

# The WPI Playbook: How Business-Education Partnerships Prepare Tomorrow's Talent

June 2025

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## About

The primary goal of this playbook is to provide a comprehensive framework for employers seeking to engage in and lead regional collaborations aimed at building a technically skilled, diverse and ever-ready workforce. It also serves as a valuable resource for higher education leaders looking to align their programs with the evolving demands of the job market through effective partnerships with business. This playbook shares best practices on building sustainable workforce development programs through partnerships that enhance skill levels and drive inclusive economic growth.

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## Introduction

In the last year alone, digital technology advances, such as the widespread emergence and adoption of artificial intelligence (AI), have altered today's job market. In-demand skills are constantly evolving, and employers' need for a highly skilled workforce with the ability to understand and implement new technology is more evident than ever.

The average job has seen 32% of its skills change over the past three years ([Lightcast, 2025](#)). And "As skills gaps are the biggest barrier to business transformation, 85% of employers are planning to prioritize upskilling their workforce, and 70% plan to hire workers with new skills ([WEF, 2025](#))." New hires, therefore, will need regular professional development and technological training to remain long-term contributors to tech-enabled employers. As employers ascertain what emerging technologies mean for their operations, partnerships with employers in similar industries, education providers that offer upskilling and professional development services, and intermediary organizations become even more essential.

In the face of these rapid technological advances, creating a sustainable and skilled workforce requires innovative strategies and collaborative efforts. This playbook provides a detailed roadmap for employers and higher education leaders to develop and implement effective workforce development programs through partnerships. These partnerships are essential for addressing the rapidly changing skills requirements in today's job market. These collaborations also enable companies to pool resources, share knowledge, and develop tailored educational and training programs that meet specific industry needs. By working together, businesses can ensure a steady pipeline of qualified talent, reduce training costs, improve employee retention, and enhance overall organizational performance.



## How can employers create a sustainable workforce?

Investing in upskilling opportunities for incumbent employees is critical to ensure retention and encourage a culture of lifelong learning that, in turn, yields the desired work product and keeps organizations from falling behind in the technology sector. Moreover, adjusting hiring practices to assess a new candidate's skill set is fundamental to matching the new hires with the right roles, avoiding the need for significant retraining upon entry or, in some cases, subsequent layoffs ([Cloud Academy, 2023](#)).

“

The community college talent pool is one that should be utilized. We've done focus groups, formed strong relationships with community college faculty, talked to community college students, and supported career services departments to make sure we understood these institutions better and developed the right recruitment strategy.”

— **Ellen Glazerman, Executive Director,**  
**Ernst & Young Foundation and America's Director of University Relations**

## What role does higher education play?

Businesses should take a broad view when considering educational partnerships, exploring a spectrum of potential collaborators that includes career technical education providers, as well as two- and four-year academic institutions. The importance of these partnerships lies in identifying the right educational partners capable of tailoring their training and curricula to meet the specific needs of the company. By doing so, businesses can ensure that individuals possess the skills and knowledge necessary for successful employment. This strategic approach to partnership selection not only enhances the relevance of educational programs for students but also maximizes the return on investment for companies by streamlining the path from education to employment.

Higher education providers need to evolve curricula to respond to today's workforce demands. To best equip workers with certain universally needed technology skills, academic programs should also focus on how to embed basic skills in digital literacy, programming, and analytics into a range of disciplines.

Better still, strong and sustainable partnerships between business and higher education offer a solution to the growing skills shortage. To see changes at scale, such partnerships

must exist within an ecosystem that fosters regular communication, relays industry needs to the academic community, and demonstrates to educators the larger marketplace for those skills.

### **The Business Roundtable Workforce Partnership Initiative offers a template.**

A number of employers have taken the lead in fostering large-scale partnerships with higher education, benefiting their companies along with the regions in which they operate. They are engaged in the Business Roundtable Workforce Partnership Initiative (WPI): a one-of-a-kind, business-led collaboration founded on the principles of collective impact, where multiple peer companies and higher education institutions come together to develop highly tailored educational and work-based learning opportunities to address the most pressing skills needs in their region.

WPI was created in 2018 to leverage the collective interest and need among CEOs for a skilled workforce. Working with Business Roundtable, the Business-Higher Education Forum serves as an implementation partner, and JPMorganChase Foundation is both a funder and thought partner. WPI leverages BHEF's Creating Purposeful Partnerships methodology and represents businesses' commitment to driving inclusive economic growth in regions, with a focus on accelerating and scaling best-in-class workforce development programs. The initiative was designed with the flexibility needed to tackle regional-specific skills-development challenges in concert with rigorous, scalable solutions that advance business-higher education partnerships and drive outcomes.

