



## The BILT Model: Six Ways to Engage Employers and Give Students the Skills They Need to Get Hired

*By Mark Dempsey, Assistant Director, Ann Beheler, Principal Investigator, National Convergence Technology Center, Collin College*

While every community college program seeks to guide students toward completion of certificates and degrees that will prepare them for employment, too often there is a mismatch between what employers need and what our curriculum teaches. The answer lies in getting local business and industry experts to actively participate in the process of steering coursework. The [National Convergence Technology Center \(CTC\)](#)—funded by a National Science Foundation grant and based at Collin College in Frisco, Texas—calls this approach the business and industry leadership team, or BILT model. The name differentiates the BILT from a traditional business advisory committee (BAC) that might only convene once a year to approve curriculum presented by faculty. The BILT model insists that business and industry experts “co-lead” programs and validate the job skills students will learn. In other words, while a BAC advises, a BILT leads.

### Six Essential Elements for Success

The CTC has identified six elements essential to the success of BILTs. Review the list below and think about the relationship your college has with its employer council. Is your program doing enough to keep business and industry engaged?

1. **FREQUENT MEETINGS** – Your BILT must meet more than once a year so your employers feel ownership of the program. Remember the old adage “out of sight, out of mind.” The CTC recommends four meetings, once per quarter—one in person for annual job skills validations and three shorter virtual meetings. While some colleges prefer to assemble in person for a formal meal, shorter virtual meetings make it easier for your BILT members to participate.
2. **TRENDS DISCUSSION** – Set aside time each meeting to allow your employers to discuss the trends they’re seeing in industry. This is a good way to let them share their perspectives on the current and future state of the workforce and necessary employee skills, which can further inform your program to keep it current.
3. **FACULTY ATTENDANCE** – This may seem obvious, but some colleges limit attendance at the employer meetings to a select few. It’s important that faculty hear first-hand the perspectives, forecasts, and needs of the industry without the intermediary of typed meeting minutes or second-hand summaries. Faculty are the ones teaching the skills employers want. They need every opportunity to understand those skills as clearly as possible.
4. **ANNUAL JOB SKILLS VALIDATION** – Once a year, convene your BILT to go over the job skills (also called “KSAs” for knowledge, skills, and abilities) they want to see in an entry-level worker for the next 12–36

months. This will likely require a longer meeting, but this structured validation process lies at the heart of the BILT model. Your employers are on the front lines of industry and know best which job skills are important and which skills are out-of-date. Use these experts to guide your curriculum. Remember also to make sure your BILT members are the people who understand the jobs your students will be seeking: high-level technical executives, first-line hiring managers, and the technicians themselves.

5. **FACULTY CROSSWALK** – The CTC asks its BILT to validate job skills through voting. Votes are recorded in a spreadsheet in real time ([see a sample here](#)) during the meeting, which adds order and structure to the discussion. The faculty then use those votes to map skills to the program’s coursework and make sure that what the BILT calls for is what the curriculum is teaching. If there are gaps, adjustments can be made either by creating a new course or updating an existing course.
6. **PROVIDE FEEDBACK** – BILT members need to feel valued, so be sure to take time to let

them know how you implemented their recommendations. Even if you can’t do what they ask, let them know. In some cases, the BILT can find a solution to your problem. Keep in mind that if you ignore their suggestions or make them feel unheard, you run the risk of losing their interest and engagement.

These six elements will help strengthen your relationship with your business council, encourage your employers to commit to your program, and better align your curriculum with workforce needs. While this model was originally developed for IT, it’s been successfully implemented across a broad range of technical programs.

**To Learn More:**

- Download the [BILT Toolkit](#)
- Watch the Webinar: [BILT Basics](#)

*Connect with the authors:*

[Mark Dempsey](#) and [Ann Beheler](#)

