



Carolina Across 100

“Our State, Our Work”

Employer Engagement Toolbox

Please see below for a directory of resources that may be helpful to your collaborative as you seek to more deeply engage with employers to meet your numeric goals.

We do not expect that all resources will be applicable for your team or region but hope that this resource provides you with a “starting point” for locating tools that will aid in the creation, refinement, and implementation of your employer engagement strategies. If you have any questions about the resources shared or tools listed, please reach out to the ncIMPACT Initiative team, and we’ll be happy to assist you.

#CarolinaAcross100

A RESOURCE GUIDE TO ENGAGING EMPLOYERS

Jobs for the Future. By Randall Wilson, 2014.

Summary: “This resource guide presents working models of successful employer engagement and lessons for securing and sustaining partnerships with employers. It was written to help education and training providers fully realize the value of strategic, long-term, and intensive partnerships with employers.



Contents:

Overview of why employer engagement is critical for workforce development.

- How to define employer engagement
- The “ladder” of employer engagement

Figure 1. Ladder of Engagement

	New Relationship		Working Relationship		Strategic Partnership
	LEVEL I	LEVEL II	LEVEL III	LEVEL IV	LEVEL V
Key employer role	Advising	Capacity-building	Co-designing	Convening	Leading
Stage of relationship	Initial contact / new relationship	Establishing trust and credibility	Working relationship	Trusted provider and collaborator	Full strategic partner
Activity Examples	Discuss hiring needs, skills, competencies; advise on curricula; contract training; hire graduates	Job site tours; speakers; mock interviews; internships; needs assessment; loan / donate equipment; recruiting	Curriculum and pathway development; adjunct faculty and preceptors	College-employer sectoral partnerships	Multi-employer, multi-college partnerships
Engagement examples by level	Western Technical College - Wisconsin Shifting Gears Monroe Community College	Bristol Community College	Owensboro Community and Technical College Automotive Technical Education Collaborative - AMTEC Columbus State Community College - LogisticsART	NorTEC Northern Virginia Community College - NoVAHealth FORCE Cabriollo College / Bay Area Community College Consortium	Health Careers Collaborative of Greater Cincinnati / Cincinnati State Community College Health Professions Pathway - H2P

Contents:

Overview of why employer engagement is critical for workforce development.

- Level 2: Building Educational Capacity
- Level 3: Co-designing Curricula and Career Pathways
- Level 4: Convening Workforce Partnerships
- Level 5: Leading and Sustaining Regional Partnerships
- Conclusion

The following are additional lessons general to any stage of employer engagement, but of special importance when exploring and initiating business relationships:

- > **Know your employers.** Do the initial research to select the right partners and tailor strategy accordingly: are they growing, declining, or stable? What industry or sector? What is their history of partnership? What are their connections to local boards, associations, and the public workforce system? Who should be contacted initially? Who has the authority to make decisions about partnering?
- > **Cast a wide net within the firm.** Strengthen relationships with employers by engaging members at multiple levels of the organization - not only human resource or workforce staff but also high-level leadership and department managers. This helps to limit dependence on a single “champion” who might leave the organization, become overburdened, or offer a narrow view of the organization’s workforce needs.
- > **Learn to speak “business.”** Be problem- rather than program-focused. Translate academic terminology or “grant speak” into a common language. Columbus State Community College’s Cheryl Hay reminds us that the employers see themselves first as “businesses,” whose primary purpose is not providing employment or supporting advancement, but making things or offering services to create a profit or generate revenue (Hay & Blair 2013). Understanding the distinct agendas at the table, while determining common goals and metrics (skill sets, productivity, retention), is critical to effective employer engagement.
- > **Bring value to the table.** Be clear about the value your institution can create for businesses, and the assets you can offer. What courses or programs of study currently offered are relevant? How can new or revised curricula and credentials respond to business needs in specific skill areas? Provide data on labor market trends and assist business with mapping the constellation of local services.
- > **Cultivate and maintain relationships.** Remember that “the cows need milking every day,” as Nan Poppe, former campus president at Portland Community College, observes. Building a relationship takes time, early wins, and persistence. Once a working relationship is established, keep employers “in the loop” about curriculum and program development, as well as student progress and outcomes. Offer recognitions and publicity to employers for their support and participation.
- > **Make employer participation user-friendly.** Be clear about your specific needs. Coordinate contact lists and gatherings with other workforce-serving organizations in your region to avoid duplication; team up where feasible. Take inventory of your current workforce relationships and leverage them where possible, rather than initiating partnerships from scratch.
- > **Build on business networks.** Recruit new partners through existing ones. Lead with employers to make the case to additional employers. Identify and cultivate employer champions.
- > **Focus on producing systems changes,** not just programmatic outcomes.