## Progress to Date

### Active Sites

Chicago	2018-Present
New York City	2018-Present
Connecticut	2022-Present
Milwaukee	2018-Present
Southeast	2018-Present
Texas	2022-Present

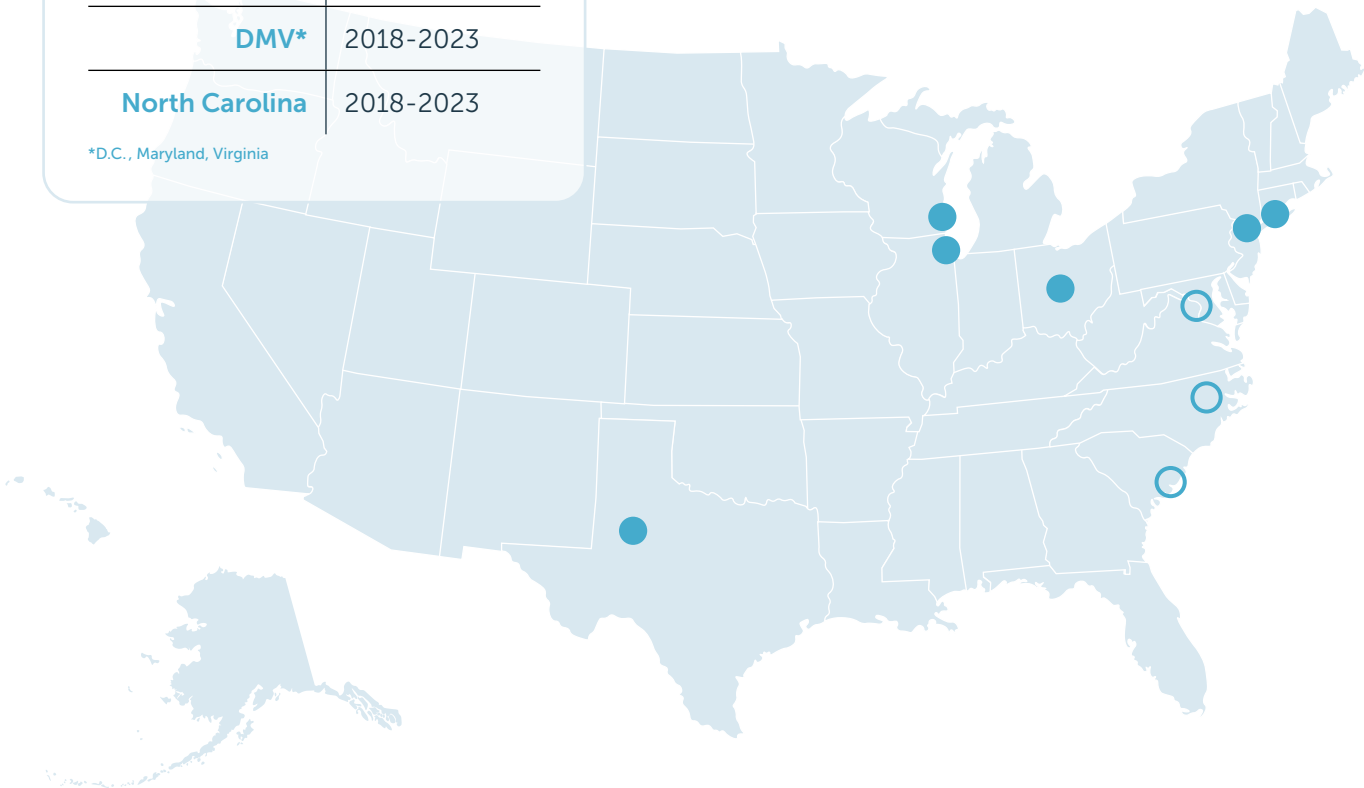
### Engagement

Businesses	500
Higher Education Institutions	130
Nonprofits	70
Government Agencies	25
Students	13K
Apprenticeships	18K
New and Updated Courses	245
Average Salary of New Hires	\$56K

### Self-Sustaining Sites

Columbus, Ohio	2018-2021
DMV*	2018-2023
North Carolina	2018-2023

\*D.C., Maryland, Virginia





Research has documented several benefits of the various models that WPI sites employ, including decreased training costs, improved retention, increased inclusion, and expanded opportunity for nontraditional students. These models also offer many distinct advantages that are only possible through partnerships between employers and higher education. By providing a collective voice, amplifying shared interests, and participating in learning communities, these collaborations offer:

- **Scale of impact.** WPI's focus on regional transformation sets it apart from similar collaborations. Employers are not just developing their own workforce; they are also embedding in-demand skills within the larger community, enabling other companies to find the talent they need and distinguishing the region as a hub of growing talent.
- **Recruitment.** Partnerships, particularly those involving multiple companies, highlight the importance of a particular industry or occupation, which can help attract new talent to a field, university, company, or region. The scale of these partnerships can also help secure funding and other support from government agencies, foundations, and outside stakeholders.
- **Customization.** When employers work together to identify common hiring needs, they signal to educators the overall marketplace for these skills. By equipping higher education with this critical knowledge, institutions have the ability to tailor curriculum to meet employers' needs. Employers gain access to workers with highly customized skills, colleges increase their rate of post-graduation placement, and students feel confident in their course of study.
- **Inclusion.** Partnerships help local populations develop in-demand technical skills that can increase employment options and overall earnings for workers (Burning Glass Technologies, 2019). They also help companies recruit traditionally underserved populations and demonstrate their commitment to the community.
- **Lasting impact.** The relationships built through these initiatives will endure and grow over time. By cultivating ongoing discussions, creating feedback loops, and developing programming between business and higher education, partners can create processes for continuously signaling labor market demand, refining curricula, and generating relevant experiences, like work-based learning opportunities, for learners. This direct communication between business and higher education will help develop a pool of talent that is better prepared to enter, adjust to, and advance in the workforce.

