Pennsylvania's
STATE SYSTEM
of Higher Education

Employer Engagement ACTION PLAN

#Prepared4PA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education is leading the initiative #Prepared4PA to foster, create and build upon partnerships in our workforce ecosystem. In November 2019, the State System hosted *Pennsylvania Prepares* to bring together senior business leaders, HR professionals, and subject matter experts from industries, government, education agencies, and national funders. This convening uncovered insights into new opportunities that could benefit job seekers and students throughout the state of Pennsylvania through greater collaboration between the State System and employers. The State System actively engaged voices of industry to gain a greater understanding of the skills and competency gaps from the demand side of the statewide labor market. By listening to employers and industry leaders, the State System identified new ways to prepare for the future of work through collaboration between employers and higher education institutions to address critical workforce needs.

In 2020, #PreparedforPA formed a statewide steering committee to oversee the initiative as well as regional working groups to serve as workforce collaboratives in the north, south, east and west regions of the Commonwealth. These working groups are inclusive of universities, community colleges, chambers of commerce, workforce organizations, industry associations and other workforce stakeholder representatives. In September 2020, #Prepared4PA convened for regional assemblies in which higher education, workforce and employers gathered virtually over five days. The statewide kickoff session covered the labor market impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and diversity, equity and inclusion in our workforce in two insightful panel discussions. For each region's assembly, participants discussed the foundational skills, occupational technical skills and credential requirements in each of the six target industries. Best practice panel discussions highlighted the strong partnerships and workforce programs currently in place today. Overall, the regional assemblies highlighted the importance of including a diverse set of insights for collaboration into future efforts.

#Prepared4PA continued engagement with employers and workforce in late 2020 to develop six industry competency maps designed to articulate the industries' knowledge, skills, abilities and credentials for in-demand occupations. Employers provided input and feedback on the competency maps, which were finalized and shared with all stakeholders in February 2021.

In 2021-2022, #Prepared4PA is supporting four workforce innovation pilot programs to address pressing workforce training and education needs through strong partnerships among employers, higher education, and workforce systems.

All of the above activities have helped inform and inspire the following Employer Engagement Action Plan, which is designed to provide the State System and its workforce partners with ideas, tools and action items to continue supporting the state's workforce ecosystem.

HOW TO USE THIS ACTION PLAN

This Employer Engagement Action Plan serves as a guide and resource to support employer engagement activities involving Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education and its network that is inclusive of universities, community colleges, technical colleges, and other education and training providers.

The tools included in this guide are focused on providing postsecondary education leaders as well as workforce development professionals with resources to aid in planning and executing successful employer engagement activities. These tools come from a variety of sources - some are newly created, some have been adapted to fit the purposes of this guide and many reference other excellent sources on these topics.

Those using this guide can implement its strategies and action items to build deeper relationships with other organizations including chambers of commerce, workforce boards, and economic development organizations that can help the State System connect with industry and business for collective success in aligning workforce needs with higher education offerings and programming.

With support from the PASSHE Foundation, Lumina Foundation and Strada Education Network, this report was prepared by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) as part of the #Prepared4PA initiative. Recognizing that adult learners are the backbone of the U.S. economy, CAEL helps forge a clear, viable connection between education and career success, providing solutions that promote sustainable and equitable economic growth. CAEL opens doors to opportunity in collaboration with workforce and economic developers; postsecondary educators; employers and industry groups; and foundations and other mission-aligned organizations. By engaging with these stakeholders, we foster a culture of innovative, lifelong learning that helps individuals and their communities thrive. Established in 1974, CAEL, a Strada Education Network affiliate, is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) membership organization.

SECTION 1: DEFINING SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

STRATEGY:

ARTICULATE WHY EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IS IMPORTANT

Smart, sustainable employer engagement strategies build capacity within postsecondary institutions and workforce organizations and across communities to empower and engage employers as partners and leaders in systems change—including place-based, statewide, and national policy change. These strategies focus both on current employment needs and future industry opportunities as well as job quality, retention, pay equity, and advancement policies and practices. These strategies also focus on helping employers, education, and workforce system providers better align resources around career pathways[1].

Active engagement of industry leaders and members of the business community can differ from a purely advisory approach. Approaching employers as "high-impact," strategic partner means looking beyond the immediate needs of a program, institution, or initiative and intentionally seeking ways to make industries and economies more competitive. Effective engagement requires building ongoing opportunities for problem solving and program development.

Stakeholders—including employers and educators—need effective strategies for integrating educational instruction and workforce development to benefit employers, incumbent workers, and the future workforce. By collaborating, employers and institutions can help industries meet their workforce needs and make higher education more job-driven. These partnerships can:

- Increase foundational skills development within the workplace
- Foster new skills development and internal job promotion
- Provide stepping stones for low-wage, entry-level workers to more productive employment
- Link education/training and workforce development to labor market trends and needs[2]

[1] Good Jobs and Career Pathways. Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (2020) https://skilledwork.org/what-we-do/career-pathways-sector-strategies-employer-engagement/

[2] Tools for Building Employer-Educator Partnerships. Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS) (2020). https://lincs.ed.gov/employers/about.htm

ACTION:

IDENTIFY BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYER PARTNERS

Identifying how a partnership with education providers can benefit employers is critically important up front. Keeping in mind what the business community can gain from collaboration helps to establish a more sustainable partnership and earn initial employer buy-in.

MEASURING AND ANALYZING RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

Most employers discuss overarching reasons for why they choose to dedicate resources toward employer-training partnerships; some have built into their systems clear metrics for measuring such returns on investment, or ROI.

The following list includes ideas for ROI metrics that would ideally be identified and measured before, throughout, and after a workforce collaborative partnership formation. Stakeholders that are new to forming partnerships may find this list particularly helpful.

ROI metrics should be identified and measured throughout these engagements for evaluative purposes.

Sample ROI Metrics:

- Costs associated with training incumbent workers internally
- Costs of lost productivity due to understaffing
- Costs of recruiting for understaffed positions
- Costs associated with turnover
- Reasons for employee turnover

Rather than thinking about how a partnership is paying off after it is underway, it is in the best interests of the collaborative to identify the main goals and objectives of the partnership up front to establish metrics at the baseline and at critical touch points throughout the initiative.

Additional benefits to employers may include:

- Addressing hiring needs
- Improved retention with training and education benefits
- Stronger community relations
- Brand or company recognition in the community

Despite the many benefits of workforce collaboratives, employers may not have worked together in this way and may have a number of questions or concerns. Three of the most common concerns are the following:

- **Are We Better off Working Together?** It is likely that many employers will worry that other employers, in some cases their direct competitors, will benefit more than they will by working together. Some may think larger employers will benefit more and that larger employers' needs will more likely be catered to because of their size.
- **Will We Be Sharing Proprietary Information?** Many employers will worry that they will have to share proprietary information about their businesses and their critical jobs. They will want to know who they will share this information with and whether they can trust partners to maintain and protect their confidential information.
- **Are There Business Collaboration Risks?** Some employers will want to know whether they can work together under a formal collaboration without any legal risks.

In order to address some of these common concerns, offering to speak with employers independently to talk through the issues in detail can help to alleviate concerns and answer key questions about joining and engaging in a workforce collaborative. Offering a non-disclosure agreement may also be helpful. For some employers who may be concerned about confidentiality,ensure their engagement and sharing of information is protected by creating a Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) or some other formal agreement in order to build trust for the relationship going forward.

ACTION:
IDENTIFY BENEFITS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERS

Developing the "why" statement for higher education engagement with the local business community is an important step in initiating the engagement process as well as for building buy-in at the institutions. A strategic approach to employer engagement can benefit higher education institutions in multiple ways, including:

- improving understanding of industry needs for curricular refinement
- securing financial and resource support for research and curriculum development
- providing enhanced student experiences through placements and immersive projects (internships, etc.)
- broadening networks within the business community; recruiting business leaders as adjunct professors and student mentors
- increasing relevance for adult learners with more industry-driven programs
- opening opportunities to enroll more adult learners
- streamlining pathways into key industries to accelerate graduate employment outcomes
- recognizing the experiential learning that occurs within industry and pairing it with complementary, microcredential and traditional curricula
- securing an ongoing stream of learners through preferential pathways into the university for industry partners

For each institution, it is about being an integral part of the ecosystem in which businesses operate, and where people live, learn and thrive. To harness the full potential requires an intentional engagement strategy – at an industry, business, leader and individual level[3].

The #Prepared4PA initiative is striving to create a value-add through partnerships within the system level as well as fostering universities' collaboration with the local business community. It is important to articulate and share the benefits of employer engagement for each and every stakeholder at all levels of collaboration.

