

# Building Sustainable and Strategic Partnerships with Business and Industry

A Step-by-Step Guide for Community Colleges



Prepared by Genz Consulting for Achieving the Dream



Achieving the Dream™



ARCONIC FOUNDATION

# Table of Contents

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<b>Acknowledgements</b> . . . . .	<b>3</b>
<b>Preface</b> . . . . .	<b>4</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> . . . . .	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction: The Challenge</b> . . . . .	<b>7</b>
<b>The Goal: Strategic Partnerships with Industry</b> . . . . .	<b>8</b>
<b>What's in It for Colleges?</b> . . . . .	<b>9</b>
<b>What's in It for Businesses?</b> . . . . .	<b>10</b>
<b>What it Takes: A Step-by-Step Process for Building Strategic Industry Partnerships</b> . . . . .	<b>11</b>
<b>Step One: Take Stock of Employer Engagement Efforts</b> . . . . .	<b>11</b>
Within the College . . . . .	<b>11</b>
Outside the College . . . . .	<b>12</b>
<b>Step Two: Build Support for a New Approach Within the College and Broader Region</b> . . . . .	<b>12</b>
<b>Step Three: Identify the Right Co-Conveners and Make the Right Ask</b> . . . . .	<b>14</b>
<b>Step Four: Hold Kickoff Meeting and Seek Actions to Cement Industry Buy-In</b> . . . . .	<b>16</b>
<b>Step Five: Build and Sustain the Momentum</b> . . . . .	<b>17</b>
<b>What Does Success Look Like?</b> . . . . .	<b>19</b>

# Acknowledgements

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This guide, prepared by Genz Consulting, is largely informed by and draws from the national Next Generation Sector Partnership Community of Practice, a network of community college, workforce development, and economic development leaders that is actively engaged in building industry-driven, “next gen” sector partnerships. These partnerships bring together a critical mass of business leaders to address the shared competitiveness needs of their sector, working in partnership with community colleges, as well as other education, workforce development, and economic development programs. Learn more about the Next Gen Community of Practice at [www.nextgensectorpartnerships.com](http://www.nextgensectorpartnerships.com).

The guide also builds on lessons learned from Achieving the Dream’s (ATD) Community College Advanced Manufacturing Career Pathways Initiative, funded by Arconic Foundation, which brings together ATD network colleges Muskegon Community College (MI), Cuyahoga Community College (OH), and Westmoreland County Community College (PA), in partnership with employers, local workforce boards, and other key stakeholders to improve industry-college collaborations and to strengthen the advanced manufacturing workforce pipeline. Thanks to leaders from each of these colleges for their insights and input into this guide.

# Preface

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As part of their mission to prepare students for careers, community colleges are being called upon to deepen their relationships with business and industry. On the one hand, partnerships with industry are critical to ensure that colleges stay attuned to the ever-changing skill needs of regional employers. On the other hand, preparing a skilled workforce requires employers to step up in offering internships and other work-based experiences to augment classroom learning and help ensure that students graduate with applied, real-world experiences. Across the country, colleges are working to build partnerships with industry that yield high-quality, real-time information on skill requirements and result in employer commitment to providing the training and experiences needed to prepare a skilled workforce.

Colleges that participated in Achieving the Dream's Community College Advanced Manufacturing Career Pathways Initiative, funded by Arconic Foundation, tackled this challenge by convening regional manufacturing employers along with other regional workforce development partners including workforce development boards, community-based organizations, and industry associations, to develop action plans that respond to unique local talent needs. The goal was to hear directly from employers about their most critical talent needs and to develop responsive solutions, engaging multiple education and training providers in the region. While each participating college customized its approach, tailored to the unique needs of its local labor markets, the initiative generated common lessons about what it takes to achieve and sustain the employer engagement needed to build stronger career pathways in to manufacturing.

This guide captures and builds on these lessons. It is intended to support other colleges working to expand their partnerships with business and industry and looking for new approaches to achieving deeper and more sustained commitment from employers. While every college faces unique challenges in meeting the needs of its regional economy, ATD hopes to reveal key promising practices and lessons learned that apply to colleges across the country looking for ways to think differently about their partnerships with industry.

