



## Employer Engagement Toolkit Enables Next-Level Planning

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In a time when information is critical to success and budgets are tied to outcomes, the need for strategic employer engagement with colleges has never been greater. No longer can programs thrive with limited input from local employers. All community and technical colleges must stay informed of—and respond to—industry-specific trends that impact skill sets, national standards, and credentials.

The Employer Engagement Toolkit, developed through CORD's *Advancing Credentials Through Career Pathways* project, funded by ECMC Foundation, provides the tools and resources to assist colleges in engaging employers in a variety of ways across a broad spectrum of activities.

The toolkit is organized among five categories of engagement: Knowing Your Audience; Developing Your Program; Mining for Deeper Engagement; Generating Support; and Joining Voices.



Within each category is a self-check to assist colleges in reflecting on their current level of engagement and prompt internal conversations. There are activities for the college to perform prior to reaching out to employers and activities to engage in with employers. Resources, tools, and strategies from the field are included in each section as well.

**Knowing Your Audience** helps colleges better understand their local employer base and ensure they are engaging the right people from each organization, both college and partner company. Tools in this section help colleges take inventory of their current level of employer engagement, seek assistance and connections from external partner organizations such as chambers of commerce or workforce or economic development partners, create an outreach plan, and assist with finding the right engagement fit for each employer.

**Developing Your Program** dives into the topic of employer input into curriculum to ensure the knowledge, skills, and abilities of program completers are aligned with the local job market. 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 a program teaches. The answer lies in getting local business and industry experts to actively participate in the process of steering coursework. This section introduces the Business Industry Leadership Team (BILT) model, which insists that business and industry experts “co-

lead” programs and validate the job skills students will learn. Resources for establishing and operating a BILT are included.

**Mining for Deeper Engagement** focuses on strengthening engagement with existing employer partners. Learn how to take it to the next level, by offering employers more opportunities to engage with students, their future employees. Tools in this section address recognition for employers who are already engaged with a college, using their testimonials to market programs, and finding new ways to involve them in programs and initiatives they may not be aware of such as apprenticeships, internships, career fairs, and more.

**Generating Support** is about resources including, but not limited to financial. Learn about college donors and find ways to more closely connect them to programs, labs, and students. Tools are provided to help college foundation staff and faculty collaborate to bring necessary resources to the college. Strategies for staying connected to past program graduates as they progress on their career path are also included.

**Joining Voices** helps college personnel work with employers to move them from Partner to Advocate. Being an advocate involves far more than hiring graduates. It is about preparing a workforce that keeps the local economy strong. It is about a group of employers being proactive in helping the college increase its awareness of and relevance to the community it serves. Also, knowing the employers that are interested and involved with the college can lead to greater



engagement. For example, a leader who is positioned well in a sector may ask fellow industry leaders to join in the important work of advocating for the college and its programs. This can lead to increased involvement by employers who bring their networks to the college and increase partnership opportunities for new program development and support.

The Toolkit’s five elements of engagement offer resources and strategies to help colleges strengthen relationships with local employers, creating new opportunities for students while ensuring local hiring needs are met. Ultimately, engaged employers will turn to their partner college as their first choice for workforce education and training.

#### **To Learn More:**

- Visit the Employer Engagement [Toolkit](#)
- Request a guided tour of the Toolkit, its features, and resources for your college by contacting [ddavidson@cord.org](mailto:ddavidson@cord.org)