NOTES

Make a list of benefits for your institution and for your employer partners.

[3] Keys for Successful Industry - Education Engagement (2019)
https://www.mercer.com.au/content/dam/mercer/attachments/asia-pacific/australia/our-thinking/au-2019-universities-pov-brochure-july-2019.pdf

STRATEGY:

DEFINE SUCCESS

ACTION:

ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIP OBJECTIVES

Given the broad definition of employer-education partnerships and "workforce collaboratives," efforts toward defining success measures depend on the type and size of partnership. Base the following objective-setting exercise on how you define a workforce collaborative in your region, driven by your community's purpose for collaborating.

Developing a win-win scenario is ideal. Identifying wins for each of the partners can improve understanding of what each partner brings to the table and how they view the engagement. Articulating a shared vision between partners builds a strong foundation.

TO START, SOME QUESTIONS THAT EMPLOYERS AND EDUCATORS MIGHT ASK TO IDENTIFY THE OBJECTIVES ARE:

- Why did we decide to partner?
- Do the partners have a shared vision?
- What are our short-term and long-term goals?
- How do we measure the progress and success of this partnership?

EXAMPLES OF SHARED VISION:

- Focus on serving adult working learners
- Commitment to front-line workers
- Investment in wrap-around services for working adult students/employees
- Credit for prior learning options - recognizing the learning that occurs outside of the classroom

EMPLOYERS LISTEN FOR:

- How the institutions support students
- Innovations in how the curriculum engages and expands opportunities for students
- How institutions are partnering with other companies
- Cost of attendance

ACTION:
DEVELOP SUCCESS METRICS

Defining success for a larger and more inclusive collaborative warrants taking a longer-term and broader perspective that involves a measure of impacts on students and job seekers, on business and industry, and on programs and resources, using both process and impact measures[4]. When a collaborative involves multiple industries, employers, workforce and economic development organizations, and education providers from varying levels, the success metrics should include measures related to sustained relationships, levels and types of engagement, and development and continuation of programs.

SAMPLE SUCCESS METRICS FOR WORKFORCE COLLABORATIVES

- Programs (training, courses, certificates, degrees) developed and implemented to meet workforce needs
- Engagements by employers in program advisory committees
- Contribution to curricular reviews by industry
- Contribution of resources by industry to education programs (lab equipment, speakers, etc.)
- Experiential learning opportunities (internships, job shadowing, etc.)
- Faculty engagement in industry
- Activities for job seekers / students connecting with employers (career services, job fairs, etc.)

The quantitative and qualitative metrics for partnerships below can also apply for the larger workforce collaborative by rolling up data from multiple programs implemented.

SAMPLE SUCCESS METRICS FOR SPECIFIC PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS

For partnerships focused on specific education and training solutions designed to meet workforce demands in a particular industry, targeting specific occupations, with fewer employers and education providers, the success metrics can be more targeted for that purpose. An ideal program will consider quantitative and qualitative measures. These success metrics will likely be selected and defined during the later phases of partner engagement. See Section 3 for more on stages of employer engagement.

Employer partners may look for metrics from the education partner on:

- Enrollment numbers
- Tuition assistance utilization rates
- Degree and program mix
- Re-enrollments (from Certificate to Associate or Associate to Bachelor’s)
- Money and time savings for prior learning assessment credit
- Retention rates
- Estimated Cost per Trainee

[4] Next Generation Sector Partnerships (2019). www.nextgensectorpartnership.com

QUANTITATIVE MEASURES:

- Number of participants
- Completion of course(s), certificate, degree program
- College credits earned
- Continuing Education Units (CEUs) earned
- Persistence rates
- Assessment scores
- Job placements
- Job promotions
- Number of students entering internship, job shadow, etc.
- Number of students entering candidate pool for job placement

QUALITATIVE MEASURES:

- Does the curriculum align with the competencies?
- Are students able to demonstrate competencies as a result of the program?
- Do supervisors see improved performance?
- Does the program qualify or prepare students for career progression?
- Is the time-to-fill open positions reduced?
- Are attrition rates reduced?
- Do students perceive benefits for education and career progression as a result of this program?
- Did the program delivery method consider the needs of working adults?
- Were the timeframe and time commitment for students, employer and academic partners appropriate?
- Is this pilot program replicable in other industries, with other employers, with other institutions, for other occupations?
- Is this program sustainable?

NOTES

ACTION:

DEVELOP A PLAN TO TRACK DATA

Once goals and objectives of partnering have been identified and metrics established, it is important to think strategically about how that data will be collected. Depending on the goal, some of the data might be housed in an employer's human resources department (e.g., training costs for sending incumbent workers out of state, etc.), and other data might be calculated and kept by department directors (e.g., cost of lost productivity due to understaffed positions). Data may also be required from the educators' records on student enrollment, retention and completion.

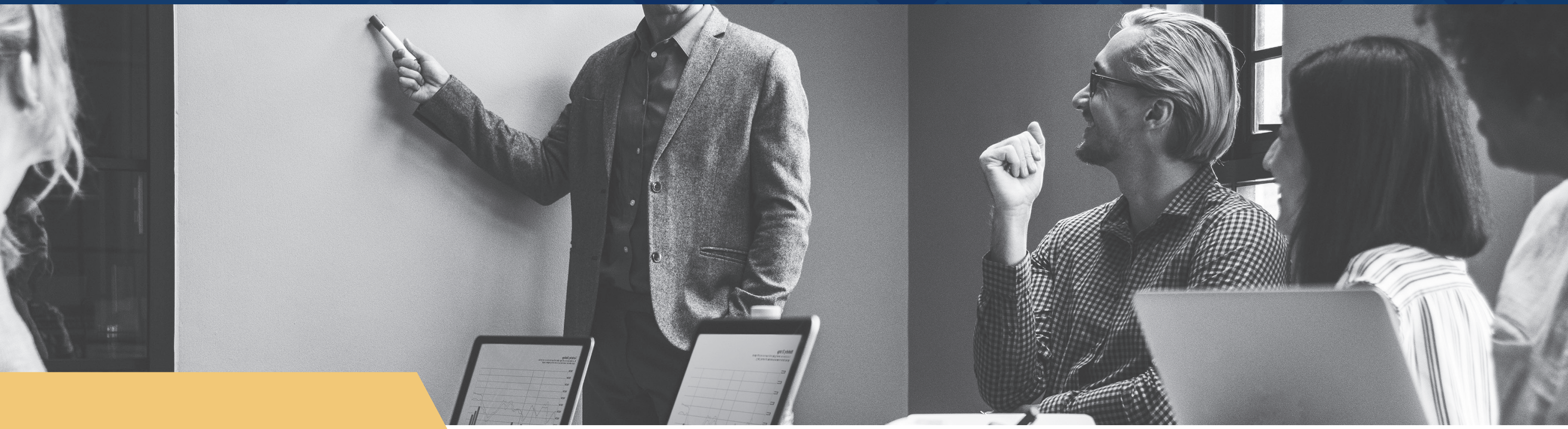
The important consideration is that the goals are clear, metrics are developed, and a plan is made for how and by whom it will be collected and stored. One idea would be to store this information in an accessible location, such as a Google Drive or other cloud account.

Once baseline data is collected, the same metrics can be used to collect additional data over time. Ideally, you'll want to have a person on board who is well-versed in research methods and statistics to handle data so that it can be converted to meaningful stories about how the partnership is proving to be effective. Including communications professionals early on in the process can make story collecting easier as your initiative continues to achieve success[5].

TIP

Identify a single-point-of-contact person who coordinates providing updates between the various partners and updates the data regularly in a shared location.