WPI offers a template for businesses to collaborate with higher education and peer employers to address specific workforce needs within their region. The model builds from the essential steps profiled in the Business-Higher Education Forum report, *Creating Purposeful Partnerships*, with an expanded focus on building relationships, cultivating executive support, and finding consensus when working across multiple businesses and institutions ([Business-Higher Education Forum, 2018](#)).

**The WPI model follows 4 phases of development, marked by 12 steps in total.** While these steps are presented as linear, partners will likely iterate between them as they build an initiative. Each step also presents an opportunity for third-party facilitators—known as intermediaries—to aid the process by providing analysis, coordination, oversight, and, sometimes, funding.

## Phase 1

### Laying the Groundwork

Before a business can engage peer companies and higher education institutions, it will need to define the problem and develop a plan of action.

Steps

1

Clarify  
Expectations  
of Senior  
Management

2

Analyze the Talent  
Ecosystem

3

Formulate  
a Project Plan

## Phase 2

### Partnering With Peer Employers

As new partners come on board, plans begin to take shape, and leaders uncover the specific set of skills the region needs most.

Steps

4

Recruit Employers  
With Similar  
Talent Needs

5

Agree on the  
Basic Partnership  
Structure

6

Identify Education  
and Training Needs



### Phase 3

#### Engaging Higher Education

The involvement of higher education translates skill requirements into curricula and preliminary plans into action.

Steps

7

Select Appropriate  
Higher Education  
Partners

8

Resolve Known  
Barriers to  
Implementation

9

Build Curriculum  
to Skill  
Specifications

### Phase 4

#### Implementing the Program

Though implementation will vary by site, partners will always need to recruit, monitor, and sustain.

Steps

10

Recruit  
Participants From  
Target Populations

11

Monitor  
and Refine the  
Program

12

Sustain and  
Expand Successful  
Strategies

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## 3 Key Roles

**Within each WPI network,** leaders typically fall into one of three categories, all of which are essential to long-term success.

### Business Partner

**Definition:** Businesses are the leaders and drivers of the WPI initiation and beginning work. A lead business, interested in growing and diversifying its local talent pipeline will partner with WPI to begin the process and ultimately develop partnerships with other businesses and education providers in the region.

**Example | WPI Texas:** Dell

### Education Partner

**Definition:** An education partner can be a community or four-year college, or other credential-granting institution that has the capability of adjusting curricula and/or developing new courses aligned with the business partners' in-demand, agreed upon knowledge, skills, and abilities.

**Example | WPI Texas:** Alamo Colleges District





## Local Intermediary

**Definition:** An intermediary is an entity with experience in workforce development and/or higher education that can identify realistic goals, priorities, and resources commitments based on the general vision of the business. This is typically a local organization within the region of focus that can serve as a trusted partner and amplifier of WPI's goals. For more on how to integrate and intermediary, see text boxes in each step.

**Example | WPI Texas:** Council on Regional Economic Expansion and Educational Development (CREEED)

### WPI Profile: El Paso, Texas

El Paso, Texas, is a WPI site in the early stages of development. Leaders and partners are beginning to identify higher education and business champions; develop knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that will be the foundation of future credential programs; and determine which sector will be the focus of this initiative. Justin Yancy, president of the Texas Business Leadership Council, and Andres Alcantar, senior advisor for the Texas Association of Community Colleges—two key leaders with WPI Texas—attribute engagement and commitment thus far to their partnership with the [Council on Regional Economic Expansion & Educational Development](#) (CREEED), a local organization dedicated to developing high-quality education for all students in El Paso. WPI elevates CREEED's work, offering additional support and expertise from an array of stakeholders, while CREEED remains a central driver of the initiative.

## PHASE I: Lay the Groundwork

### Step 1: Clarify expectations of senior management.

The first step to launching a regional workforce development program is to clarify the vision of the initiative's executive sponsor, which could be the chief executive officer, chief human resources officer, or other member of an employer's senior management team. Companies should consider:

- **Goals.** Identify a list of clear, concise goals to serve as a compass for the project, enabling staff to assess the relevance of proposed activities and to communicate the purpose of the initiative to potential business and higher education partners. Goals can vary and may align with sourcing qualified talent, reducing training costs, or serving the company's broader philanthropic mission. Companies should also consider partnering with other employers to achieve broader goals within the sector or region.
- **Alignment.** The executive sponsor will probably have a vision for how the program will operate within existing company priorities, including in what region it is located, which employers or higher education institutions will be involved, and how skills will be acquired (e.g., through an apprenticeship program, targeted in-house training, etc.).
- **Resources.** Staff should clarify what level of staffing and financing the executive hopes to make available for this initiative. A general understanding of employee commitment, executive sponsor involvement, and project budget can help staff when identifying potential activities and models in later steps.

#### WPI Connecticut (CT)

Through WPI CT, industry champions Stanley Black & Decker and Accenture seek to prepare an additional 1,500 Connecticut residents for high-tech jobs. This is a public commitment building upon the work of the [Tech Talent Accelerator](#), which seeks to form sustainable partnerships between business and higher education to develop high-skill credentials and pathways to tech-enabled jobs.

This strategy is directly aligned with the state's [workforce strategy](#) that seeks to build business-higher education partnerships in the technology field.