Dr. Karen A. Stout, President  
Achieving the Dream

# Executive Summary

Preparing students to be successful in today's economy requires a different kind of partnership between community colleges and business and industry, moving beyond the traditional advisory roles. Surveys, focus groups, and advisory boards inform existing programs but are often transactional in nature. Colleges must struggle to achieve sustained employer commitment to contributing to programs—for example, by expanding work-based learning opportunities, providing guest instructors, or donating the latest technologies or equipment to ensure that classrooms keep pace with changing industry standards. Furthermore, colleges often find it difficult to engage a true critical mass of employers to advise on their programs since there are multiple, competing demands for their time and attention. As a result, colleges often rely on only a small sample of employers when they make key programmatic decisions.

An alternative approach requires community college leaders to re-think the roles that industry plays in shaping college programs, re-design how the college engages with industry, and deepen partnerships between colleges and other workforce and training providers in the region to approach industry as a unified front. The result? More sustained commitment from employers to shaping college programs; more accurate, real-time information on the needs of the regional labor market; and more students prepared with the skills and experiences they need to succeed in careers that pay family-sustaining wages.





This guide describes these strategic partnerships, including what they achieve for colleges and for business and industry. It also includes a step-by-step process for colleges looking to deepen and expand their partnerships with industry, including:

- ▶ **Taking stock of existing employer engagement efforts in the college and in the broader region** to identify gaps or areas of duplication of efforts and assess the strength of existing employer engagement efforts.
- ▶ **Making the case for a more broadly coordinated employer engagement effort** within and outside the college, building support for a unified employer engagement strategy that reduces the number of fragmented outreach efforts.
- ▶ **Identifying the right co-convenor for an industry partnership**, who is perceived as neutral and who has credibility with business and industry and with other education and workforce development partners.
- ▶ **Holding a kickoff meeting and taking actions to cement industry buy-in.** This includes giving the floor to industry at the first meeting and facilitating business leaders to develop a common agenda and form industry-led teams to tackle their most pressing priorities.
- ▶ **Building and sustaining momentum over time**, responding to industry's priorities through collaborative problem-solving, starting with 'quick wins' and building to longer-term transformations in how students and jobseekers are prepared for careers in the targeted sector.

# Introduction: The Challenge

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In today's dynamic economy, jobs are changing quickly. In every industry—whether manufacturing, agriculture, banking, or others—technology is transforming the way business is done. This means demand for skilled workers is growing as automation makes routine jobs obsolete. And with growing global competition, companies in all industries are striving to be leaner and more efficient, re-thinking staffing models and job descriptions in order to stay as competitive as possible.

How can community colleges keep pace with these changes? What does it take to stay closely attuned and responsive to the needs of industry in a complex and ever-changing labor market? And how can colleges preparing workers enlist the full support of industry—to provide work-based learning, facility tours, and equipment donations, and not just advice?

For decades, colleges have relied on advisory boards, surveys, and focus groups to understand the needs of industry. Faculty, program deans, career services offices, and others have reached out to businesses to seek internships and connect students to jobs. But despite many hours of staff time, these efforts often only touch a handful of businesses, yielding an incomplete understanding of the real needs of the local labor market. And with multiple points of outreach and disconnected 'asks' to employers, this approach rarely achieves sustained commitment from business leaders to contributing to college programs in substantive ways.

Across the country, colleges are grappling with these challenges and looking for new ways to engage with business and industry that yield deeper commitment from employers and more accurate information on the real needs of the local labor market.

# The Goal: Strategic Partnerships with Industry

What's an alternative approach? Moving beyond transactional and fragmented connections to employers requires college leaders to *re-think* the role of industry in informing decisions about academic and workforce development programming and to *re-design* how they engage employers throughout college operations.

Partnerships with Industry	
TRADITIONAL	STRATEGIC
Led by faculty/staff and advised by business	Led by business and supported by faculty/staff
One-on-one outreach to individual firms	Multiple companies from the same sector
Company representatives	Senior decision-makers from business
Address needs of specific programs	Address comprehensive workforce needs of targeted sector including career advising, pathways from K-12 and to 4-year programs and curriculum in multiple programs
Multiple meetings for business leaders to shape college programs one at a time	One place for business leaders to impact the college as a whole
Community college 'goes it alone,' forming partnerships independent of other regional industry engagement efforts	Community college is part of a regional team approaching industry with a unified front

This step-by-step guide describes the practices that underlie sustainable and strategic partnerships between colleges and industry. These steps move the relationship beyond narrow advisory functions, aligning college programs with the needs of industry and mobilizing business leaders to make deeper commitments to building effective career pathways. Such partnerships provide a vehicle for college leaders to make strategic decisions that ensure programs respond to industry needs. The result? Businesses find the talent they need to grow and students get better jobs.