[5] Employer-Training Partnerships in Seattle/King County: A BLUEPRINT FOR WIN-WIN-WIN EXPERIENCES. (2017) Seattle Jobs Initiative.https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/economicDevelopment/workforce/Employer%20Training%20Partnerships_v3_print.pdf



SECTION 2: ASSESS CURRENT EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENTS

STRATEGY:

RESEARCH AND UNDERSTAND EXISTING PARTNERSHIPS, INITIATIVES AND PROMISING PRACTICES

ACTION:

KNOW YOUR SERVICE LANDSCAPE

It is likely that others within your higher education system, local workforce development agencies, or community-based organizations are also seeking to build relationships with employers in your area. Being aware of these other players can help you:

- Recognize opportunities to collaborate with/assist others who have similar/complementary goals (e.g. partnering with adult-focused staff, or a community organization that serves a different population, may be an effective way to position your organization as a resource to help employers connect with multiple initiatives in a coordinated way)
- Coordinate your outreach efforts with others and reduce the compassion fatigue employers may feel as a result of being approached by multiple agencies, while gaining efficiency in outreach efforts with the goal of engaging a larger number of employers than any one organization could reach alone
- Learn/benefit from the strengths of staff/agencies whose approach differs from yours
- Present a unified front to employers—instilling in them a sense that the workforce system is less complicated to work with[6]
- Ensure efforts are not duplicated and that everyone understands and is filling their role in the greater ecosystem

ACTION:

DEVELOP AN INVENTORY OF WORKFORCE ACTIVITIES CURRENTLY HAPPENING IN EACH OF THE REGIONS

Workforce asset mapping is a valuable exercise that helps communities to develop an inventory of regional stakeholders and the workforce-related services. The mapping consists of researching, logging, and analyzing the data to better understand where leveraged resources and partnerships can increase the effectiveness of a community's workforce and talent

[6] Strategic Employer Engagement: Building Dynamic Relationships with Employers in Teen and Young Adult Employment Program. (2013) Commonwealth Corporation. http://commcorp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/youthworks-resource_strategic-employer-engagement.pdf

development objectives. This inventory is not meant to be a "magic bullet" or an exact science; however, it is an ideal starting point as you work to better understand the services being offered in the community and to better serve your underrepresented populations.

Through this exercise, communities will work to identify where aligned efforts can result in economies of scale, connect regional stakeholders, and create the space where discussions around collaboration and alignment can occur with greater impact. See Appendix A for a example of organizing Workforce Asset Mapping.

STRATEGY:
DETERMINE ENGAGEMENT TARGETS USING LABOR MARKET DATA

ACTION:
CREATE A SHORT LIST OF INDUSTRIES AND TOP OCCUPATIONS OF HIGHEST PRIORITY

Pulling labor market data will provide the information needed to target the focus of workforce collaboratives. Use real-time (Emsi or Burning Glass) or traditional (BLS, Census, O*Net, PA WorkStats) data sources.

Collecting labor market information and identifying broad industry needs are the first steps for higher education partners and educators when considering which employers to engage in your collaborative. You can break the ice in preliminary discussions by asking the following:

- What industries need more skilled workers?
- What are the hiring needs of the employers in those industries?
- What skills are lacking among adults in the area's labor shed?
- Are your institutional offerings aligned with industry employer needs?

Communicate education and workforce data and information to stakeholders in an accessible way. Include anticipated effects of disruption and associated skills gaps to employers, regional workforce entities, education institutions and the general public. In addition to high-level summary reports, states should consider making available state data machine-readable so that data scientists and analysts can develop innovative, predictive data tools[7].

ACTION:
REVIEW INDUSTRY COMPETENCY MAPS

Use Pennsylvania's industry competency maps to better target the industries and occupations of focus for initiatives and curriculum development. Created in 2020-21, the State System's Competency Maps include in-demand occupations in six target industry clusters. These can help inform any program considered to address workforce needs.

[7] Employer Engagement - Lifelong Learning Ecosystem. National Governors Association (2020). https://www.nga.org/futureworkforce/policies/employer-engagement/

WORKFORCE ASSET MAPPING:

- highlights opportunities where leveraged resources and partnerships can increase the effectiveness of talent-development initiatives
- allows regional partners to identify areas of service overlap and where gaps require additional effort
- identifies populations served and supports better directing resources to ensure equity of opportunity for all members of the community
- highlights skills, and credentials required by employers to inform quality, robust, industry-validated training and education programs.

SAMPLE BROAD FINDINGS AT A REGIONAL LEVEL

- Soft Skills Training Happening in Silos
- Confusion Around Career Awareness
- No Region-Wide System of Career Pathways
- Community Partnership Opportunities Abound
- Training Program Roadblocks for Employers
- Absence of Talent Attraction and Retention Strategies
- Barriers to Workforce Participation
- Industry-validated training and education programs.

STRATEGY:

LEARN ABOUT THE BEST WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH EMPLOYERS

ACTION:

EVALUATE STAGES OF EMPLOYER PARTNERSHIPS

Consider an employer in your institution's current network or an employer that you'd like to bring into your network. Reference the chart below - at what stage are you currently with this employer? Based on your answer to this question, what is one next step you think you could take now with that employer? For further guidance on how to communicate with employers, please refer to Section 4 of this action plan.

HOW TO APPROACH EACH STAGE OF THE EMPLOYER PARTNERSHIP PROCESS

IDENTIFY A FOCUS	BUILD TRUST	DEEPEN THE CONNECTION	CO-CREATE OPPORTUNITIES	PARTNER STRATEGICALLY
Take a close look at the employer's incumbent workforce Analyze and update your understanding of the job profiles at the employer Identify the employer's skill gaps	Listen Show the value of your programs Communicate how your programs can improve the employer's bottom line	Keep the relationship active Stay on top of the changes in the industry and in the skills profiles Help the employer define their needs Connect them with additional partners	Complete the job task analysis process Create curriculum with the employer Identify experiential learning opportunities	Invite employers to your advisory committee Identify monetary and capital investment opportunities Become the pipeline for new employees Build coalitions of employers and providers

ACTION:

CONVENE FOCUS GROUPS TO UNDERSTAND HOW BEST TO ENGAGE

By bringing together groups of employers and partner organizations for focus groups, higher education and other partners can better understand their priorities, needs and preferred methods of engagement. Engagement can take many forms. Connecting with partner organizations at this stage helps to better understand the ways in which each of these entities prefer to engage with each other - including employers, higher education, workforce development, and others in the workforce ecosystem.

The objective is to organize purposeful and effective engagement. Plan purpose of meetings, frequency, time of day, setting, content, medium, etc. This can be accomplished by survey, collaborative meetings, 1:1 meetings or via email.

As a result of this engagement, you should have a solid grasp on:

- What's currently happening in the region
- The most promising best practices/initiatives
  - How these function
  - Replicability
- Employer/partner preferences around engagement
- How often and who are meeting and why
- What is working well and what is not going so well

SECTION 3: DEVELOP A STRUCTURE FOR WORKFORCE COLLABORATIVES

STRATEGY:

STRATEGIZE YOUR APPROACH TO PARTNERSHIP

ACTION:

DEFINE A WORKFORCE COLLABORATIVE FOR YOUR REGION

The term "workforce collaborative" in this document is intended to be inclusive of the many forms the partnerships can take to be most effective for the local, regional and statewide workforce ecosystem. Employer engagement can come in the form of direct interactions between a university or college and a single (or several) employer(s) aimed at addressing specific, local workforce needs. These collaboratives can also expand to include groups of employers in one or multiple industry clusters, multiple education and training providers from K-12 and higher education, workforce development and economic development organizations, nonprofit organizations, and chambers of commerce. The State System is broadening the concept of a workforce collaborative to involve more stakeholders from a larger geographical area, across industries, and to meet the need for multiple types of workforce training and education solutions to serve a more diverse population.

These groups can be instrumental in determining demand, providing a systematic approach and creating a process for determining an area's most critical jobs and organizing demand data to be shared productively with associated partners. At the same time, the groups can address the supply side by assessing what programs exist or could be developed to meet the demands.

Ideally, these collaboratives solve the most common employer engagement challenges because employers are empowered to be a part of the decision to organize and participate to meet their most critical workforce needs. When your collaboratives are employer driven, industry leaders will be more inclined to engage and bring other like minds along in the work, which means more valuable feedback to inform programming. These leaders will be better positioned to serve as primary funders of collaborative activities. With skin in the game, employers will have more buy-in and will be more inclined to share sensitive information about their workforce needs. Inviting employers to have decision-making abilities guided by stakeholders will work to increase their return on this investment[8].

[8] Talent Pipeline Management - Strategy 1: Organize workforce collaboratives. U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation (2020). https://tpmacademy.uschamberfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/TPM-3.0_Strategy-1_FINAL.pdf

ACTION:

DECIDE TO START NEW OR BUILD ON EXISTING INITIATIVES

Based on the research on existing partnerships and information gathered from leaders on promising practices and the developed workforce asset inventory, consider whether to start a new collaborative or build upon those that currently exist. This may not be an either/or but rather a both/and depending on the many factors that come into play when evaluating the needs in various sectors for a workforce collaborative. Knowing the assets your community already has in this area can be useful in deciding where to begin your efforts.

Starting a new collaborative is hard work and runs the same risks of any new business startup. It also is open to criticism that you are reinventing the wheel rather than building on existing partnerships. For more details and tips on overcoming potential pushback, see Section 4.

Making the decision on whether to build on existing efforts or start anew requires a careful review of the pros and cons of each approach. In many cases, employers will prefer host organizations such as chambers of commerce, industry associations, and economic development agencies that have existing initiatives involving stakeholders, including education and training providers, universities, colleges, and workforce agencies. These initiatives are often based on public-private partnership models that have all stakeholders at the table in all meetings and do not provide the opportunity for employers to meet separately in order to set their own priorities and address any issues in working together.