## Engaging an Intermediary

An intermediary can **guide staff during the initial planning stages and assist with collecting and documenting feedback from the executive sponsor**. An entity with experience in workforce development or higher education can identify realistic goals, priorities, and resource commitments based on the general vision of the business.

### Step 2: Analyze the talent ecosystem.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the workforce landscape within a region, employers will need to conduct a thorough analysis of the supply of and demand for skills in the region, as well as gain a thorough understanding of their current talent-sourcing mechanisms. To do so, companies should:

**Assess hiring needs.** Metrics may include:

- Hiring projections
- Available budget
- Short- and long-term growth goals
- Number of positions posted
- Percent of offers declined
- Average number of days to fill a position
- Skill requirements for open positions
- Demand for specific skills across departments
- Current workload and employee bandwidth

**Assess the market.** Analyze regional skills supply and demand to ensure the selected field is broad enough to attract peer businesses and higher education partners. Metrics may include:

- Supply
  - Number of relevant degrees awarded annually
  - Number of active workers with desired skill set
  - Employment destinations of recent graduates



- Demand
  - Occupational growth projections
  - Size of workforce
  - Open jobs
  - Common high-demand skills across sectors

**Assess employment practices.** Identify current talent sourcing, recruitment, and development efforts. Metrics may include:

- Partnerships with higher education providers
- Recruitment strategies (regionally and beyond)
- Content/keywords in advertisements and social media campaigns
- Education requirements for job postings (these may prove to be a barrier to hiring a more diverse workforce with the desired skill set)
- Inclusion-related hiring practices

**Assess state/federal investments.** States or regions may already have overlapping initiatives underway or may have state or federal funding designated for related workforce development programs. For example, Connecticut received federal funding from the [Good Jobs Challenge](#) to advance its Regional Sector Partnerships (RSPs), the flagship initiative of the Governor’s Workforce Council. RSPs are coalitions of employers at the forefront of developing talent pipelines in key industries supported by public partners in education, workforce development, and economic development ([CT Office of Workforce Strategy](#)). WPI Connecticut works to ensure major companies are participating in RSPs and having their demands addressed by Good Jobs Challenge programs so that more Connecticut residents are hired into “good jobs” in the state.

### WPI Texas: EY Pilot

EY has partnered with Alamo Colleges District, which comprises five community colleges in San Antonio, to recruit graduates to accounting positions. EY's historical hiring processes targeted bachelor's degree holders, so partnering with community colleges required a new recruiting strategy and understanding of graduates' skills to ensure effective job placement and long-term success. The purpose of this initiative is to diversify EY's hiring pipelines and leverage local talent while simultaneously learning how to replicate this structure in other parts of the country.

EY formed strong bonds with professors and conducted focus groups to promote the accounting major to prospective students, and, in turn, elevated EY as an attractive employer post-graduation.

Since the initiative began in 2022, [EY has hired 91 individuals](#) as business support associates from the Alamo Colleges. These individuals have the opportunity to advance within the accounting department and take advantage of EY's educational benefits to earn additional credentials or degrees or engage in professional development to move elsewhere within the company.

**“ I feel so lucky to have been given the opportunity to work at EY, where I have been encouraged, nurtured and allowed to shape the experience to be something tailored to my strengths while still pushing me towards growth personally and professionally.”**

— Molly, Austin CC graduate, EY employee

### Engaging an Intermediary

An intermediary can **work with human resource analysts to identify and interpret data.**

Such an organization can also be helpful in conducting the inventory of existing strategies, as they will likely span beyond the human resources department and require a commitment of staff time. Sites that seek a regional analysis of talent needs often engage an intermediary, including workforce boards, third-party data providers, government agencies, management consultants, and others with access to and experience with the data.

### Step 3: Formulate a project plan.

This checklist may help the lead company identify goals, priorities, commitments, and intentions prior to engaging partners.

- **Field/sector.** Define the occupation or skills to target based on senior management's goals and priorities and the specific talent needs identified in Step 2 (e.g., cybersecurity, aerospace engineering, advanced manufacturing, data analytics).
- **Geographic region.** Solidify the location on which to focus the intervention (city/state/metropolitan area).
- **Academic credentials.** Develop a list of credentials that higher education institutions must offer to those participating in this initiative (e.g., apprenticeships, certificates, degrees, badges).
- **Industry engagement.** Define activities that employers are expected to offer workers or students participating in these initiatives (e.g., work-based learning, resume review, technology donations, grants to higher education institutions).
- **Company signaling.** Create the mechanism and frequency with which employers identify and share talent needs with partners (e.g., competency mapping, meetings between faculty and subject-matter experts from business, regular revisions of job postings and candidate profiles).
- **Budget.** Develop a list of budgeted items and create a preliminary spending plan for the initiative (e.g., work-based learning wages, expenses for recruiting higher education providers, tuition for courses).
- **Value proposition.** Create a value proposition for businesses, higher education institutions, and students served by the initiative.

### Engaging an Intermediary

An intermediary can help **identify an appropriate model that meets the lead company's goals, priorities, and hiring needs.** An organization with experience in designing and executing workforce programs can be particularly helpful in weighing the pros and cons of different options.