Strategic partnerships with industry are distinguished from traditional employer engagement approaches in the following ways:

- ▶ **They are led by business leaders and supported by college faculty and staff**, not the other way around. This means that business leaders define the agenda and champion their own priorities. College faculty and staff participate primarily as listeners, to gain an understanding of industry needs and work together to formulate creative responses.
- ▶ **They bring together multiple businesses from a single industry sector**, as opposed to generating one-on-one meetings with individual firms. As a result, they aggregate the needs of the sector across small, medium, and large companies.
- ▶ **They target senior decision-makers from business**, not just company representatives who cannot make commitments on behalf of their company. Ideally this means chief company

officers (C-Suite leaders such as CEOs and COOs), but can include human resource leaders if they have decision-making authority within their companies.

- ▶ **They address the comprehensive workforce needs of the targeted sector**, not just offer advise or input on specific programs. By keeping the agenda open-ended, these partnerships focus on what matters most to business leaders, whether that's helping colleges update an existing college program, create a new one altogether, or build stronger connections with K-12 or four-year institutions. The focus is on what the industry needs to produce a stronger talent pipeline overall, not just what individual college programs can do to prepare students.
- ▶ **They serve as one place for business leaders to influence the college at *all* levels, reducing duplication of efforts and multiple points of outreach from various arms within the college.** Rather than colleges approaching businesses with multiple 'asks' from departments and divisions within the college (faculty, career services, fundraising, and so on) partnerships act as the go-to vehicle for senior business leaders to influence and contribute to college programming, including:
  - Strategically assessing program offerings to identify gaps or areas of duplication;
  - Delegating the right business leaders to serve on advisory boards;
  - Identifying the most efficient and effective ways to integrate work-based learning opportunities into college programs;
  - Contributing to career advising, donating equipment, offering guest instructors, and identifying other meaningful ways to contribute to college programs.
- ▶ **They *integrate* with other regional industry engagement efforts, not *isolate*.** Fragmented employer outreach is not limited to community colleges. Other organizations like workforce development boards, chambers of commerce, adult basic education providers, and community-based organizations also are reaching out to industry to understand their needs and solicit their engagement. Strategic partnerships align purposefully with these initiatives rather than duplicating or competing with existing efforts.

## What's in It for Colleges?

Making a shift to strategic partnerships with industry represents a significant departure from the status quo. It requires college leaders to support a coordinated approach to industry engagement and to be willing to respond in meaningful ways to industry feedback and requests. This means challenging traditional ways of thinking about workforce programs and often, breaking down institutional silos. So, what's in it for colleges?



- ▶ **An opportunity to be more relevant to business and industry.** When business leaders have an efficient and effective mechanism to partner with colleges and influence programming, they are more likely to use colleges as a go-to source of talent.
- ▶ **More students successfully entering jobs and careers.** The majority of community college students enroll with a goal of preparing for a career. By being better connected to business and industry, college programs are more likely to lead to student success in the workforce.
- ▶ **More accurate information on industry needs.** A critical mass of business leaders from the targeted sector can provide real-time information on their most high-priority needs and gaps.

- ▶ **Greater support from industry in building programs.** When business leaders have a platform to define their own agenda and collaborate with colleges on their own terms, they are more likely to make substantive commitments to college programs, whether in-kind or financial.

### What's in It for Businesses?

Nationally, businesses are struggling to find the talent they need to stay competitive in a global economy. At the same time, partnering with community colleges and other workforce training providers can be time-consuming without a clear return on investment. By collaborating with other businesses to agree on critical skill needs shared across the industry and working in an efficient way with education partners, businesses more readily can shape the talent pipeline they need. Specifically, strategic partnerships with colleges offer businesses:

- ▶ **A more efficient and effective way to work with colleges** to prioritize critical skill needs, mitigate gaps in programming, and augment classroom learning with relevant work-based learning experiences.
- ▶ **A way to collaborate with other industry peers in the sector** to agree upon and prioritize shared workforce needs.
- ▶ **The ability to influence college programming at the scale needed.** Rather than relying on program advisory boards alone to influence college programming, strategic partnerships allow business leaders to address their comprehensive talent needs in partnership with community colleges.