ACTION:

ORGANIZE EFFORTS TO BOLSTER EXISTING INITIATIVES

The #Prepared4PA steering committee and regional working groups are excellent examples of existing and well-represented groups in Pennsylvania. Continuing these working groups and building on this structure across the state may well prove an effective strategy.

Based on any research on other existing partnerships described in Section 2, #Prepared4PA may decide to coordinate efforts, combine resources and/or collaborate with other groups to avoid duplication. See more ideas on developing these existing groups in Develop a Plan for the Workforce Collaborative.

One way to bolster any of the existing initiatives and double down on expanding employer engagement is to consider these groups as a needed space for employers to form employer committees, task forces, or work groups. The idea of employer-only committees provides a forum and opportunity for businesses to organize themselves, set priorities, and clarify their role within the larger partnership, especially when it comes to providing more granular labor market information that is specific to their company's workforce needs.

Organizing employers in this way also provides a mechanism for employers to enhance their career pathway partnerships using a talent supply chain approach that addresses employer ROI.   See more related to this idea in Section 4 - Establish Industry-Specific Advisory Groups in Each of the Target Industries Identified.

[9] Talent Pipeline Management - Strategy 1: Organize workforce collaboratives. U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation (2020). https://tpmacademy.uschamberfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/TPM-3.0_Strategy-1_FINAL.pdf

STRATEGY:

DEVELOP A PLAN FOR THE WORKFORCE COLLABORATIVE

There are elements outlined below to address in the planning process when developing a more formal type of workforce collaborative. When the decision is to build upon existing collaboratives, information in this section may help inform further development, structural enhancements, and planning for sustainability.

ACTION:

IDENTIFY A HOST ORGANIZATION AND CREATE STRUCTURE

The organization that houses and provides the staff and management support for one or more workforce collaboratives is the host organization. Host organizations are oftentimes business member organizations (e.g., chambers of commerce, industry sector-based associations) or economic development organizations dedicated to business growth and competitiveness and are chosen or affirmed by the employer members to manage and staff workforce collaboratives.

Early on in the creation of a new collaborative, host organizations should develop a preliminary budget and staffing plan to ensure they have the necessary leadership commitment and staff resources to complete this work. While each collaborative must proceed at its own pace, it is important to demonstrate consistent progress to your employer members. Once the workforce collaborative has gained experience in moving through the process for the first time, it will be able to expedite each stage of the process and reduce the time taken to update its information and execute each strategy.

Host organizations should be able to launch new collaboratives more easily as they gain experience. Whether you are starting your first collaborative as a new initiative or building from an existing one that may be part of a public-private partnership, the selected host organization should provide the necessary staff time with or without seed funding to lay the initial groundwork. The biggest up-front cost and commitment is time, which typically poses the biggest hurdle for a collaborative's successful launch.

ACTION:

DEVELOP A BUDGET, TIMELINE, AND STAFFING PLAN WITH THE HOST ORGANIZATION

It is very important for host organizations to budget for the amount of time that a staff member will need to commit in order to facilitate a new collaborative from start to finish. Some host organizations find it useful to offset the cost of having a staff member facilitate a collaborative by raising funds from local sources that are interested in providing seed funds for new collaboratives. This can result in having the full cost of a staff member covered for the first year, or it could be a cost sharing arrangement between a philanthropic source and the host organization.

The goal is to demonstrate enough value and return on investment within the first year to make the case for employer members to sustain the work of the collaborative through membership dues and other types of employer investments.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Are staff members trained and ready to do employer engagement?
- Do we have sufficient relationships to accomplish program goals?
- Are there significant employers missing from our list?
- Are employers engaged at multiple levels (i.e. hiring, career awareness and advising)?
- Are there opportunities to engage these employers in ways they currently are not engaged?
- Are there patterns in how we connected with these employers?
- What are the lessons learned from past relationships with employers? (Did we burn bridges? Not follow through? Get them excited and then not engage?)

ACTION:
FUND THE COLLABORATIVE

Whether you are starting a new collaborative or building on existing initiatives, consideration about how to fund the effort is important for sustainability. Oftentimes, collaboratives lack dedicated, paid staff to keep the work going. Relying on volunteers and full-time employees from the entities involved to add this work to their already full plates is risky in the long term. Obviously, the identification of a host organization is a logical factor in how best to consider staffing and funding.

One option for funding involves a more structured approach as an employer collaborative. Employer collaboratives are unique in the sense that they are financed at least in part by membership fees and other types of employer contributions. There are many different options for employer financing, including membership dues, contributions for specific initiatives, and foundation donations. An employer collaborative might require seed funding to get started, which can come from other funding sources, such as the government. However, if seed funding is needed from an alternative source, it may influence the degree of employer leadership and commitment, and, ultimately, control going forward.

Although seed money might be needed to start an employer collaborative, the host organization should focus mainly on employer financing and start from the premise that employers will be the major funders of the collaborative over the years only to the extent that they receive a positive ROI.

In this model, the most important decision is the selection of the “pain points.” Pain points are defined as specific challenges or issues that an employer or group of employers may have with their current processes. These pain points can help guide the basis for short-term and long-term employer financing of collaboratives and lead to the most immediate results and returns on those investments.

As a result, employer collaboratives should be designed so that employer membership dues and other investments result in equal or greater bottom-line benefits by addressing their most visible and costly pain points, such as:

- **Unfilled Job Openings** - Employers are not able to fill critical job openings with qualified talent in the time frames needed to meet business needs
- **Onboarding and Upgrading Costs** - Employers have to increase spending to onboard recent hires and upgrade existing workers
- **Turnover and Retention** - Employers are not able to retain workers who are leaving the industry or the region

This will require a discussion with employers and human resource professionals on how best to calculate the costs that employers incur from these pain points. Many of these costs will be rough estimates that employers decide are reasonable based on industry benchmarks or their own experiences. In almost all cases, even rough estimates will show that collaborative membership dues and other investments will have high returns if the collaborative is successful in addressing major pain points.

STRATEGY:
CREATE A SYSTEM OF METRICS AND MEASUREMENTS TO TRACK PROGRESS

ACTION:
ESTABLISH METRICS FOR SUCCESS

A system of metrics should be set in place for the working groups to work toward from the outset to measure employer engagement. Metrics could track employer attendance, employer investment, employer referrals, etc. These metrics will help working group members to stay on task and ensure they’re effectively moving the industry groups forward. Refer to Section 1 on Develop Success Metrics for guidance. Each collaborative or partnership will determine the goals of the collaborative and select the associated success metrics.

Sample Framework of Measurement

This sample is inclusive of many types of metrics from which to choose for the collaborative and offers a simple way to report the data.

	Name of Collaborative or Partnership Program	INCLUDED	NUMBER	LIST OF NAMES OR DESCRIPTIONS	WHO IS TRACKING DATA?
Representation	Guiding questions: Does our collaborative have representation from the employers from different sizes and industries? Are we connecting with our workforce and economic development systems? Do we have education and training resources at all levels to consider stackable, educational pathways? Do we have representation for diverse populations across our region? Have we involved community-based organizations to that represent target populations of students, job seekers and workers?				
	Collaborative members				
	Employers engaged (small, mid and large sized)				
	Employers representing target industries				
	Industry associations engaged				
	Workforce Investment Board/workforce development organizations				
	Chambers of Commerce				
	Economic development orgnanizations				
	Community-based organizations				
	Technical schools				
	Community colleges				
	K-12 school systems				
	Training providers				
	Recruiting and talent development firms				
	City, County and State agencies				
	Local organizations representing specific populations				
	Regional geographic area (communities, counties, cities/towns, regions)				
	Assessment of needs conducted for specific populations (surveys, meeting participation, outreach, etc.)				
	Communication and outreach targeted to representative groups				
Alignment	Guiding questions: Are our partners working toward complementary goals for workforce development? Are we duplicating efforts or competing when collaboration may be more beneficial in the short- or long-term? Do we know how to prepare our students for jobs and careers that are in-demand?				
	Shared vision between partners articulated				
	Goals alignment or complementary between entities				
	Roles and contributions by each partner entity shared - what is each organization bringing to the table?				
	Academic programs aligned to workforce needs				
	Identified potential duplication of efforts				
	Transferable and stackable credits				
	Agreements or MOUs between education and training providers				
	Workforce system connections (training, resources, etc.)				

