

# Business and Community College Partnerships: A Blueprint



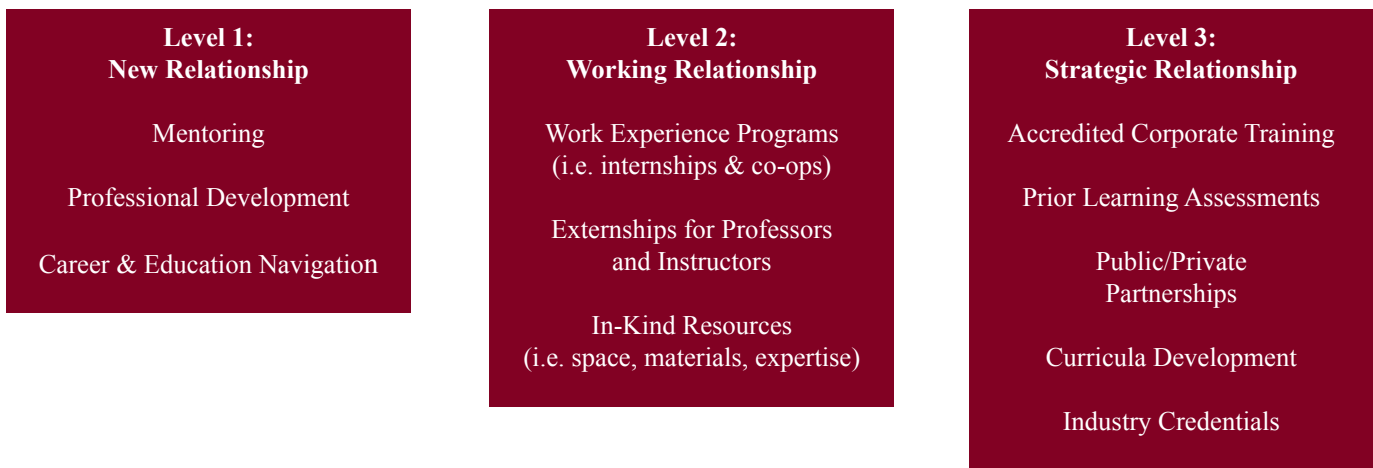
# Introduction

For over a decade Corporate Voices for Working Families (Corporate Voices) has provided leading best-practice employers a forum to improve the lives of working families, while strengthening our nation's economy. Many employers accomplish this by supporting the educational attainment of current and future employees. In order to ensure that individuals have the skills to succeed in the workplace and are on education and career pathways to earning family sustaining wages, employers often partner with community colleges in Learn and Earn models of talent development. These partnerships integrate important aspects of employment and education for working learners and do so at an attractive price point for working families.

Learn and Earn partnerships are formulated around the distinct connection between college completion and workforce preparedness. Relevant job experience is often critical for individuals who need their education to prepare them for the workforce. The correlation between education and work, combined with economic forecasts make partnerships between businesses and community colleges a smart solution that can mutually benefit employers, educators and individuals. *Business and Community College Partnerships: A Blueprint* helps practitioners create and sustain these partnerships to increase the skills of employees and college completion rates.

## Types of Partnerships

Expertise and comfort level can determine the form and focus of partnerships. As partners take time to gain an understanding of what it takes to work together, additional projects can form and a deeper relationship can result. The opportunity exists to grow partnerships into the various types of Learn and Earn models described in the graphic below and in the best practice examples highlighted throughout the blueprint.



This blueprint, which is *intended for business and community college leaders who have limited expertise in forming partnerships and are interested in undertaking such an endeavor*, is divided into four sections:

- Overview: Explains how partnerships serve businesses, community colleges and working learners.
- Section I: Targets businesses with strategic ways to leverage community college expertise.
- Section II: Identifies business and community college divisions where partnerships can be integrated.
- Section III: Targets community colleges with the advantages of partnering with business.

The related imperatives of enhancing the skills of the nation's workforce and improving college completion rates will require broad commitment and investment from a range of stakeholders. Two of those stakeholders—businesses and community colleges—share complementary goals. Employers need skilled workers; community colleges need to prepare students with the education required to succeed in today's economy. This brief overview section explains how, working together, businesses and community colleges can best serve their mutual interests and the needs of the working learners who depend on them.