Jobs for the Future; By Kevin Doyle, Green Economy, 2015.

Summary: “This toolkit is a guide for training providers, workforce development organizations, community colleges, other educational institutions, and community-based organizations deliberately integrating employer engagement into the core decision making for a successful program. It offers strategies for educational institutions and workforce development organizations in the early stages of launching a new relationship and building a strategic partnership.”



Overview:

This toolkit’s individual exercises, checklists, planning guides, questionnaires, and resources are designed to:

- Guide training providers, workforce development organizations, community colleges, other educational institutions, and community-based organizations to begin to deliberately integrate employer engagement into the core decision making of your program.
- Offer strategies to increase the number of ways employers can participate in your program design and development.
- Help workforce development organizations and educational institutions begin to develop relationships with employers.

Using the Toolkit:

This toolkit is organized into four sections and is designed as a modular guide, not a publication that must be read from cover to cover. The tools are designed to stand alone, while also organized into sections that progress sequentially. Use the entire toolkit as a package or select individual exercises, checklists, planning guides, or resources that are most relevant to you.

Contents:

- Section 1: Getting Ready
 - Tool 1.1. Assess Your Current Partners: Internal Assessment
 - Tool 1.2. Develop Your Partner Database
 - Tool 1.3. Assess Your Current Partners: External Assessment
 - Tool 1.4. Setting Goals to Guide New Partner Development
 - Tool 1.5. What Employers Value Most
 - Tool 1.6. Mapping Your Assets
 - Tool 1.7. Demonstrate Return on Investment (ROI) to Employers
 - Tool 1.8. Craft an Employer-Based Value Proposition
- Section 2: Targeting Your Relationships
 - Tool 2.1. Identifying Employers in Your Industry
 - Tool 2.2. Recruiting Your Employer Leadership Committee
 - Tool 2.3 Develop High-Level Relationships
- Section 3: Be a Go-To Convener
 - Tool 3.1. Identify Major Issues Facing the Industry
 - Tool 3.2. Co-Host an Employer-Focused Networking Event
 - Tool 3.3. Tips for Successful Employer Connections

- Section 4: Partnership
 - Tool 4.1 Employer Voice in Participant Selection
 - Tool 4.2. Prioritizing the Right Soft Skills
 - Tool 4.3. Finding Skills in Labor Market Information
 - Tool 4.4. Teaching Industry Skills
 - Tool 4.5. Work-Based Experience

Employer Engagement and Recruitment

A Quick Guide to effective practice

New Ways to Work, 2019

Summary: “This guide is designed to help leadership and staff, including work-based learning coordinators, job developers and others from schools, community organizations and/or intermediary partners effectively recruit and engage a range of employers to provide work-based learning opportunities for students or young adults, and to support activities in the classroom. It recognizes that not all employers can provide the same levels of commitment to or involvement in a particular program or initiative, but that any employer can be engaged in one or more activities if the experience is designed and supported with employer capacity in mind. It also recognizes that employer engagement is not just one person in the organization’s job but takes a concerted effort of staff and partners across the entire organization or initiative.”