## PHASE II: Partnering With Peer Employers

### Step 4: Recruit employers with similar talent needs.

A successful workforce partnership forms when companies with similar hiring needs converge around a common regional solution. Partners will share talent needs, their vision, and priorities as well as agree on the time commitment, staffing, and resources dedicated to the initiative. To do so, the lead company should:

- Assess the overall fit of companies with which it has an existing relationship, including partners from existing workforce initiatives that have a demonstrated commitment to community impact.
- Identify other peer companies with similar talent needs and core values.
  - **Tip:** Use a labor market assessment tool (e.g., Lightcast) to determine common talent needs in the region.
  - **Tip:** Look through companies' histories of engaging in social responsibility and workforce development to determine commonalities in core values.
- Share a draft project plan, goals, and value-add with prospective partners.

#### WPI Chicago

To expand the city's commitment to professional advancement through apprenticeships, Aon and Accenture co-founded the Chicago Apprentice Network (CAN) in August 2017 to convene Chicago companies that either already have or are interested in creating their own professional apprenticeship programs. WPI supports this initiative.

Employers involved in CAN have similar talent needs and are committed to prioritizing apprenticeship programs as central to their recruiting models.

#### Engaging an Intermediary

An intermediary can **be indispensable in recruiting peer businesses, explaining the goals of the project, securing buy-in, and facilitating early meetings**. Membership-based intermediaries like BHEF can leverage their contacts and knowledge of different employers to help the lead company select appropriate partners.

## Step 5: Agree on the basic partnership structure.

This step will look different in each partnership model based on what the partners decide works best for their needs. Ironing out details upfront makes collaboration easier over time. Items that are useful to cover include:

- **Scope.** Determine the parameters of the field of focus, the region, educational goals, recruitment goals, and industry engagement. These parameters may be adjusted from the lead company's original scope to incorporate partner companies.
- **Governance.** Discuss how the group will make decisions (consensus, majority rules, leadership committee, etc.) and establish a meeting structure and schedule. Designate delegates for each company's executive sponsor.
- **Partnership.** Determine the process for adding new partners. Questions to consider include:
  - *What are the criteria for becoming a partner?*
  - *What organizations are doing similar work and may be interested in partnership?*
  - *What is an effective recruiting process for prospective partners?*
  - *What resources must new partners commit?*
- **Information sharing.** Outline data-sharing practices, particularly around sensitive data like talent needs, hiring practices, and workforce demographics.

“

Tech talent is critical to businesses across all sectors in Connecticut. The Tech Talent Accelerator, a state-sponsored program designed to create partnerships between business and higher education, is helping our state quickly increase its capacity to deliver the talent needed to keep our businesses competitive in Connecticut. Through this investment and in partnership with WPI, our entire business community will yield the benefits of hiring diverse, well-trained, ready-to-work tech talent with the specific skills necessary for our businesses through our state's world-class public and independent higher education institutions.”

- **Marty Guay, Vice President, Business Development, Stanley Black & Decker**

## Engaging an Intermediary

An intermediary with **experience in partnership structures or legal agreements will be critical** at this juncture, as will engaging legal counsel if partners are new to developing membership agreements.

### Step 6: Identify education and training needs.

In this step, the lead company and partner companies must identify and describe—with the help of internal subject-matter experts, entry-level incumbents, and managers—the specific technical knowledge, skills, and abilities a worker needs to add value on day one and grow within the company. To do so, the group may:

- Conduct an internal survey of members to quantify specific needs within the organization
- Standardize how needs are measured
- Facilitate a conversation among partners to understand the range of needs
- Explore a labor market information tool (e.g., Lightcast, Chmura, JobsEQ, LinkedIn), a free, open-source application programming interface (e.g., Lightcast Open Skills Taxonomy), and public skills reports (e.g., Burning Glass Institute’s periodic skills reports).

Examples of resources on skills and competencies include:

- Federal skills databases
  - U.S. Department of Labor’s O\*NET (occupational skills ratings and level scale anchors)
  - U.S. Department of Education’s National Career Clusters Framework
- Field-specific competencies
  - NICE Cybersecurity Workforce Framework
  - CAE-CD 2021 Knowledge Units for cybersecurity
  - CompTIA (technology positions)
  - Google Career Certificates
  - AWS Certificates

- Qualification summaries developed by a partner or other region
  - Companies' own lists of skills required for certain professions
  - Colleges and universities that companies have relied on for skills/outcomes lists
  - Work completed in other regions, if publicly available

### Important to Remember

Throughout this process, partners may need to revisit decisions about the field on which the initiative is focused, the targeted level of employee (entry, mid, professional), and whether needs are based on occupations or skills.

### Engaging an Intermediary

Sites often engage an intermediary to **conduct the skills analysis**, allowing work to remain objective and consistent across companies.

## PHASE III: Engaging Higher Education

### Step 7: Select appropriate higher education partners.

Business partners will want to recruit colleges and universities that can articulate strong support for the overall priorities and values set forth by the initiative as well as demonstrate the ability to implement highly technical programming that matches employer talent requirements.