Engagement	Guiding Questions: Are we thinking creatively about how we work together and share resources? Is our plan for partnership engagement effective and relevant for all parties involved?				
	Identified roles and responsbilities for promoting and managing engagement actvities				
	Participation in collaborative / partnership meetings				
	Responses or participation in data sharing, input and review				
	Effective, action oriented meetings				
	Employer participatiion in program advisory committee				
	Employer contribution to curriculur reviews				
	Resource contribution by industry to education program (lab equipment, speakers, etc.)				
	Experiential learning offered to students				
	Work-based learning offered to students				
	Faculty visits/engagment in industry				
	Activities for job seekers and employer connections				
Program Participation and Completion	Guiding questions: Which metrics for participation are most important for each partner or participant? Can we re-define or expand success metrics for our organization that includes or aligns more with success for other organizations and individuals? How and who gathers, tracks and reports the data?				
	Number of participants/students/trainees				
	Completion of course(s), certificate, degree program				
	College credits earned				
	Continuing Education Units (CEUs) earned				
	Persistence rates				
	Assessment scores or demonstration of competencies				
	Job placements				
	Credit from prior learning awarded				
	Student/Worker Demographics identified and collected				
	Job retuention rates				
	Students in internships, job shadow, apprenticeships, etc.				
	Students entering candidate pool for job placement				
Student/Worker Support	Guiding questions: Do the students/workers recieve adequate support to complete this program? Are the training and education options flexible and appropriate for working adults?				
	Tuition and fee cost				
	Job promotion				
	Career services provided				
	Support services provided (childcare, transportation, etc.)				
	Flexible course schedule for working adults				
	Programmatic options for upskilling and reskilling				

Example of Goals for Talent Alignment Strategy

This example provides another way to plan and communicate the collaborative's goals and strategies.

GOALS & STRATEGIES	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY	SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION(S)	TIMING
GOAL 1: Aligned Efforts Support Increased Talent Availability in the Region			
1.1 Support and expand youth organization			Immediate
1.2 Create regional mentorship program for early and mid-career cohorts.			Mid-Term
GOAL 2: Career Opportunities are Well-Known, Accessible, and Offer Pathways for Students and Workers of All Skill Levels			
2.1 Create and expand equitable career pathways for working learners.			Mid-Term
2.2 Create employer-led messaging campaigns about career pathways, investments in the workforce, and support for the community.			Mid-Term
2.3 Increase accessibility of wraparound and supportive services for populations in need.			Mid-Term
2.4 Expand Cradle-to-Career effort and approach to better serve adult workers and learners.			Mid-Term
GOAL 3: Education, Training, and Development Opportunities are Aligned with and Connected to the Job Market			
3.1 Create a regional degree attainment initiative focused on high growth, in-demand industries and occupational clusters.			Mid-Term
3.2 Support and develop more non-traditional skill development opportunities.			Immediate
3.4 Increase employer connection to student population.			Immediate
GOAL 4: Regional Partnerships and Collaboration are Established, Strengthened, and Sustained			
4.1 Identify and assess system initiatives focused on talent and workforce development.			Immediate
4.2 Create an educational leadership forum for system leaders			Immediate

SECTION 4: DRIVE ENGAGEMENT AND BUILD SUSTAINABLE RELATIONSHIPS

STRATEGY:

PREPARE AND PLAN COMMUNICATIONS AND MESSAGING

ACTION:

DEVELOP A PLAN FOR OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION

Working groups will need to develop a plan for outreach and communication to industry representatives. The communication plan is dependent on the group's overall plan for engagement. Clear, direct and purposeful communication is key. Include concise updates, action items for the group and its members, and communicate key information on why, what, when, how and who. See more on communication ideas in Section 5.

ACTION:

IDENTIFY A SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT IN PLACE FOR EMPLOYERS

Streamlined and concise communication with employers is key to making best use of time and resources. Consider the need for a single point of contact for the group or within your organization who will be communicating with the employers.

TIPS

- Learn the language of business and their needs
- Recognize employers and industry leaders for their input, support and guidance
- Make sure to collect data at various touchpoints to ensure all parties' needs are met

ACTION:
CRAFT A VALUE PROPOSITION

For reaching out to employers, develop a short three- to five-minute presentation or “elevator pitch” that presents the value proposition to employers and addresses some of their major concerns. Once you have listened to the employer community’s most pressing workforce issues and understand more about how best to engage, this value proposition can be used to help gain support for a partnership.

Employers may be impressed and interested in learning more about your institution if you are prepared to share the following:

- Your vision for serving working adult learners
- Wraparound supports you offer that help learners be successful
- Credit for prior learning and work experience
- Understanding of, and commitment to, the employer’s employee pool
- Successful innovations
- Successful partnerships with other companies
- Cost of attendance
- Willingness to flex the tuition cost structure to the needs of employees

NOTES

What is your institution’s value proposition?

ACTION:
IDENTIFY EMPLOYER CHAMPIONS

It's also important to identify employer champions for each industry early on in the process of building industry groups. Continually recognize employer and industry leaders for their input, support and guidance. Working group members should utilize their contacts to identify industry champions who are well respected by both the business and broader communities. They can be the voice and leader for driving attendance at working group meetings.

STRATEGY:
HIGHLIGHT AND PROMOTE PROMISING PRACTICES

ACTION:
SHARE REGIONAL SUCCESS STORIES AND MODELS

Referencing your research on existing partnerships in your region, identify programs that can be highlighted. Set up interviews with participating institutions and employer partner contacts. Contact participating employees and their supervisors engaged in the program to tell their stories.

- Who is partnering?
- What is the partnership accomplishing for workforce development and the larger community?
- What are the goals and overall vision of these engagements?
- How does the process work?
- How was the experience for the student? What did he/she gain from the education/ training at the workplace?

OVERCOME POTENTIAL PUSHBACK

Employers may not see the value in partnering with workforce programs or partnerships because they may perceive the cost of participation to outweigh the benefits. This challenge is exacerbated if too much time is required of the employer, if interactions are disorganized or if services are poor. Employers may be unwilling to bear the costs of involvement in these collaboratives if they can reap benefits without engaging.

Some employers or industry leaders may be wary of working with each other, especially since most collaboratives typically involve employers from the same industry working together. And education partners may be hesitant to share curricula with their competitors. Make sure employers and stakeholders understand the benefits of working together vs. working in silos, and address these concerns up front[10].

[10] The Goals and Dimensions of Employer Engagement in Workforce Development Programs (2015). Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/2000552-The-Goals-and-Dimensions-of-Employer-Engagement-in-Workforce-Development-Programs.pdf

ACTION:
HOST A BEST PRACTICES PANEL DISCUSSION

Consider proposing a panel discussion about a partnership model at local workforce events at the chamber of commerce or other forums related to workforce and talent development. The goal is to share some details about the partnership and the education-industry collaboration to give other organizations ideas for replication. The discussion can center around a newly developed partnership or one that has some results to share. Remember the power of networking and leave time for questions and answers. The goals are to recognize what is currently happening, demonstrate progress, and show how the engagement between education and industry can be a solution for the business community.

STRATEGY:
ESTABLISH INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC ADVISORY GROUPS IN EACH OF THE TARGET INDUSTRIES IDENTIFIED

The broad purpose of industry-specific advisory groups is to help the institution document the need for a workforce education program and to ensure that the program has both adequate resources and a well-designed curriculum to provide students with the skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary to successfully meet the needs of business and industry. This involves focused discussions on common workforce needs across that industry. It is in the best interest of higher education institutions to establish separate industry-specific advisory councils for each workforce education program or cluster of closely related programs.

ACTION:
DEVELOP A PLAN FOR INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC ADVISORY GROUPS

The advisory group is one of the principal means of ensuring meaningful business and industry participation in program development and revision. Acceptance and continued support of education often hinges on a community's knowledge of the various career-training workforce opportunities. This involves a broader purpose than engaging an advisory group for a single degree program. Using all of the previous information gathered, strategize with your internal team on the most impactful composition for your advisory groups.

Inviting other stakeholders could address what exists on the supply side in terms of talent, resources, etc. Advisory groups often include:

- Robust group of employers from the occupational field
- Four-year college and university partners
- K-12 teacher(s)/others from K-12 with a key role in your field
- Community college instructor/faculty member from aligned programs of study
- Adult basic and literacy education staff
- Community-based organizations staff (United Way, Big Brothers/Big Sisters)
- One student representative from your program(s) of study within each industry
- Representatives from local or regional industry associations
- Local workforce staff from jobs and family services[11]

[10] Employer Advisory Council Research Guide. Endel, Barbara (2016). http://trcenter.vccs.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/6-Zane-St-EAC-Resource-Guide-8.15.16.pdf

PLANNING ENGAGEMENT FOR EACH TARGET SECTOR

- Choose a well-regarded and experienced facilitator who has a deep knowledge of both the region and, if possible, the industry. An excellent reference is the Facilitator Guide from Next Gen Sector Partnerships.
- Consider having partner organizations that are not employers or industry representatives in listen-only mode during these initial engagements. They take notes and seek to better understand employer needs.
- Present all collected and current labor market data to the employers and prepare talking points for the facilitator (refer back to Section 2 for guidance). Before moving into a deeper discussion regarding the needs of the employers, the conversation should garner initial reactions to the accuracy of the data presented.
- Ensure that employers commit to action following the initial meeting. Be prepared to decide on a date/time for the next meeting. Based on the conversation, there should be a list of to-dos that need to be done before that meeting. When employers come back to the table, they need to see that progress has been made.