## **Partnerships Meet Business Imperatives**

Businesses partner with community colleges in order to meet multiple goals. Community colleges build business' talent pipelines by providing 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace education and training to current and future entry-level employees. In addition, businesses can partner to help meet other business imperatives, including:

- Increase employee retention rates;
- Improve skill and education levels;
- Expand employee diversity; and
- Boost performance and productivity.

Businesses who partner with community colleges are often able to see a positive return on their training investments. Employers with career matrixes find that as retention increases so does employees' experience, potentially increasing productivity and reducing rework and correction costs. The quality of products and services can rise with corresponding increases in customer satisfaction and revenues. For detailed information on how companies are meeting these imperatives, visit Corporate Voices' Learn and Earn Micro Business Cases on [Crest Cadillac](#), [KPMG](#) and [Millstone Power Station](#) at [www.corporatevoices.org/our-work/pse/home](http://www.corporatevoices.org/our-work/pse/home).

## **Partnerships Meet Community College Imperatives**

For community colleges, partnerships with business will usually support their mission of assisting individuals to obtain marketable skills and credentials that allow them to access a sustainable career path. Through this work, community colleges can look to their business partners to help:

- Meet college completion goals;
- Develop and validate curriculum;
- Supply in-kind donations of equipment and materials;
- Extend scarce classroom space;
- Increase revenues; and
- Provide visibility.

## **Partnerships Meet Working Learner Imperatives**

According to Demos, 66 percent of young community college students work more than 20 hours per week and 58 percent enroll only part time, which appears to increase the risk of dropping out even more than employment. Business and community college partnerships allow these individuals, working learners, to fulfill their need to continue employment and simultaneously advance their education, which allows them to overcome life challenges, and receive valuable education and work experience. By obtaining a postsecondary education credential these individuals are better positioned for initial employment, as well as promotions, bonuses and increased job stability.

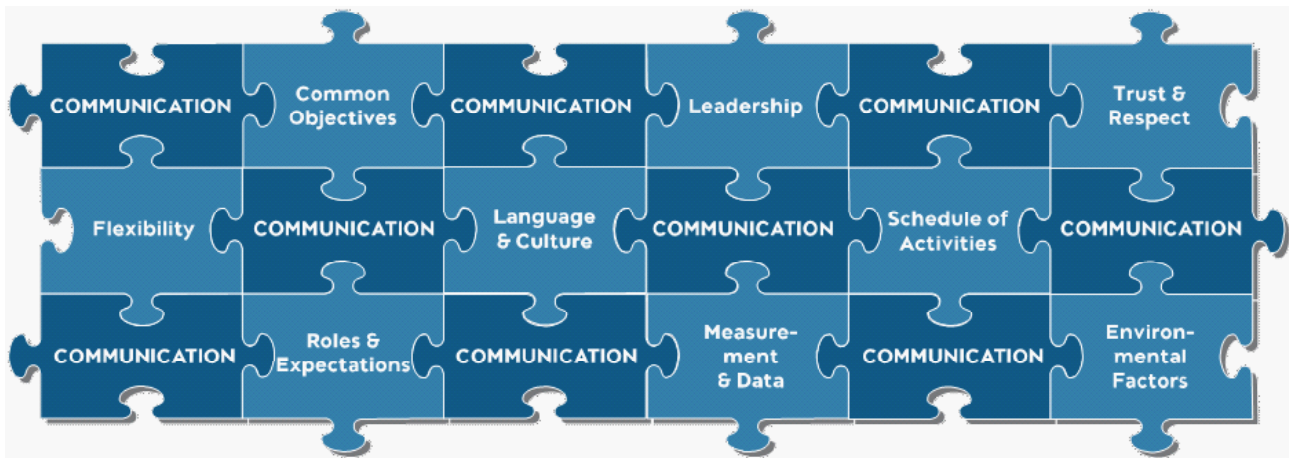
# Keys to Successful Partnerships

To successfully launch and navigate a partnership, business and community college leaders should keep in mind the following:

