know about New York but think it's too expensive. They know where Washington is. But they are not as familiar with Philadelphia. So we are exposing them to it and that's good. So many of them said 'Thank you for coming.' It makes a real difference just being there."

In addition to Commerce Department and Peirce College officials, participants included Councilman Al Taubenger and representatives from Select Greater Philadelphia, Citizen Diplomacy International, Global Philadelphia Association, the German-American Chamber of Commerce of Philadelphia, the French-American Chamber of Commerce of Philadelphia and Temple University.