It is important to remember that partner businesses may be tempted to recruit only higher education partners with whom they have an existing relationship. However, if the initiative seeks to expand and diversify the pipeline of students and workers with sought-after skills, businesses may need to partner with new higher education institutions. Ideally, partners will develop membership priorities or requirements before identifying and engaging individual institutions. Higher education partner criteria checklist:

- **Student demographic.** Identify colleges and universities that actively recruit and enroll diverse, low-income or local populations. Data may include race/ethnicity, gender, financial status, disability, home state of undergraduates, and special designation (e.g., HBCU, HSI, MSI).
- **Program offerings.** Initiatives with a strong focus on the academic caliber of higher education partners may look to national rankings, particularly within the selected field. Employer partners may also look to community colleges with strong teaching faculty and subject-matter experts in the selected field.
- **Modality and nimbleness.** Initiatives will need to examine which higher education partners offer online, evening, weekend, and part-time programs to achieve flexibility and shorter time to credential. Businesses interested in conducting on-site trainings will need to contact prospective education partners' offices of professional studies.

#### Important to Remember

Partners must keep in mind a college's capacity and willingness to engage in this work. Some colleges have enrollment caps or restrictive enrollment in relevant coursework (e.g., computer science), and it may be difficult to expand their capacity for this initiative.

### Engaging an Intermediary

As with business recruitment, an intermediary with knowledge of all connections to different institutions can be a tremendous asset in helping partners **identify, vet, and recruit institutions that best meet their goals.**

### Step 8: Resolve known barriers to implementation.

Once higher education partners have joined the initiative, all partners must review the specifics of the program and the potential barriers to implementation. These may include:

- **Competing priorities.** Colleges and universities may be reluctant to create new classes, or they may strongly prefer to offer content only to students in the major. Employers may vary in the extent to which they can offer a competitive wage to students engaged in work-based learning. Ultimately, partners must agree on the minimum level of uniformity and ensure that even if students have different experiences, they are all equipped equally with the desired skills (as monitored in Step 11).
- **Faculty training.** In amending curricula, faculty members at higher education institutions will likely need to teach new skills and content areas with which they have limited exposure. Many WPI sites have met this training need by allowing partner companies' subject-matter experts to train and mentor faculty, review course content, or serve as adjunct faculty. This partnership model also creates greater bandwidth for education providers that are too often short-staffed.

### WPI Partner: CUNY Faculty Fellowship Program, New York Jobs CEO Council

Originating in 2020, the City University of New York (CUNY) Faculty Fellowship Program supports faculty by assisting them in redesigning pedagogy and training them to become advocates for work-based learning. The program offers visiting scholar sessions, workday experiences at partner employers, employer presentations, support for syllabus revision to include real-world assignments and assessments that align with in-demand careers. This initiative provides faculty with multilevel support systems to adjust and implement curricula that prepare students for the workforce.



- **Government relations.** Partners should anticipate some amount of government oversight, depending on the specific type of program they are implementing. For example, programs that want to register their apprenticeship with the U.S. Department of Labor—which is not required but can be beneficial to the company—must demonstrate that the experiences meet national and independent standards for quality and rigor. The development of a new major, minor, or certificate is also likely to trigger review within the college or university and by state regulators. While some sites have opted not to create a new credential to avoid the need for formal review, many have developed one, deciding that the extra time was worth it to help students and employers find the best fit.

### Engaging an Intermediary

Intermediaries can help partners **identify likely barriers to implementation, particularly if that intermediary has experience implementing a similar workforce development program**. The entity can also moderate a discussion to identify solutions to these barriers, including making adjustments to the model as needed.

### Step 9: Build curriculum to skills specifications.

After identifying and navigating potential barriers to implementation, businesses should compare the specific education and training requirements set forth in Step 5 against existing curricula of partner higher education institutions.

To do so, businesses may collaborate with higher education partners to develop a process by which each applicable existing course's learning outcomes are mapped against the KSAs that the businesses have identified for entry-level roles. Learning outcomes and, therefore, curricula may need to be adjusted to better translate to these KSAs. Alternatively, new programs and/or courses may need to be created—depending on the education partner's capacity—to fill employer needs. This method will require subject-matter experts from the businesses to be deeply involved throughout the curriculum development process.

A sustained, strong partnership between employers and education partners is foundational here, especially if, in the adjustment of learning outcomes or in the creation of new courses/curricula, a formal evaluation and approval process is required by the education partner's administration.

### Important to Remember

The number of courses that need to be reviewed also depends on the parameters set forth by the larger group; initiatives that seek to incorporate learning outcomes into as many courses as possible will require a larger review than a program that seeks to enroll students in a particular course sequence.

### Engaging an Intermediary

While academic partners often prefer to do this work on their own, an intermediary can help **identify relevant courses of study and review offerings across multiple programs, departments, and colleges**. Depending on the number of institutions involved, an intermediary can also be essential in synthesizing findings across partners.

## PHASE IV: Implementing the Program

### Step 10: Recruit participants.

Regardless of the program structure, implementation begins by identifying, recruiting, and selecting the first cohort of participants.

Both businesses and academic partners play key roles in recruiting students and workers into the program and eliminating barriers or perceived obstacles that may prevent individuals from pursuing available opportunities. Strategies for all partners may include:

- Partner with subject-matter experts to attract candidates to the selected field.
- Partner with campus recruiters or career services.
- Create greater awareness about skills needed in complex fields like data and computer science and advertise accessible pathways to careers in such fields.
- Collaborate with workforce boards and nonprofit organizations that serve diverse populations and offer support services and complementary programs such as work-based learning and youth employment preparation.
- Recruit students directly from the first course within a sequence if one exists or is developed through this program.
- Offer resume review workshops and interview preparation.