- **Common Objectives:** Understand partners' overall needs and motivations in order to develop complementary outcomes. The relationship needs to be a win-win for everyone involved.
- **Leadership:** Each partner will have an internal hierarchical leadership system that will need to be understood and embraced. Determine who from each partner organization will manage the work and also who has decision making authority.
- **Trust and Respect:** Building trust and respect for partners takes time. Build on reputations from previous work in the field. Trust is more likely to come from time spent together and learning the strengths each brings to the table.
- **Flexibility:** Working in partnership requires partners be adaptable to a range of situations. Outside influences will impact the work of the partnership and its partners. Flexibility ensures leaders can deal with issues at hand, focus on the ultimate goals of the partnership and allows for potential new opportunities to arise and help the partnership grow.
- **Language and Culture:** Differences in language and culture will exist between partners. It is important to bridge these gaps when building the partnership. Neutral facilitation allows partners to hold frank conversations about language, including vocabulary and definitions, and cultural barriers when issues arise. Being honest and open-minded with partners can help overcome any barriers.
- **Schedule of Activities:** Community colleges will differ with their business partners on how much time needs to be invested to reach mutual outcomes. To overcome this challenge, develop a schedule of activities. This schedule could include what needs to be accomplished in the next month, quarter and year – depending on how long the partnership will be sustained. The schedule should also include strategic points of evaluation so that all partners are on track with progress to date.
- **Environmental Factors:** Partnerships, to be most successful, should be tied to the time and place in which they are created. Consider doing an environmental scan to identify implications that can come from location (local, regional or national), economics of the area and the industries involved in the partnership. This information can be used to formalize the overall objectives of the partnership.

## BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE

**Applied Scientific Instrumentation (ASI)** is meeting its skilled workforce needs through **Lane Community College (LCC)**. LCC's cooperative education (co-op) program provides students college credit while working in positions related to their career and academic goals. For each co-op partnership, LCC uses a standard Memorandum of Understanding. This short document, signed by representatives of both partners, outlines the roles and responsibilities for each. ASI agrees to invest in the development and mentoring of its interns. LCC agrees to provide a faculty coordinator with industry knowledge to assure that appropriate student matches are made, to develop measurable learning objectives and to determine grade assignments based on employer evaluation.



- Clearly Defined Roles and Expectations:** Have a clear understanding of the roles each partner will play. Understand partners' expectations and visa versa – know what to expect of them. When launching a new partnership, consider getting each partner's roles and responsibilities in writing to create a potentially non-binding scope of work. This does not have to be a formal contract, but a short document will assist in ensuring there is a clear understanding among partners and that a system of accountability is in place. If the partnership begins to fall short of expectations, use that document as the basis for discussions with partners. Consider scheduling time periodically to review the document to see if environmental changes have created the need for roles to be revised.
- Measurement and Data:** Be sure to measure progress against the benchmarks set earlier, report on results, and be willing to change course if the plan is not working. A partnership will not be sustainable if partners cannot deliver.
- Communications:** Ultimately, to achieve the first nine keys to success, excellent communication is a must among partners, within their organizations, and to the public. Communication among partners is essential to understanding partner's long-term and short-term needs, which will evolve over time. Strong and constant communication ensures that the partnership's scope and objectives are continually in line with the needs of the partners. Develop a communications strategy and feedback loop to determine what information should be communicated to particular individuals and at what time. Communication is a critical component that loops around the previous nine keys to success.

#### BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE

The sole mission of the Western Association of Food Chains (WAFC), an organization representing companies in the retail and wholesale food industry, is to build education depth throughout the food industry. Through WAFC's Retail Management Certificate Program, they have partnered with over 135 community colleges to utilize standard academic course work offered by most community colleges to create an industry recognized certificate. As budget cuts force these community colleges to evaluate resource allocations and expenditures, their food industry employer partners offer on site classroom usage within their facilities, supplementing valuable on-campus space. Additionally, employer partners provide adjunct instructors steeped in current learning needs of the industry.