ACTION:

CONVENE INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC GROUPS

Working groups can schedule meetings for each industry group to come together with a clear agenda and a plan for action. Recruitment will be key to success, as will a clear and concise plan for employers to ensure they have a good grasp of what they're being called upon to do and provide.

Consider which type of meeting would work best in your region given all of the planning and information gathered thus far. Types of meetings to hold with employers can include:

- **Roundtable discussions with industry leaders**
  Roundtable discussions with industry leaders are a great way to bring together employers for workforce-related discussions. These types of meetings consist of industry leaders meeting with education/training partners and key leaders within the workforce collaboratives to discuss challenges and opportunities. Having these groups of stakeholders in a single room will make it much easier to take action, as opposed to relaying messages between the various groups.

  It always helps if education and industry can speak directly to one another to craft solutions. Of course, WIB, chambers of commerce and/or economic development organization partners can help to facilitate these discussions and help to implement the solutions that are developed during this time.
- **Work with sub-groups of employers from the industry groups**
  It is likely that common issues will surface among a group of employers. By engaging with a sub-group of employers that have similar workforce challenges, the group can dig deeper into the competencies and skills that are most important for success in each of the target occupations. Relay this information to training partners and education providers on a regular basis and provide consistent updates when an employer needs to shift due to labor market changes.
- **Establish venues, such as networking events, for employers to connect directly to education and training providers**
  These events should happen regularly and allow for free-flowing conversations between the two groups. As these groups get to know each other better, relationships will be strengthened and the conversations between educators and industry will begin to happen more naturally.

[10] Employer Advisory Council Research Guide. Endel, Barbara (2016). http://trcenter.vccs.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/6-Zane-St-EAC-Resource-Guide-8.15.16.pdf

TIPS FOR EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

CULTIVATE AN EFFECTIVE ONGOING ADVISORY RELATIONSHIP WITH EMPLOYERS

- Solicit information from employers using a variety of methods, including one-on-one interviews, focus groups, surveys, and presentations. Get out of the office and meet employers on their own turf.
- Connect with talent attraction or recruitment directors within each organization you are targeting.
- If holding joint meetings of employers, allow time for non-workforce topics of interest to participants, such as finance, supply chains, or technology[12].
- Find common ground – are there existing higher education programs or opportunities that would be attractive to employers? How do incumbent workers benefit and how can these opportunities be used as a talent attraction tool?
- Consider Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) as a benefit for employees – research your PLA policies and consider assessing learning that has occurred outside of the classroom for college credit.
- Tuition assistance/reimbursement – Ensure you know what your tuition assistance policies are and ensure that your institution is an approved school.
- Certification supplementation – Do your program offerings align with employer and industry needs? If not, what can be changed to make programs more relevant?
- Work-based learning – Have a thorough knowledge of the work-based learning opportunities that the employers and industries currently offer, including apprenticeships, internships, mentorship, etc., and identify potential opportunities to partner.

UTILIZE YOUR RESOURCES: ENGAGE YOUR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GROUPS EFFECTIVELY

Use relationships with chambers of commerce and Economic Development Organizations (EDOs) to give you a jump start in connecting with key industry partners and employers. These entities know and understand the heartbeat of the business community and will likely know the specific people you should connect with first.

Once you have some venues for conversation in place, it makes sense to begin leveraging local partner contacts to convene employers across each sector. Representatives from WIBs, chamber of commerce and/or Economic Development Organizations (EDO) can also aid in the discussions by facilitating conversations with the group and helping to get the conversation started, as they will often have a high-level perspective on the issues and know how to speak “the language of business.” Don’t be afraid to reach out to these partners to ask for help getting started.

Representatives from these organizations can also play lead roles, such as chair or co-chair, in the workforce collaborative. Employers will feel more comfortable when there is a familiar face in the facilitator role. If you do not currently have a point person in your workforce collaborative to best serve this role, it may be better to let your chamber of commerce, WIB or EDO lead in the near term until the connections between the workforce collaborative leads and industry representatives are further solidified[13].

Leverage connections to other businesses. Most employers have strong connections to other businesses both within and outside their respective industries that can extend the work of the collaborative(s), benefiting learners, higher education, workforce and economic development partnerships, and employers/industry leaders.

[12] A Resource Guide to Engaging Employers. (2015) Jobs for the Future (JFF). https://jfforg-prod-prime.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/A-Resource-Guide-to-Employer-Engagement-011315.pdf

[13] Coastal Region Hospitality & Tourism Workforce Action Plan. (2019) CAEL

SECTION 5: SUSTAIN EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT THROUGH ACTION

STRATEGY:

SHOW CONSISTENT VALUE TO EMPLOYERS AND BUILD A POSITIVE REPUTATION

ACTION:

PROVIDE ONGOING COMMUNICATION WITH ACTION-ORIENTED UPDATES

Email and keep in contact with the employer advisory groups in between meetings with key program updates, information on what your students are doing, news items, awards, new grants or initiatives, etc. Promptly respond to correspondence from employer partners and follow through on actions agreed upon by the collaborative. Embed some polling/voting in the email to ask them their guidance on key issues.

Share/email key reports, articles, briefs, or things happening in the field to keep your employers most up to date on promising workforce practices and trends. In a sense, you are creating a learning community for them and many employers find this knowledge sharing very valuable. A few ideas below:

- Set up an online portal (like a shared Dropbox or Google Drive) for employers to access meeting materials, receive updates, read newsletters, chat with each other/partner orgs/training providers, or access other important pieces of information. This could also be an ideal place to track progress toward goals and identify the accomplishments of the partnership. Many employers are unable to step away from their businesses to attend in-person meetings.
- Plan a newsletter. Consider turning the meeting notes and subsequent implementation into a regular newsletter with specific action items called out.
- Initiate public relations. Coordinate with local and regional media to get the word out about progress. Some examples of content to share with larger audiences include:
  - Articles about ongoing engagement with industry leaders and champions
  - Success stories about students / employees
  - Updated and timely labor market data

Actively sharing information that is relevant to employers and directly applicable in solving their workforce challenges demonstrates value in the partnerships. For example:

- Assist employers in navigating the workforce and other support systems by mapping the region's providers and their roles and resources.
- Provide assistance in connecting their incumbent workers and trainees to needed services.
- Identify potential partners based on industry needs and standing employer relationships through existing programs, local workforce investment boards, or other partner agencies.

ACTION:

MAINTAIN OR BUILD ON STRUCTURES AND AGREEMENTS TO ESTABLISH ACCOUNTABILITY IN PARTNERSHIPS

Regardless of the particular structure and agreements developed for your partnerships (see Section 2 for more information on workforce collaborative formation), maintaining that structure and holding the partners accountable is important for sustainability.

The host organization's role in maintaining these agreements is key but so too are the roles of the other stakeholders involved. As the collaborative evolves, consider the role of employers in taking ownership and assuming leadership of initiatives and partnerships. Encourage and communicate to employers throughout your engagements that they should feel empowered to own ongoing partnerships developed within the collaborative. Refer to Section 1 on Return on Investment to further demonstrate the value of employers leading these efforts.

STRATEGY:

ALIGN EXISTING EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAM CURRICULA TO EMPLOYER NEEDS

ACTION:

PRIORITIZE A PROGRAM REVIEW

Focus on a program that has surfaced in a potential partnership for a pilot program, aligns with labor market data findings to address a particular workforce demand, or is targeted as a solution to recent requests from the business community.

Considering the results of recent labor market research, development of industry competency maps, and any feedback from employer partners in workforce collaborative meetings, the program review could involve:

- Comparing course content with occupational competencies and tasks in competency maps
- Evaluating developing and validating skills tests (these assessments could be used as challenge exams for assessing prior learning)
- Identifying opportunities for stackable credentials and microcredentialing

ACTION:

CONSIDER ADDITIONAL ENGAGEMENT BY PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Most all institutions have program advisory committees. The purpose of these committees is to provide input and advice on the program and keep the curricula relevant for today's workplace. We recognize this role is voluntary and committee members are often generous with their time and resources.