# What It Takes: A Step-by-Step Process for Building Strategic Industry Partnerships

This step-by-step guide describes how community colleges can build strategic partnerships with industry. It is intended to be used by community college leaders looking for ways to strengthen existing employer outreach to build deeper and more sustainable partnerships with business.

## Step One: Take Stock of Current Employer Engagement Efforts

The starting place in building more strategic partnerships with industry is understanding what's already going on in terms of business outreach and engagement. This involves inventorying efforts both within and outside the college to understand where and how businesses are currently being convened or solicited for input. This is a critical step to ensure that you are directly addressing the issue of fragmented employer outreach, rather than adding one more industry engagement effort to an already crowded field. As long as businesses are being approached by multiple, independent parties with similar or competing requests, it will be challenging to get and keep their attention. A more strategic approach to business engagement must involve closely coordinating and aligning with other business engagement efforts.

### Inside the College

- ▶ **Map out the points of employer outreach within your college.** Convene a core team of college faculty and staff who represent the various departments or divisions that reach out to business—career services, academic departments, development, and so on.
- ▶ **Develop a list of ways that the college is engaging business by asking:**
  - Who is currently reaching out to businesses?
  - Where are we making one-on-one asks (e.g., individual outreach for internship requests) vs. bringing businesses together (e.g., advisory boards)?
  - What businesses are we targeting and who within those businesses? (sectors of focus, small- or medium-sized firms, HR leaders or CEOs, and so on.)
  - What is the purpose of each outreach effort?
- ▶ **Assess the effectiveness of those efforts and identify any areas of duplication.**
  - Have an honest dialogue about what your inventory reveals.

- How successful are your various efforts in terms of level of business participation, quality of feedback, level of business commitment?
- Where are you duplicating efforts in terms of which businesses you engage with or in the purpose for the outreach?

### **Outside the College**

- ▶ **Consider and identify other organizations and agencies in your region that are also reaching out to and convening business leaders.** More than likely, they are making similar asks to industry—inquiring about workforce needs, asking for participation in focus groups, and looking for internships, job placement opportunities, or letters of support.
- ▶ **Bring together this core group of partners in your region** to work through similar questions to the ones you raised about business outreach inside the college. Ask:
  - What organizations are reaching out to business and industry to ask for information or support with workforce development, education, or economic development programs? (Consider Chambers of Commerce, workforce development boards, industry associations, economic development organizations, community-based organizations, K-12 career and technical education programs, adult basic education programs, four-year universities).
  - What venues exist that bring businesses together and provide opportunities to learn about their needs? (These might be advisory boards, CEO roundtables, sector partnerships, civic organizations, and so on.)
  - What businesses are other organizations targeting and who within those businesses (sectors of focus, small- or medium-sized firms, HR leaders or CEOs, and so on)?
  - What is the purpose of each outreach effort?
- ▶ **Again, with this initial inventory in hand, step back and assess.**
  - Are there areas of duplication of efforts?
  - Where could regional efforts be better coordinated or targeted?
  - Of the various avenues for business to engage with public partners, which are most effective?

### **Step Two: Build Support for a New Approach Within the College and Broader Region**

Having inventoried the many employer engagement efforts at the college and in the broader region, you likely have a clear picture of the challenge; in almost every region there are multiple, competing efforts to engage with the same business leaders. This leads to business fatigue and burnout, which can

make it difficult for any organization—whether a community college, workforce board, or economic development organization—to get and keep a true critical mass of business leaders engaged.

Moving past fragmented and competing outreach efforts requires a shared commitment among partners within

and outside the college to jointly approach industry, building a ‘shared table’ that allows for multiple departments and organizations to understand industry needs and collaborate with one another to respond appropriately.



► **Build support within the college.** Start within the college to enlist support for a more coordinated industry engagement effort. This is best done as a ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ effort. Engaging the president is helpful in setting a consistent vision and message for the college as a whole. At the same time, it’s critical to engage key faculty and staff who are directly involved in industry engagement efforts. As you build support within the college, look for college leaders who have particularly strong relationships with business and industry. These could be faculty, program deans, or others. It’s especially important to bring in these leaders early on to get their ideas about how to broaden and deepen employer engagement throughout the college, building on existing efforts.