#### WPI Milwaukee

The Academy of Advanced Manufacturing™ (AAM) is a [12-week residential program based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin](#), that equips veterans with the technical and workplace skills to fill in-demand manufacturing jobs. AAM advances a Rockwell Automation (Rockwell) priority to employ more people with military backgrounds. AAM is part of WPI, through which it is connected to a network of industry-higher education partnerships in regions across the United States.

With its primary partner, ManpowerGroup, AAM identifies veterans to enroll in the program, teaching them technical and essential workplace skills and providing connections to employers for interviews and subsequent job placement. During the program, Rockwell delivers technical instruction, and ManpowerGroup delivers professional skills instruction.

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Over the 6 years of the program, 441 individuals have enrolled in AAM. Of those, 348 graduated, and 280 were placed in jobs with a Rockwell customer. In addition, 38 percent of participants are people of color. Rockwell has had 90 unique customers participate in the program, and about half of the placements have been with repeat “customers” of the program.

WPI provided tools and resources that enabled AAM to capture success metrics and plan for expansion, including customized technical assistance, an action plan and metrics templates, a replication guide, an insights guide, case studies, and peer-to-peer convenings.

### Engaging an Intermediary

An intermediary can **help with all aspects of student recruitment**, including hosting on-campus information sessions, contacting interested students to push formal enrollment, tracking conversations, and developing marketing materials to attract new participants.

### Step 11: Monitor and refine the program.

The group of higher education and business partners should now translate previously established goals and activities into quantifiable outputs and outcomes to ensure the program achieves the desired results. Through this exercise, partners may identify critical activities to add or remove, problematic assumptions, ways different activities and actors fit together, and participant demographics. Partners will need to develop a system to collect and report the aforementioned data. Collection methods may include:

- Developing a template for partners to populate
- Conducting an annual survey
- Informally emailing each partner’s main point of contact

Once data is collected, data reporting may take the form of:

- Dashboards
- Report cards
- Other standardized reports that compare performance against goals

While quantitative information is fundamental to the initiative, it should accompany regular conversations and feedback (in the form of networking events, trainings or workshops, scheduled meetings, surveys, etc.) from faculty members, teaching staff, administrators, students, business partners' main points of contact and other relevant stakeholders close to the work. These conversations will lead to necessary adjustments to the program.

**Prioritizing the student.** Faculty, teaching staff, and business partners should regularly engage with students to encourage persistence through the educational side of the program so they eventually become full-time employees. These conversations can also lead to important changes in the program such as implementing more tailored support systems or refining recruitment strategies.

### Important to Remember

Business and higher education partners will need to establish a schedule/feedback loop to regularly assess course alignment with the KSAs.

### Engaging an Intermediary

Intermediaries can help sites **develop relevant performance metrics and work through a logic model that makes sense for the work**. Finding an intermediary with experience in performance management and benchmarking could be particularly helpful.

## Step 12: Sustain and expand successful strategies.

In this last step, partners focus on developing a permanent mechanism for businesses and higher education to exchange ideas and information, dedicate staff to program administration, and scale what works. To do so, the group may:

- **Develop an ongoing signaling mechanism.** As technology changes, so too will the specific KSAs that business partners consider essential. To ensure employers signal these evolving needs to higher education, partners must decide how frequently they will update competencies for a select field and adjust educational offerings to match those needs.

- **Find a permanent program administrator.** To maintain momentum, partnerships can find an outside entity to handle ongoing program administration and operations.
- **Replicate what works in other fields and regions.** Ongoing performance monitoring and data collection provides partners with insight into which elements of the program are successful and which should be eliminated in future iterations. This information can provide the foundation for the expansion of the program into new regions, fields or career paths. In particular, businesses with operations in other regions may consider initiating this program elsewhere with local partners and intermediaries.

### WPI Chicago

Since its origination, CAN has launched 9 active networks, onboarded 206 unique employers partners and has received 4,746 apprenticeship commitments, with an eye toward its goal of 10,000 apprenticeship commitments by 2030.

CAN, in partnership with Business Roundtable, created the national Apprenticeship Playbook that serves to help other employers launch their own apprenticeship programs.

### Engaging an Intermediary

Sites looking to scale and replicate successful strategies can **work with an intermediary that has a national perspective on other sites or industries** that might be receptive to developing a similar initiative.



## Lessons Learned

As businesses and academic partners embark on this work, lessons learned from WPI sites can assist with facilitating all phases of creating and sustaining a partnership.

- **Utilize existing resources and initiatives to secure early wins.** To expedite this work and realize early project successes, partners can rely on existing resources and partnerships as a starting point at each phase. In Phase I, for example, the lead business can review existing analyses from its human resources department to identify company hiring needs and complete the Business-Higher Education Forum's implementation checklist for initial project planning. In Phases II and III, partners can recruit businesses and academic institutions with which they have collaborated in the past, develop skills requirements based on existing national models or similar initiatives, and work with faculty members to adjust existing courses of study rather than piloting a new credential. In Phase IV, partners can recruit students who have already completed a course or other partial training in the sequence and focus their efforts on scaling in regions and within occupations that have existing workforce development initiatives.
- **Engage CEOs and leaders of higher education institutions to accelerate action and outcomes.** Direct peer-to-peer engagement by CEOs and the leaders of educational institutions helps align goals, accelerate partnership development, and sustain organizational commitment. Sites with executive-level engagement advance more quickly; when leadership prioritizes this work, employees are more inclined to make the initiative a success. When executives provide support, resources, and regular check-ins on progress, employees are much better positioned to engage and execute on