Think about how the committee is engaged today and if there are any opportunities to enhance or target that engagement. Are there areas that have not been explored recently that could be resurfaced? Are there areas of focus that have surfaced in other workforce collaborative conversations that can be brought to the committee for ideas?

- Identify and expand the use of new technologies or equipment
- Add hands-on, work-based learning and internship and job shadowing opportunities
- Invite faculty to participate in industry professional development activities
- Enhance connections with career services
- Inform faculty of job openings for students
- Provide work experiences, internships/externships, apprenticeships, work/study or work-based learning opportunities for students.
- Assist students to develop resumes and interview skills
- Contribute to outreach and public relations efforts about the programs
- Provide tours, field trips, job shadowing experiences, and speakers

Consider providing a menu or guide for employers to help them develop onsite education experiences for students and educators. There are a variety of possibilities, and employers may respond better with a menu of potential options and assistance in setting up work-based experiences. Teacher and professor externships are valuable experiences that allow educators to witness firsthand what goes on at local businesses on a regular basis and incorporate this knowledge into their curriculum. Student and parent tours and exposure to equipment/technology can pique interest and dispel pre-conceived notions of certain industries/occupations.

STRATEGY:

BUILD NEW OR EXPAND CURRENT PROGRAMS DESIGNED WITH INDUSTRY

ACTION:

IDENTIFY THE WORKFORCE NEED FOR TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Based on discussions with local employers, the need for short-term training may have surfaced. Or, the idea that a certificate program designed with industry-driven curricula could help prepare workers for certain jobs. Now, take action to determine how your institution can provide a solution. Your continuing education department may have training to offer immediately. Or, consider partnering with another college or a third-party vendor to provide the training if a curriculum already exists that meets the need.

Listening to industry about pain points in talent development will provide the necessary information to start formulating a solution. Start with some basic questions.

- What are the target occupations?
- What credentials are valued for occupations in a chosen pathway?
- Is there a need for new hires? What are the requirements?
- Is there an opportunity to grow your own talent pool and promote from within the company? What is needed to upskill and reskill?
- What is the timeframe?
- What are the competencies needed? Foundational or soft skills or occupation-specific technical skills?

ACTION:

DISCOVER EMPLOYERS' EXPECTATIONS

Once a needs statement is established, dive deeper into what would create a win-win scenario for the employer, the employees/students, and the institution. During initial conversations with employers about potential training program implementation, inquire about the importance of and expectations around the following aspects of a training program.

- Credit or non-credit
- Degree or certificate to be achieved
- Program accreditation
- Pass rates on certification exams or retention numbers
- Geographic Area (online, on campus, inhouse, within 1 or 2 hours etc.)
- Length of program
- Cost
- Program capacity
- Academic rigor
- Faculty credentials
- Curriculum design (does the program address all competencies required by the employer or are modifications needed)

Remember to highlight benefits for employees. For example, the employer may not require college credit, but the employee can benefit from earning credit and pursuing stackable credentials.

Developing a shared definition of success is an important initial step in planning the program in partnership with employer partners. See more on success metrics in Section 1.

The next step in discovery with the employer partner involves a more detailed dive into program content and delivery. Ask that the employer determine which of the following are required or would be nice to include. See a **Sample Questionnaire for Listing Program Wants vs. Needs in Appendix A**.

ACTION:

IMPLEMENT TRAINING AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Each partnership will look different. Many varying factors that are outlined in the discovery and planning stages will dictate how the program is implemented. Generally, suggestions for the implementation phase include:

- Maintain single points of contact for employer and institution for coordination
- Schedule touchpoint meetings between partners (bi-weekly, monthly, quarterly depending on program)
- Plan interventions to ensure persistence and completion
- Coordinate work-based activities for employees/students
- Track data - See Section 1 for more tips on tracking data

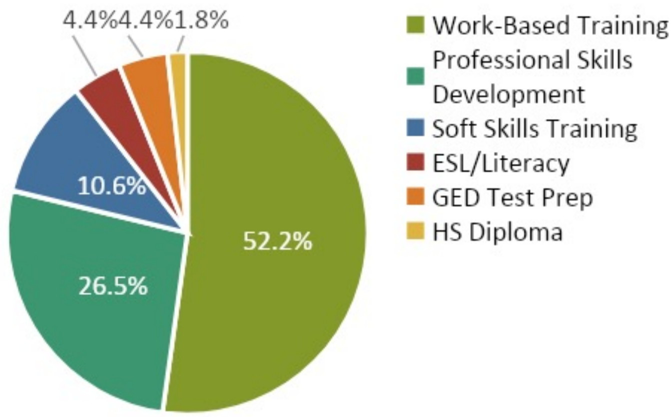
NOTES

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE TOOLS AND RESOURCES

WORKFORCE ASSET MAPPING EXAMPLE

FORMAT, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS

ORGANIZATION	ORGANIZATION TYPE	SERVICE TYPE	POPULATIONS SERVED	LOCATIONS
Name	Non-Profit	Soft Skills Training	All	Counties
Name	Private	GED Test Prep	Students	Statewide



Summary of Recommendations

- **Alignment of Services**
  Convening a group of stakeholders and beginning to align outreach efforts and opportunities for streamlining through collaboration and resource sharing is an ideal first step in this process. Although there may be meetings like this already taking place, work with partners to consolidate into one recurring meeting.

- **Using this Inventory as a Dashboard**
  This inventory would be most beneficial to the community as a public-facing and online-accessible dashboard. The more the inventory is updated and critiqued, the more accurate it will become. These updates should come from community feedback, service providers, and other stakeholders.

SAMPLE EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT TYPE TOOL

	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
Stage of Relationship	Initial Contact/ New Relationship	Establishing Trust and Credibility	Working Relationship	Trusted Provider and Collaborator	Full Strategic Partner
Stage of Relationship	Advising	Capacity Building	Co-Designing	Convening	Leading
Stage of Relationship	Discuss hiring needs, skills and competencies Advise on Curricula Contract Training Hire Graduates	Job site tours Speakers Mock Interviews Internships Conduct needs assessment Loan/Donate Equipment Recruiting	Curriculum and Pathway Development Adjunct Faculty and Instructors	College-Employer Sector Partnership	Multi-Employer / Multi-College Partnerships

SAMPLE EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT EMAIL LANGUAGE

SAMPLE STEERING COMMITTEE INVITATION LETTER

<DATE>

<NAME, TITLE>
<ORGANIZATION>
<ADDRESS>

Dear <NAME>:

As a leader and key stakeholder in [XXXX], you are invited to participate in an <INTERVIEW / FOCUS GROUP> as part of the [XXXX] that is currently underway.

[Insert project background, goals, initiatives, etc.]

[Language about why to engage/participate and overall vision]

As a Steering Committee member, you will be asked to attend [X number of meetings] [Month - Month] to meet with [XXXX]. We will ask the Steering Committee for guidance, candid insight about our [ISSUE] strengths and challenges, and feedback on [ANY PROGRESS MADE].

The Steering Committee will encompass a diverse range of [ORG TYPE, ORG TYPE] from across the community. Like you, other Steering Committee members are community influencers and play an important role in guiding [AREA OF FOCUS]. Feel free to suggest potential Steering Committee members or individuals who should participate in a focus group.

We would be delighted if you would join us in this important initiative. Please send your response to <NAME (EMAIL, PHONE NUMBER)> before <DEADLINE DATE>. Also, mark your calendar for the first Steering Committee webinar, which is scheduled for:

<DATE>
<TIME>
<LINK>

If you have questions or comments about the strategic planning process, please contact <NAME> with the [ORGANIZATION] <(EMAIL, PHONE NUMBER)>.

Thank you for considering this invitation. We look forward to working with you on this important talent alignment initiative.

Sincerely,

<NAME, TITLE>
<ORGANIZATION>

SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW INVITATION LETTER

<DATE>

<NAME, TITLE>
<ORGANIZATION>
<ADDRESS>

Dear <NAME>:

As a leader and key stakeholder in our region, you are invited to participate in an <INTERVIEW / FOCUS GROUP> as part of the [PROJECT/INITIATIVE] that is currently underway.

[Insert project background, goals, initiatives, etc.]

[Language about why to engage/participate and overall vision]

We would be honored if you would accept this invitation to participate in an <INTERVIEW / FOCUS GROUP> and share candid insight from your perspective as a leader in [FOCUS AREA].

[ORGANIZATION/CONTACT NAME] will facilitate the strategic planning process. Representatives from [ORGANIZATION] will lead your <INTERVIEW / FOCUS GROUP>.