For college faculty and staff, set expectations clearly that a more strategic industry engagement approach will yield greater commitment from industry, but will also require them to respond in proactive and creative ways. Look for ‘agents of change’ within various departments in the college and enlist their support. They will be important to your ability to demonstrate progress and responsiveness to industry.

► **Build support from other regional partners, focusing on those that have the greatest credibility with business leaders.** It may be tempting to stop here and frame the new approach to industry engagement as a college initiative. But from businesses’ perspective, it can be hard to differentiate among a college-focused workforce initiative or one convened by the workforce development board or a K-12 career and technical education (CTE) program. Businesses are most interested in working with multiple partners that are building a skilled talent pipeline. Therefore, they are more

likely to stay engaged over the long term if they can access multiple partners at a single table, rather than participating in multiple initiatives. That's why it's critical to build support for a new approach as a regional effort, not a college initiative.

- ▶ **Focus on the organizations that have the greatest credibility with business leaders.** This may be the workforce development board, Chamber of Commerce, economic development organization, or other partners. Assemble a core team to jointly plan for an employer-led partnership that puts business leaders in the driver's seat and brings together multiple partners from the college and other organizations to respond to their needs.

### Step Three: Identify the Right Co-Conveners and Make the Right Ask

With a better understanding of which organizations are connected to industry in the region and who, within the college, have the strongest relationships, make a decision about who is best positioned to co-convene the partnership with the college. This may be a partnership between the college president and the local Chamber of Commerce; it may be a collaboration of the K-12 superintendents, community college president(s), and the local workforce development board. The most important element is that it's a group effort, not just a single college's initiative.

Work with other convening partners to plan a kickoff meeting that will bring together 20 to 30 CEOs and senior decision-makers from the targeted sector to begin to map out an industry-led strategy for building a stronger talent pipeline. Since they likely have been to similar events in the past, the targeted business leaders will likely be skeptical that this is more than "just another meeting." To finesse skepticism, have the co-conveners frame this first meeting as part of a different kind of partnership by describing it as:

- ▶ A way to collaborate with multiple partners within the college and other education and training organizations to address workforce needs comprehensively (vs. through narrow conversations focused only on existing programs);
- ▶ A way to more effectively and efficiently shape education and training programs (vs. a chance to only provide input);
- ▶ Industry-led and action-oriented (vs. being driven by individual organizations or grants).

Enlist the support of key business champions early on in helping to draft an invitation to the kickoff and identify the right business leaders to engage. Ideally, the invitation letter would be signed by the business champions themselves to make clear that this will be an industry-led meeting. Even better, ask business champions to host the first meeting at a place of business.

## Sample Invitation for Kickoff Meeting

Ideally this letter would be signed by two to three business champions from the targeted sector. To reflect the fact that it is being co-hosted by the college and other regional partners, you may consider displaying the logos of those colleges and businesses beneath the signature of the business champions.

Dear Sandra,

I'm writing to invite you to be a part of a new manufacturing-focused effort in our region. I hope you'll join us for our kick-off meeting on DATE and TIME in the Board Room at Brownsville Machining.

As manufacturers, we know our growth and future competitiveness depends on a skilled workforce. But it's a daily struggle to find the people with the right skills and work ethic to make our companies thrive here in REGION. We know there are multiple efforts in our region to prepare people for careers in manufacturing but they're often not at the scale they need to be or are missing the mark in targeting the real needs of industry.

We want to take a new approach to building the talent pipeline our industry needs. The purpose of the meeting on DATE will be to "launch" an industry-led partnership to identify and address the workforce needs that impact all of us. It will be driven by strategic and thoughtful business leaders like you and include the education and training partners in our region (list other partners here). They will be in "listen-only" mode at the first meeting in order to hear directly from us about what are our most critical workforce needs. They are committed to supporting us in making changes to how students are prepared for careers in manufacturing, but are eager to first hear from us about what our most critical priorities are.

The meeting on DATE will be a two-hour commitment. It will be professionally facilitated, focused, and will result in the formation of industry-led action teams to pursue the priorities we agree are most important. I hope you will join us.

If you have any questions or want to learn more, please feel free to call me at XXX-XXXX. I look forward to seeing you on DATE.