## A Business Perspective: What Businesses Can Gain from Community Colleges

Business concerns on the growing skills gap, combined with future economic and talent management forecasts, makes partnerships with community colleges a smart solution for business executives. Community colleges can be a resource for any type of training, including accredited, traditional postsecondary education and customized, corporate training. Typically, community colleges are deeply connected to the regional economy and have the flexibility necessary to expand curricula and programs as the needs of the region, and its employers, change, making each community college unique.

To ensure community college partners can meet a business' distinct needs, businesses should provide them with an understanding of the organization - its environment, culture and characteristics. Higher education partners need to have a firm grasp on what businesses need from their new hires and what it takes to be successful within the organization to ensure working learners obtain the learning outcomes articulated by the industry.

### BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE

Deep partnerships can require partners to reach out to competitors for their expertise to benefit the good of all. In 2005 the Kentucky Community and Technical College System created a core partnership between 12 colleges and 18 automotive manufacturing companies in 8 states. The resulting organization, the Automotive Manufacturing Technical Education Collaborative (AMTEC), set to work with their partners to identify a common set of competencies and a common curriculum for the automotive industry. When employer engagement waned, AMTEC reached out to **Toyota** to recruit their suppliers and competitors into the efforts. The time investment paid off as BMW, Ford, General Motors and many of their major suppliers agreed on fundamentals common to all automotive manufacturing that can be standardized and taught across multiple colleges, regions and states. The process leverages curriculum development and delivery options for use across the industry.

### Community College Strengths

By taking the time to understand community college partners, business can utilize the strengths of community colleges to help meet talent development needs. Community college partners can often provide businesses with these strengths:

- Development of customized curriculum to meet local labor-market needs;
- Low cost training options and facilities;
- Flexible course development, scheduling and delivery with accelerated time to completion;
- Connection to the regional economic community;
- Speed to market of new and revised courses and certifications;
- Creation of employee learning communities and support structures;
- Intermediary facilitation among multiple small employers;
- Corporate capacity building; and
- Opportunity to improve long-term community relations.

## Community College Roles

A variety of options exists for community college leaders to get involved in providing individuals with credentialed education and career pathways. Businesses can utilize community colleges to:

- Supply faculty and staff to act as a liaison with their business partners, as well as provide staffing support at on-site locations;
- Perform a needs assessment for a business' training and talent development;
- Work with businesses to generate and assess the career and education pathways available to their employees;
- Recognize and create prior learning assessments for incumbent employees to be eligible for college credit based on past experiences and training;
- Offer foundational and general education courses for employees, as needed;
- Form articulation agreements with reputable four-year colleges and universities to provide additional education options for employees; and
- Provide supports for students both on campus through tutoring and academic services and off campus through partnerships with community organizations to provide housing, transportation healthcare and other life needs.



### ACTION STEPS FOR BUSINESS LEADERS

Steps business leaders can take to begin partnering with community colleges and create career and education pathways for current and future employees include:

1. Identify Internal Needs – identify positions where increased skill development would provide the maximum benefit to the company.
2. Identify and Select Education Partner(s) – Research and connect with regional community colleges and other education providers to find the right fit for the company.
3. Curriculum and Certification Development – Work with partner(s) to establish required learning outcomes and desired competencies. Consider what courses are currently available that could be utilized.
4. Pilot Project – Consider using a prototype curriculum on a small cohort of potential working learners. This provides an opportunity to make necessary changes before a full roll out.
5. Measurement and Evaluation – What does success look like for the company? Be sure to work with partner(s) to collect appropriate and necessary metrics.
6. Changing Skill Needs – As business needs change, be sure to communicate with education partner(s) on the effects those changes will have on employees' skill needs. Continual communication will enable them to stay up-to-date on industry requirements, creating a continuous improvement model.
7. Implement Partnership Learnings – Look across the organization to determine if similar partnerships in other departments would be beneficial to the organization as a whole.
8. Celebrate Achievements – Publicize the partnership's results with other businesses, community colleges, in the community and through the media.

# Stakeholders of Business and Community College Partnerships

Strong and dedicated leadership is important to successful partnering. The expertise and interest of a partnership's key leaders will play an important role in determining the goals of the partnership. Most strong partnerships have multiple stakeholders at differing positions and levels within both the business and the community college that will influence the agreed upon outcomes of the partnership.