Overview:

This guide is focused on framing and building capacity at two levels.

The first level, described in Section One of the Quick Guide, is focused on the strategies your organization and partners can apply to effectively recruit and fully engage employers.

Whether you represent a school, community-based organization or intermediary that is committed to making and managing the employer connections for your school or program, paying attention to and addressing each of the Five Organizational Strategies described below can greatly improve your employer recruitment and engagement capacity.

The second level, described in Section Two of this Quick Guide, focuses on activities that individuals conducting engagement activities can use to build their own personal capacity related to recruiting employers.

By applying some basic marketing and sales strategies and approaches drawn from the private sector, all of those involved in employer recruitment, engagement and support can benefit from being aware of and applying the Four Simple Steps described in this section.

EFFECTIVE EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

5 KEY ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

Addressing each of the Five Organizational Strategies described below can greatly improve employer recruitment and engagement capacity.



Content:

- Section 1: Effective Employer Engagement - Five Key Organizational Strategies
 - Strategy 1: View Employers as Both Partners and Customers
 - Strategy 2: Promote Customer Service
 - Strategy 3: Target Resources
 - Strategy 4: Apply a Comprehensive Approach
 - Strategy 5: Focus on Outcomes
- Section 2: Effective Employer Engagement Practices – Four Simple Steps for Work-Based Learning Coordinators, Youth Program Account Managers and Employer Engagement Staff
 - STEP 1 - Be Prepared
 - STEP 2 - Make a Plan and Stick to It!
 - STEP 3 - Market and Promote Your Program
 - STEP 4 - Deliver Flawless Follow-Up

- Section 3: Organizational Strategies Self-Assessment

- Progress: Ask each team member to individually complete the progress section of the self-assessment. For each indicator or statement, each team member rates progress using the following scale:
 - = Not on the radar
 - ◐ = Just getting started
 - ◑ = Pretty well along in practice
 - = Fully developed
- Evidence-Based Discussion: Ask all team members to post their responses on a large, wall-sized version of the self-assessment (with sticky dots or by making tick marks). Discuss the group's responses, especially where there are wide differences of opinion on stage of development. In that case, ask team members to cite the evidence that backs up their choice.
- Priorities: Once the team has reached general agreement on the current stage of development for each item, ask each team member to complete the priority section of the self-assessment in the context of a discreet timeframe (e.g., the next 12 months). It is helpful to limit the number of high-priority activities and to force the identification of lows in each section.
- Actions: Again, ask all team members to post their responses on the wall chart and discuss. As a group, identify priority actions for inclusion in the workplan. After completing this assessment, teams can transfer the priority objectives to a formal workplan, and identify tactics, strategies and timelines that address those priorities.

- Section 4: Tools and Materials

- Employer Engagement Strategies Self-Assessment

- A self-assessment that can help identify your progress in five key foundational strategies and develop plans for improvement (also included as Section Three of the Employer Engagement Quick Guide).

- Marketing and Sales Sample Activities

- Some sample activities to help you expand your capacity to reach new employers.