Best,

Joe Smith  
CEO, Brownsville Machining

Jane Cook  
CEO, Greens Aerospace

## Step Four: Hold Kickoff Meeting and Seek Actions to Cement Industry Buy-In

The goal of the kickoff meeting is to understand industry leaders' most pressing priorities and to begin forming industry-led teams to advance those priorities. It's important that the first meeting sets the right tone in order to encourage business leaders to take ownership over the agenda. Consider the following tips in designing and facilitating the meeting:

### Tip: Why Giving the Floor to Industry Matters

College leaders are experts in education and workforce development. And, for good reason, they are often eager to share details on their programs with industry leaders who can sometimes be unaware of what's available. But strategic, long-term partnerships with industry require a different kind of relationship. Rather than college leaders 'selling' their programs to industry, industry leaders need to define and own their own agenda, inviting support from college leaders when the time is right.

Take this example from a sector partnership in Phoenix. Business leaders were discussing their struggles to find talent with the right soft skills. A public partner from the local workforce development board jumped in to share about the various soft skill training programs they already have. Several business leaders were familiar with the program but knew it wasn't addressing the full extent of the problem. To them, the public partner's comments felt like a sales pitch for a solution before they had fully understood the problem. This led them to disengage, not returning to future meetings. If, instead, the workforce partner had given the floor to business leaders to clearly define the soft skills challenge on their own terms and begin developing their own solutions, the public partner would have built trust and rapport with industry that would pave the way for a productive relationship down the road. This includes offering their program as a potential resource (a piece of the puzzle, rather than the full solution) as part of a collaborative problem-solving process.

- ▶ **Set up the room to differentiate seating for business leaders and public partners within the college and other organizations.** Business leaders should be front and center, with others in a listening mode seated toward the periphery of the room. This is a critical distinction from traditional meetings with business and industry where, often, public partners outnumber business leaders and, often, tend to do more of the talking. It sends a message that business leaders will have the floor for the duration of the meeting. This gives them the space to clarify and own their own agenda, rather than looking to public partners to provide "the answer" right away.
- ▶ **Ask that college leaders and other public partners stay in "listen-only" mode to give the floor to industry.** Encouraging industry to step up as full partners in building the talent pipeline they need requires giving them the space they need to find their voice and own their own ideas. For at least the first few meetings, ask that college and community partners refrain from joining the discussion in order to make space for the industry voice to emerge.
- ▶ **Use a neutral facilitator.** Send a clear message that business leaders determine the agenda of the partnership, based on their most critical priorities. The facilitator is there to keep the discussion focused and action-oriented but not to push an agenda.
- ▶ **Start the discussion with broad questions and then focus on action around shared priorities.** Rather than asking for input on specific programs or initiatives, the facilitator should start with open-ended questions like, "What are your

most pressing workforce issues as you think about the next one to three years?” From there, the discussion should move to identify specific areas of common need and to probe for action—e.g. “What would it take to mitigate or address these workforce gaps?”

- ▶ **End with a call for champions.** This is a crucial final step. Make clear that this partnership will not advance initiatives without industry champions

## Examples of Quick Wins

Business leaders are most likely to rally around their own ideas, rather than responding to yours. Let them come up with their own ‘quick wins,’ but these examples may provide food for thought.

**Host a facility tour for faculty and staff.** To give faculty and staff an up-to-date understanding of what the industry looks like, organize a tour for key advising staff and faculty.

**Create a speakers’ bureau.** Bring industry onto the campus by organizing a series of guest instructors in the classroom.

**Get specific on soft skills.** To better understand what soft skills are really needed on-the-job, ask industry for their top five specific scenarios that illustrate which soft skills are most critical. Use this information to develop a soft skills manual to share with faculty and staff.

committed to them. This ensures that the partnership stays focused on the issues that matter to industry. Once you have discerned a set of shared priorities for action, make a call for industry champions to join teams to advance those priorities. If no one signs up for a priority, take that priority off the table for now. (This might create some healthy pressure that encourages other business leaders to volunteer!) At the end of the meeting, this will leave you with a set of priorities and champions associated with each that the group commits to moving forward with.

After the first meeting, facilitate teams of champions to move from ideas to action, defining measurable objectives and immediate opportunities for “quick wins.” The goal is to solidify industry ownership over the priorities of the partnership and to take action with tangible steps. Within the first 60 to 90 days of the kickoff meeting, aim for some tangible “wins” that will demonstrate progress to business leaders and build momentum for the longer term.