However, in order to initiate and grow a relationship, establishing a single point of contact can be the most effective place to begin.

## Businesses Seeking Community College Partners

Many community colleges maintain a business development division, office or person that would be the most appropriate initial point of contact for a business seeking education and training support. This function might fall into departments with a number of different designations, but the roles are similar. They include:

- Workforce Development;
- Economic Development;
- Corporate or Customized Training;
- Industry Relations and others.



Community colleges that prioritize support to regional businesses make a practice of establishing a single point of contact to which business inquiries are channeled and from which further connections are made as appropriate throughout the educational system. Eventually, an employer may come in contact with one or more of the following areas of the college, depending on the established goals and outcomes of partnership:

- President or other executive leadership;
- Dean of Departments and/or Faculty;
- Customized Training;
- Adult Education and/or Literacy;
- Co-operative Education;
- Communications;
- Grant Administration.
- Alumni Relations and/or Foundation;

Corporate Voices' research shows business and community college partnerships utilize a variety of different divisions within businesses and community colleges, which allows these partnerships to take a variety of forms. For example, the **Health Careers Collaborative of Greater Cincinnati** is a business-led consortium providing area hospitals with skilled, credentialed, loyal and diverse workers, while providing entry-level workers with educational opportunities leading to career mobility. At the consortium's foundation is a partnership between UC Health, Cincinnati Children's Hospital, Cincinnati State Technical and Community College and Great Oaks Career Campuses. The partnership is managed by Cincinnati State's Dean of Health and Public Safety and UC Health's Corporate Vice President of Human Resources and Public Safety.



## Community Colleges Seeking Business Partners

One way for community colleges to be proactive in their outreach to businesses is to maintain a business development division. As noted previously, the function might be housed in departments with a number of different designations, but one fairly consistent factor is the presence of one or more business account managers. Again, these critical staff positions may have different titles, (i.e., industry executives). They are tasked with outreach to regional employers and are often challenged by the multiple entry points of businesses.

Where and how to initiate conversation with a business is often dictated by the size of the enterprise. Within small businesses, under 250 employees but often less than 50, partnerships are most often formed at the owner or executive leader level. Medium to large employers, over 250 employees and less than 1,000, will most likely have a human resources and/or training department that is a promising point of initial contact.

Approaching a large, national or multi-national corporation is more complex and sometimes daunting. However, best practice corporations make tremendous investments in talent development and should not be overlooked as potential partners. They often anchor regional economies and can be willing leaders in regional workforce development initiatives. The place of initial contact with a corporation is often dictated by the nature of the relationship that is being sought or the type of services a community college is offering. Points for entry to consider are:

- Executive Leadership;
- Human Resources;
- Training and Talent Development;
- Diversity;
- Production;
- Business Operations;
- Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability;
- Communications; and
- Government Relations.

While it is advantageous for a community college to approach a potential business partner with knowledge and understanding of the business' needs, a well-equipped business account manager will be able to articulate the potential return on the business' investment that is being solicited. Making initial contact with a clear understanding of the value the community college brings to the business is a strong and smart starting position.

Additionally, it is reasonable for a community college to request, and for a complex business enterprise to provide, a single point of contact through which the relationship can be established, managed and can flourish.

**Pacific Gas and Electric Company's** (PG&E) PowerPathway™ initiative, created with community colleges and public Workforce Investment Boards across California, is a network of educational programs designed to build capacity to produce skilled workers in the energy industry. The initiative began within PG&E's workforce development department. In other cases, initiatives might begin within a company's corporate social responsibility division, such as in the case with **IBM** and **Queensborough Community College**.

## Community College Perspective: What Community Colleges Can Gain from Businesses

In the current economic climate, many community colleges are focused on degree completion for their students. This makes partnerships with business an important and timely imperative, one that can help provide their students with necessary job experience and outside supports needed to earn an industry-recognized credential and to be successful in the job market. However, community colleges must market themselves to business in a way that meets industry needs and resonates with business. For executives to understand that community colleges might be the education partner of choice, providing the academic and technical skills training and education their employees need, community colleges must reach outside the academic comfort zone. Understanding a business' current and future talent development challenges and needs will be critical to ensuring that any partnership is sustainable.

### BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE

**Bright Horizons Family Solution LLC** (Bright Horizons), a provider of employer-sponsored early education and work/life solutions, is committed to assisting its employees in receiving the Child Development Associate credential. Bright Horizons has developed an eCDA Program, which provides employees with the training to earn a stackable entry-level postsecondary education credential. Once an employee has received the eCDA credential, Bright Horizons encourages the employee to continue their postsecondary education. Through a partnership with **Northampton Community College** (NCC), employees can enroll in the college's online associate degree program, take advantage of in-state tuition regardless of their location, and receive a discounted tuition rate. NCC also recognizes the eCDA credential and honors 9 academic credit hours toward an associate degree.

### Business Strengths

By making the investment to understand business partners, community colleges can utilize the strengths of those partners to help fulfill their mission and make an impact on college completion rates. Strengths of business partners that can create opportunities for community colleges include:

- Access to real-time business needs;
- Improved job placement rates;
- Advocacy and community relations;
- Relevant learning opportunities;
- Industry-based adjunct faculty;
- Financial and in-kind contributions; and
- Visibility.



## Business Roles

A variety of options exists for business leaders to get involved in creating credentialed, career pathways for their employees. Businesses can:

- Supply staff to act as a liaison with their community college partners, as well as provide staff support at on-site locations;
- Provide information on skills requirements, long-term hiring needs and internal operations knowledge to support curricula development and validation;
- Mentor students, both individually and by visiting classrooms, to help them understand the industry and career opportunities available;
- Make available scarce resources, including space and materials for meetings, classes and hands-on learning experiences;
- Give teachers externship opportunities to provide them with additional knowledge of the workplace;
- Ensure that employees have knowledge and access to the training programs available and connect those training programs to career pathways;
- Reach into the employee-base to assist those near-completers, individuals who are close to obtaining a certification or degree;
- Provide supports such as tuition assistance and education stipends;
- Offer future employees relevant, contextualized work experience and evaluate those individuals upon completion of the program; and
- Recognize employees who have completed training programs and received postsecondary education credentials as an incentive to foster a college completion culture within the business.

## ACTION STEPS FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS

Steps community college leaders can take to begin partnering with businesses and create education and career pathways for current and future students.

1. Identify and Select Business Partner(s) – Research and connect with regional businesses of all sizes and industries correlated with current and potential certifications. Work with regional economic development entities to determine projected growth industries to target as partners.
2. Curriculum and Certification Development – Work with business partner(s) to create an understanding of desired learning outcomes and competency needs. Determine what courses are currently offered that could be utilized in the training.
3. Pilot Project – Consider using a prototype curriculum on a small cohort of students. This provides an opportunity to make necessary changes before a full roll out.
4. Measurement and Evaluation – What does success look like for the college? Be sure to work with partner(s) to collect appropriate and necessary metrics.
5. Changing Skill Needs – Business partners' needs will change over time. Continual communication will enable partners to stay up-to-date on requirements to be able to keep up with their needs.
6. Implement Partnership Learnings – Look across the organization to determine if partnerships in other departments would be beneficial to the organization as a whole.
7. Celebrate Achievements – Publicize the partnerships results with other businesses, community colleges, in the community and through the media.

## Moving Forward

Partnerships between business and community college leaders are an essential component to ensuring working learners have the supports needed to reach career and education goals. These partnerships promote the economic well-being of our nation by building the skilled workforce needed to be globally competitive. Corporate Voices will continue, through the development of its Learn and Earn suite of tools, to assist business and community colleges to work together effectively.

*“Innovative partnerships between employers and community colleges are essential building blocks in preparing an educated and skilled workforce. This blueprint presents an outstanding pathway for this joint work.”*

- Gerardo E. de los Santos  
League for Innovation in the  
Community College

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## About Corporate Voices

Corporate Voices is the leading national business membership organization shaping conversations and collaborations on public and corporate policy issues involving working families. A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, we are a unique voice, and provide leading best-practice employers a forum to improve the lives of working families, while strengthening our nation’s economy and enhancing the vitality of our communities.

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