- The Perfect Pitch

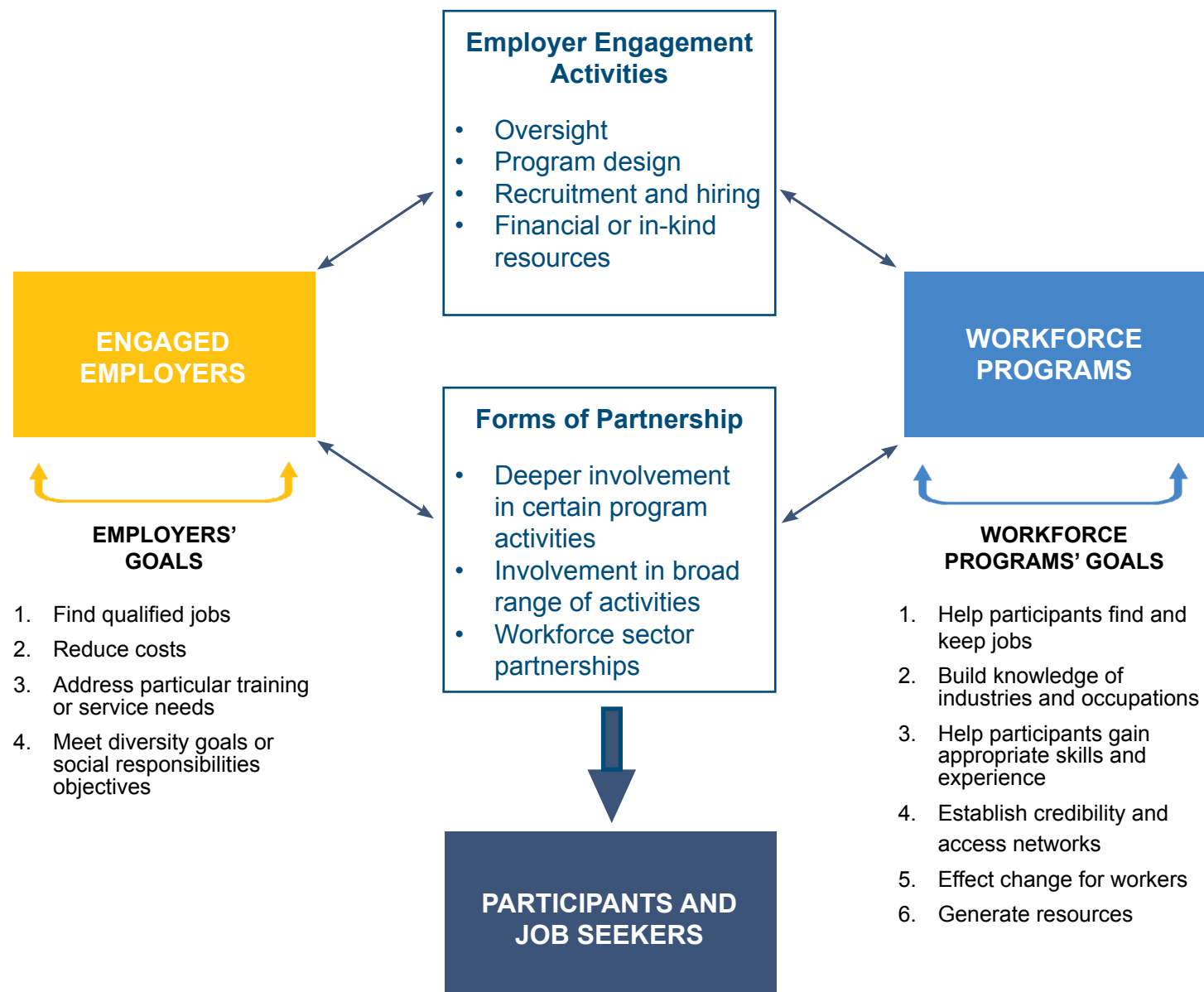
- A group exercise to help your team develop and hone an elevator pitch to promote engagement in your school or program.

- Sample Marketing Plan Template

The Goals and Dimensions of Employer Engagement in Workforce Development Programs

By Shayne Spaulding and Ananda Martin-Caughey December 2015; Urban Institute

Summary: "This brief offers a simple framework that lays out why workforce programs engage employers and why employers engage with workforce programs. It specifies how employers are involved with workforce programs and describes the challenges for both sides. This framework can help workforce organizations sharpen their thinking about employer engagement and their goals for such partnerships."