To launch the digital technology credentialing work in the DMV, the then-CEO of Northrop Grumman personally contacted and convened other CEOs. After a consortium of dedicated company executives and university presidents was firmly established, each leader identified staff members to serve on working groups focused on activities such as credential implementation, human resources hiring processes, and business engagement and recruitment. Staff continue to provide guidance and feedback on curricula, access to work-based learning experiences and recommendations for advancement of the work. Additionally, CEOs personally recruited other industry leaders to expand the number of employers at the table.

initiatives. Similarly, senior-level involvement at educational institutions incentivizes quick program development that aligns with current employer partner needs.

- **Partner with a knowledgeable intermediary.** Partnerships like WPI are led by business but supported by intermediaries that help identify and recruit members, conduct analyses, and facilitate meetings and discussions. According to WPI lead businesses, a good intermediary has experience with both business and higher education, an understanding of the targeted skill set (such as advanced manufacturing or analytics), and a knowledge of the region in which the initiative is based.

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These are not small problems we are trying to solve; we needed someone who really understood both the business and higher education environments, the true systemic constraints we would encounter, and who cared about pushing us from theory to action. I've participated in these types of initiatives in the past, and sometimes we came up with fabulous solutions that were just not workable. The Business-Higher Education Forum has been able to drive EY US in a very constructive way to get the information we need to stay on target.”

- **Ellen Glazerman, Executive Director,  
Ernst & Young Foundation and America's Director of University Relations**

- **Embrace unlikely partners.** Successful employer-higher education initiatives have benefitted from engaging new, even unlikely, partners. First, they engage with businesses that have similar, urgent hiring needs with which they normally compete for talent. They also include colleges and universities that offer similar programs and normally compete for the same students. The partnerships forged around the common goal of effective workforce development programs transcend tensions. The work becomes focused on strengthening the talent pipeline, not on vying for resources. Second, they engage higher education institutions with which they do not have an existing partnership, such as community or technical colleges, to further expand and diversify the talent pipeline. To facilitate a collaborative environment, it can be helpful to have clear rules of engagement and to offer confidentiality when discussing hiring needs.

- **Communicate the value proposition for all partners up front to help build and sustain broad buy-in for the initiative.** With competing demands of their time, staff from business and higher education need to be selective about where to invest their resources. Partnering requires effort, and each organization must find value to justify the time and work required to participate in the initiative. Clarifying the goals and values of each partner is critical. For employers, what pain point—such as hiring or retention—does the strategy solve? For higher education and nonprofits, does the initiative support increased employment for graduates or better connections to industry partners? For students or apprentices, what makes this opportunity worthwhile for them—career awareness and exposure, work experience, a career path?

When companies decide to collaborate on workforce development programming, they should create a value proposition that summarizes the benefits for each partner. Outlining these benefits enables companies to move forward with program planning and the recruitment of additional partners.

- **Design for inclusion at every stage.** Initiatives that seek to diversify the talent pipeline should prioritize inclusion at every stage for those values to permeate the culture and have an impact. In Phase I, for example, the lead company can explore how existing policy and practices might discourage diverse candidates or limit advancement and can propose a model that is accessible and relevant to the desired population. In Phases II and III, the lead company can communicate inclusion goals through project plans and signed memoranda of understanding—and select partners based in part on their commitment and ability to achieve those objectives. In Phase IV (and in all phases), partners can solidify inclusion as a central pillar of this initiative through building and purposefully maintaining a culture of inclusion and belonging. To do so, partners may seek frequent feedback from current employees and regularly examine recruitment and retention strategies to continue improving their workplace environments in this arena.
- **Document everything.** As lead businesses and their partners progress through the steps to start and expand their initiative, it is crucial that they document major findings, insights, and decisions along the way. Doing so ensures all members understand what is happening and have agreed to next steps. In particular, developing a signed agreement—whereby members confirm their commitment to the initiative and agree to decisions—helps to formalize the relationship and cement each partner’s continuing support.

## Closing

In today's workforce landscape, keeping pace with rapidly evolving market demands requires innovative and effective workforce strategies that enable employers to quickly access qualified talent. Companies can work together to identify their collective talent needs, partner with higher education providers to develop responsive curricula, and offer meaningful work experiences that help students succeed in their chosen careers. Employers investing in educational opportunities and building strong communication pathways between business and education are key to attracting talent, retaining employees, and creating a culture of lifelong learning and value.

The Business Roundtable Workforce Partnership Initiative provides a template for how this system can work with positive results. Using the steps and tools contained in this playbook, businesses can take ownership of their skills needs and work collaboratively to develop qualified talent in the current and future workforce. This work not only benefits the employer, but it also helps educators tailor curricula to meet the needs of a region and improve student outcomes. Moreover, these partnerships equip local populations with meaningful skills, employment options and good-paying career paths while encouraging stable, inclusive economic growth in our communities.

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## Acknowledgments

Business Roundtable recognizes BHEF for their partnership in creating this playbook. We also appreciate the generous support of the JPMorganChase Foundation that made this playbook possible.