## Step Five: Build and Sustain the Momentum

Effective industry partnerships require a commitment to action and creative problem-solving on both sides—from business leaders as well as from college and other education and training partners. This means being willing to experiment, work across institutional silos, try new approaches, and receive and integrate feedback.

As business partners clarify their agenda, defining outcomes and quick wins for priority strategies, work with key college leaders and external partners to begin identifying creative responses to industry priorities:

- ▶ **Find the right leaders within the college to tackle priorities that industry has identified.** Form small action teams of college leaders tasked with tackling particular challenges and coming up with potential solutions

## So, Who's in Charge?

### Roles of College Leaders and Staff in Building and Sustaining Strategic Partnerships with Industry

Strategic partnerships with industry are a team effort. No individual leader within the college—whether the president or director of workforce development—can build and maintain a partnership singlehandedly. Consider three key roles in initiating, building, and sustaining strategic partnerships with industry.

- ▶ **Championing a new vision for industry engagement within the college.** Buy-in from faculty and staff throughout the college is critical to reducing duplication of employer outreach efforts. Leadership from the president is key in sending a strong and early message that the college as a whole is committed to a more strategic industry engagement approach.
- ▶ **Co-convening industry partnership along with regional partners.** Industry partnerships require staffing support to coordinate and facilitate meetings, support industry-led action teams, and communicate with other industry leaders and regional partners. This role requires a leader who is collaborative, organized, and who has credibility with business leaders and with other key regional partners. Ideally, a convener within the college partners with another co-convener from another organization in the region in order to establish broad-based support for the partnership.
- ▶ **Responding to industry priorities and building career pathways.** The long-term impact of industry partnerships comes from the ways they transform college programs and pathways. This requires college faculty and staff in multiple departments to:
  - Recognize the industry partnership as the go-to place to understand industry needs, reducing fragmented employer outreach efforts, and;
  - Actively integrate industry feedback into their programs, seeking out new ways to be more responsive to industry priorities.

to be vetted with industry leaders. Leverage the 'agents of change' you identified in your early outreach to key college faculty and staff (Step 2). For example, if industry has prioritized a need for more hands-on learning opportunities, consider how you may be able to streamline the process by which companies could host internships or project-based learning opportunities. Are there policies that need to be changed or systems established to make it as easy as possible for companies to host interns? Task an action team with examining this issue and developing creative solutions.

- ▶ **Start small and build rather than trying to tackle too much at once.** Being able to demonstrate responsiveness at a small scale goes a long way toward shoring up your relationship with industry partners. That builds their level of commitment and motivation to tackle the long-term issues like redesigning career advising or developing a series of new programs.
- ▶ **Keep business in the lead. As the partnership builds momentum, be sure to keep industry in the driver's seat.** This means focusing on the priorities that industry leaders define, rather than on institutional or grant-related initiatives. As you build on successes and increase momentum, share the credit, acknowledging the contributions of business leaders as well as other partners outside the college. This is key in ensuring that all parties continue to actively contribute to the partnership over the long term, rather than deferring to college leaders or a few key staff.

# What Does Success Look Like?

Successful partnerships are not one-time initiatives tied to grants or special programs. Instead, they become a way of doing business. For colleges, this means that the partnership serves as the go-to place to gain strategic information on labor market demand and to broker collaborations with various departments within



the college. As a result, there are fewer independent and disconnected points of outreach to business and industry. It also means that decisions about how programs are offered factor in the most critical needs of the business leaders driving the industry sectors of the region's economy.

For businesses, this means that there are more avenues to engage meaningfully in building the talent pipeline they need. With easier ways to provide feedback on programs and to contribute work-based learning opportunities, business leaders are more involved in shaping programs.

Most importantly, successful partnerships evolve over time. As industry needs change and as the regional economy shifts, partnerships also change to meet new demands. This means continually attracting new business leaders as well as engaging a diverse group of faculty and staff within the college to ensure that it stays relevant and impactful.

Ultimately, the goal is creating a system where business leaders are jointly invested in building the worker-preparation systems they need and where students have accessible pathways into jobs and careers. This is no small feat. But it's critical to fulfilling community colleges' mission of connecting students to jobs and careers and ensuring businesses can access the talent they need to grow and thrive.