Contents:

- Introduction
- What Are the Challenges of Engaging Employers?
 - Common difficulties faced by workforce organizations.
 - Common employer barriers
 - Mutual challenges
 - To Establish Credibility and Access Networks
 - To Effect Change for Workers
 - To Generate Resources
- How Are Employers Involved in Workforce Programs?
 - Oversight
 - Program Design
 - Program Delivery
 - Recruitment and Hiring
 - Financial or In-Kind Resources
- How Do Employers Become Partners?
 - Through Deeper Involvement in Certain Program Activities
 - Through Involvement in a Broader Range of Program Activities
 - Through Workforce Sector Partnerships
- Conclusion

Employer Engagement by Community-Based Organizations Meeting the Needs of Job Seekers with Barriers to Success in the Labor Market

By Shayne Spaulding and David C. Blount, May 2018; Urban Institute

Summary: "This report highlights promising approaches and strategies that community-based organizations can use to engage employers. This information can also help the public- and private-sector funders and other organizations that fund and partner with them. The findings are based on the experiences of three selected organizations: Cara Chicago (Chicago), Henry Street Settlement (New York City), and Community Learning Center Inc. (Dallas-Fort Worth). All three are grantees under JPMorgan Chase's New Skills at Work Initiative."



Contents:

- Employer Engagement by Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)
 - Background
 - The Organizations
 - Cara Chicago
 - Henry Street Settlement
 - Community Learning Center Inc.
 - How the Three CBOs Approach Employer Engagement
 - Cara
 - Henry Street Settlement

[We seek] employers that see employees as investments in their growth as opposed to expenses to be cut. They are saying, “If I do this training, I am going to get employees that are more loyal, productive, and happier,” we need employers who think, “If I invest, I am going to see a lot of benefits.” Not all employers see it that way. Some see them as expenses.

- Henry Street staff member

- Community Learning Center, Inc.
- Common Strategies
 - Careful Selection and Targeting of Employer Partner

We’ll give [employers] a tour and talk about job needs. I like to follow with referrals. Another visit would be off site to get a tour of their facilities and so I can better understand their work culture and what a job is going to be like for our participants. Maybe meet with people who are not the main contact to get deeper into the relationship. I like to plan information sessions to learn more about the jobs and what it’s like to work there. I also like doing a hiring component where they’ll come and do interviews to fill certain positions. - CLC, Inc. staff member

- Service Delivery That Reflects a Strong Knowledge of Employer and Job Seeker Needs

Our central belief is that the participants already have natural skills and talents, and it is our job to draw them out. They are already great, and our goal is to match great people with great opportunities. To do this, we first seek to build employment partnerships, not just employment transactions. To do that, we want to provide a concierge level of service to engage with companies in really knowing their needs, know what their culture is, taking a consultation sales approach. We want to become that trusted pool of candidates for them, so that even though we aren’t able to provide a high volume of candidates, they know we’re not going to just send bodies. - Cara staff member

- Building Trusting Relationships with Employers by Providing Quality Service and Making Good Matches over Time

[A participant] had a lot of barriers and he was struggling. We did intake with him. To be able to have a community organization like CLC rally for you and get behind you and say to employers, “Yes, he has a background, but look at how [well] he did in class.” I don’t think an individual has that on their own. - CLC, Inc. staff member

- Using a Variety of Strategies to Help Employers Get beyond Stigma
- Leveraging Partnerships and Community Knowledge as an Employer Engagement Strategy
- Conclusions
- Notes

Key Questions

Ahead of your meeting with Rick, please consider the following prompts:

- What are the key industries and employers in your communities?
- Who are the key organizations/partners providing career pathways for Opportunity Youth in your community(s)?
- Do you believe that employer engagement is the key to sustaining your collaborative work overtime?
 - Is it a key strategy to create opportunity for youth to reach your objectives?
- Do you believe your team has enough employers and the right types engaged in your work?
- Have you developed a strategy to engage employers in your work?
 - How is your progress toward your goal?
- How are employers engaged in your work?
 - Do you have a good mix of employers both small and large?
 - Are they the type that are good opportunities/pathways for Opportunity Youth?
- How can the nclIMPACT team assist you with your employer recruitment/outreach?