If you have questions or comments about the [PROJECT/INITIATIVE] contact <NAME> with the [ORGANIZATION] (<EMAIL, PHONE NUMBER>). We will contact you by <DATE> to confirm your participation in the <INTERVIEW / FOCUS GROUP>. The <INTERVIEW / FOCUS GROUP> will take place on <DATE & TIME> at <MEETING LINK>.

Thank you for considering this invitation. We look forward to hearing your insight on this important industry initiative.

Sincerely,

<NAME, TITLE>
<ORGANIZATION>

SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LISTING PROGRAM WANTS VS. NEEDS

During program planning sessions with employer partners, use this list to identify which are “Must Haves” and which are “Nice to Haves.” Mark an “X” in Must or Nice.

MUST	NICE	
		Interested in building a cohort program with {employer in industry in location}
		Online option
		If online, is online program synchronous or asynchronous
		Hybrid program (course onsite but not required at a particular location)
		If hybrid program, can face-to-face sessions be held at the employer site for the cohort?
		Students must be able to work full time when enrolled
		Ability to customize program for a cohort of students
		Ability to enroll students in your regularly scheduled open-enrollment classes
		Ability to start a program at an alternative to traditional start date
		Ability to create an accelerated program
		Ability to customize or have input on competencies
		Ability to customize applications/registrations process for cohort
		Ability to transfer in credit / join program midway
		Ability to provide pre-req courses
		Ability to propose course sequence
		Ability for student to receive college credit if desired for non-credit program
		Employers to provide work-based learning experiences (job shadowing, apprenticeships, internships, etc.)
		Employer to provide faculty or guest speakers
		Employer to provide mentors
		Willingness of institution to truly partner with employer

APPENDIX B: CASE STUDIES

TOPIC: ROI CASE STUDY

Shoreline College in the Seattle, WA area worked with the WA Auto Dealers Association to develop an ROI for their partnership together. As a result, they determined the following approximate employer cost-savings:

- $8,594 per incumbent worker that needs ongoing training
- $26,928 per worker that would need to be trained to the equivalency of a program graduate
- $34,152 in employing and training a program graduate.

Lastly, if a work-based learning student logs four hours of labor for each eight hours worked at the dealership over two years in the program, the dealership realizes $170,280 in additional labor income.

Source: https://news.shoreline.edu/2015/02/27/shoreline-auto-dealers-association-forge-relationship/

TOPIC: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COLLABORATIVE

The Greater Washington Workforce Development Collaborative, in the Washington, D.C. area, brings together local foundations, individual philanthropists, and businesses around a shared vision for our region where every individual has an opportunity to realize their full potential, secure a family-sustaining job, and both benefit from and contribute to our regional economic prosperity. The Collaborative also serves to share information from workforce, education and foundation leaders to better understand the past, current and developing initiatives within the region.

The goal of the Collaborative is to provide the professionals that staff its local workforce development providers and agencies with the tools and resources they need to do their jobs effectively. The Collaborative makes investments in high-quality professional development and peer-to-peer networking opportunities for workforce practitioners. Some examples include:

1. **Young Workforce Leadership Academy (YWLA)** was launched in 2014 by DC Alliance of Youth Advocates and the Institute for Educational Leadership. YWLA is a ten-month professional development and capacity building curriculum targeted to organizations and government agencies providing youth workforce development programming in the District of Columbia.

2. **DC Adult & Family Literacy Coalition** is an alliance of adult learners, educators, advocates, public and private program providers, foundations and individuals from all quadrants of the District of Columbia. Its mission is to advance the cause of literacy, numeracy and technology skills for all adults in DC by advocating for policy that supports these goals, sharing best practices and raising public awareness of adult and family literacy.

3. **First Tuesdays Workforce Advocacy Group** is an informal group of workforce advocates, researchers and funders who meet monthly for lunch to work together to improve the workforce development system in the District of Columbia. Its goal is to help all DC residents achieve economic security through policy and practice.

Source: https://gwwdc.org/professionals/

KC Rising

Kansas City is a community of communities. Millions of lives woven together, across borders and neighborhoods, sharing one future. Every aspect of our region contributes its own history, perspective, and energy. The challenges posed by the area's diverse nature are far outweighed by what it brings in unmatched potential. KC Rising is how KC's leaders forge pathways of greater collaboration to guide us forward.

Education Pillar: Because the rate of technological advancement and change in our global economy continues to increase, more than half of today's schoolchildren will soon have careers in occupations that don't currently exist. Meanwhile, businesses struggle to find the talented workers they need to fill high-quality jobs now and create more in the future.

To effectively address this gap, talent and potential must be recognized, maximized, and met with resources and attention across the learning continuum. A foundation of technical knowledge, along with critical thinking and communication skills, allows learners of all ages to remain competitive. Building an agile culture of enduring, well-rounded education will keep involved citizens inventing, creating, and thriving.

Industry-led cooperation, alongside flexible credentialing, creates trailblazing regional talent-to-work pipelines by connecting classroom and real-world learning with hiring. This system should strive to remain nimble and responsive as our economy evolves. KC is proudly at the forefront of this movement, with engaged stakeholders focused on measurable outcomes. We must continue to reimagine, disrupt, and transform.

Source: https://kcrising.com/

Miami Dade - Academic Leaders Council(ALC)

The Academic Leaders Council (ALC) and Talent Development Network were developed to address skills gaps in target industries by aligning curricula with targeted industry needs, advancing internship programs that retain college graduates in Miami-Dade County, and collaborating on educational issues.The ALC provides a forum for dialogue and cooperation among the largest Miami-based colleges and universities, along with Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS). The Talent Development Network (TDN) was born from the institutions' shared need to increase the number of internship opportunities for their students, TDN is an online platform that connects employers with students looking for internships. Employers have the advantage of having their internship posting reach students from seven different educational institutions via one centralized portal, while students have the advantage of exploring opportunities submitted by OCOG partners throughout the community including both the public and private sectors.

This was developed to address skills gaps in target industries by aligning curricula with targeted industry needs, advancing internship programs that retain college graduates in Miami-Dade County, and collaborating on educational issues.

Source: https://www.beaconcouncilfoundation.org/academic-leaders-council

Center of Excellence for Careers in Education Advisory Board (Auburn, WA)

The Center of Excellence for Careers in Education in Auburn, WA maintains an active advisory board as a means of providing continual input. Comprising educators and industry leaders, the advisory board helps identify and shape Center-related initiatives and activities. It does so by sharing industry-related needs, job skill gaps, and analyzing emerging trends and new technology. Advisory Board members play an instrumental role in identifying industry priorities and connecting the Center to new partnerships and collaborations. The advisory board meets on a quarterly basis.

With the help of experts on the topic and samples from various colleges, the Construction Center of Excellence and the Center of Excellence for Careers in Education have developed a toolkit that includes documents to assist in the development and maintenance of an advisory board that will meet program needs. The toolkit includes a list of advisory board best practices, employer engagement best practices, welcome letters, ethics guides, partner assessments and more.

Source: https://www.careersined.org/advisory-board

TOPIC: EVALUATION METHODS

Quantitative evaluations of sectoral training programs

Sectoral training programs are currently highly regarded because they not only get substantial employer input for workforce investment programs, they also help regions and communities focus their activities on sectors of interest. The following organizations were described as involving employers in the design of programs by providing input into program offerings or curricula. They also involved employers in the delivery of programs by offering opportunities for participants to gain work experience or asking employers to participate in program activities, such as mock interviews for participants and job fairs:

The Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership (WRTP) is an association of employers and unions, described as a workforce intermediary, that develops short-term training programs (typically two to eight weeks long) to meet the needs of specific employers. For the demonstration, their training programs in the construction, manufacturing, and health care sectors were included.

Source: https://wrtp.org/

Jewish Vocational Service (JVS)-Boston is a nonprofit organization. It operates one of Boston's American Job Centers for Workforce Investment Act customers and serves a range of disadvantaged customers, including refugees, immigrants, and welfare recipients. JVS-Boston's training programs in medical billing and accounting were included in the demonstration.

Source: https://www.jvs-boston.org/

Per Scholas is a New York City organization that combines vocational training with a program to recycle computers and distribute them to low-income individuals. Per Scholas's computer technician training program, which included training for repair and maintenance of computers, printers, and copiers, was included in the demonstration

Source: https://perscholas.org/

The Future Ready Iowa Alliance publishes annually Metrics That Matter, a report highlighting progress toward the Governor's postsecondary attainment goal that Iowans earn an additional 139,900 post secondary credentials by 2025. This report includes metrics on the current skills gap such as rates of educational attainment (including registered apprentices), data on high-demand jobs, average earnings, and employer-demanded skills across industries

Source: https://www.futurereadyiowa.gov/metrics

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