

Employer-Led Industry Engagement

Best Practices & Steps Model

A Framework for Community College, Adult Education & Workforce Development Partnerships with Industry

Workforce & Employer Engagement Division

Synthesized from: BILT Model (NSF/Collin College, 2023) · DOL Employer Engagement Research (Safal Partners, 2021) · HRTTP Promising Practices (UC Berkeley/CWDB, 2020)



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CALIFORNIA
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PROGRAM

Industry as Partner, Not Just Customer

Industry-Led Partnership

Goal is to place industry in its rightful co-leadership role while preserving the academic authority, instructional expertise, and equity commitments that educational institutions bring.

Introduction: Why Industry Must Lead

- The U.S. Department of Labor's review of employer engagement research (Patterson & Carson, Safal Partners, 2021) found that **programs with high levels of industry involvement in design and delivery produce measurably better employment and earnings outcomes** for participants.
- The BILT (Business and Industry Leadership Team) model developed by NSF Convergence Technology Center and Collin College has demonstrated in over 100 colleges nationally that **employer co-leadership in curriculum development directly increases graduate employability and employer hiring commitment.**
- California's High Road Training Partnerships Study (UC Berkeley Labor Center / CWDB, 2020) showed that **when industry — including both management and labor — leads problem-solving, partnerships achieve both scale and systemic impact.**

What the Evidence Tells Us

Outcomes from research studies directly supporting this model

30%

Higher Average Wages

Program completers with employer-focused sector advisory councils vs. control groups

TAACCCT Evaluation (DOL, 2021)

58→83%

Employment Rate Gain

Non-incumbent workers in co-designed programs with high employer engagement

TAACCCT / Sectoral Employment Impact Study

\$46,580

Avg. Annual Earnings

Project QUEST graduates at 9-year post-enrollment follow-up — sustained, long-term earnings impact

Economic Mobility Corp. / MDRC (2019)

87–94%

1-Year Retention Rate

Registered Apprenticeship completers remaining with sponsoring employers after one year

U.S. DOL Apprenticeship Data (2022)

30–60%

Lower Cost-Per-Hire

Employers sourcing talent through WBL pipelines vs. traditional recruiting channels

National Fund for Workforce Solutions (2020)

100+

Colleges Using BILT

Validated nationally; recognized by U.S. DOL & Dept of Education as a leading model for employer engagement

NSF/Collin College BILT Tracker (2023)

Four Pillars of This Model

Every Element of Employer-led Engagement Rests on These Principles

01 Industry Leads Problem-Solving

Industry (Employers and Labor) define demand, identify gaps, validate competencies, and set standards — not as advisors but as co-architects.

02 Partnership Is a Sustained Priority

Engagement is not transactional or event-based. It is an ongoing, structured, two-way relationship with defined governance.

03 Learner/Worker Voice Is Incorporated

Alongside employer input, worker and union perspectives on job quality, barriers, and career pathways are explicitly included.

04 Training Solutions Are Industry-Driven

Curriculum design, credential alignment, work-based learning, and quality improvement are all grounded in what industry partners determine is needed.

The Six-Phase Model at a Glance

Iterative, not linear — each phase feeds into the next and back again. Phases 2–3 repeat annually and other phases are visited regularly.

PHASE 1

Foundation & Partnership Architecture

Who leads, governance structures, MOU, coordinator roles.

PHASE 2

Industry-Led Labor Market Analysis

Demand determination, LMI tools, industry needs assessment, industry problem solving.

PHASE 3

Curriculum Co-Design & Credentials

BILT/KSA process, DACUM, competency mapping, stackable credentials.

PHASE 4

Work-Based Learning Infrastructure

WBL continuum, employer onboarding, learning agreements, supervision.

PHASE 5

Faculty & Instructor Industry Currency

Externships, PLCs, practitioner-in-residence, BILT trends meetings.

PHASE 6

Data, Improvement & Scale

Outcome metrics feedback loops, scaling strategies.

Designate and Resource the Employer Partnership Coordinator

The single most important structural investment is a **dedicated human** being whose job is to **make employer participation easy**.

This role — the **Partnership Navigator/Liaison** — operates as the **primary friction-reduction mechanism** in the partnership.

- This person serves as the **single point of contact** for all employer partners across all engagement tiers.
- They **manage MOU execution, meeting logistics, learner matching, WBL coordination, and data collection**.
- They are the **relationship manager** for the BILT/IAB, handling invitations, follow-up, RSVP tracking, and continuous communication.
- The BILT model specifies **high-touch outreach**: phone calls, emails, printed hand-signed invitations, and personal follow-up — not mass email campaigns.
- They should **understand WIIFM ('What's in it for me?')** for each **employer partner** and tailor recruitment and retention messaging accordingly.

Foundation and Partnership Infrastructure – Phase 1

- **Define the Industry Co-Leadership Model** - Explicitly distinguish between advisory participation and co-leadership. Co-leadership means industry shapes what programs exist, what they teach, and how success is measured.
- **Select the right model for your context:** A local BILT advises a single program at one college; a regional BILT advises multiple colleges in a sector.
- **Distinguish industry roles:** High-level technical executives and strategists (future-oriented), first-line hiring managers (current KSA needs), and recent program graduates working in the field (both perspectives) are each valuable. HR professionals alone are insufficient — their knowledge is second-hand.
- **Include learner/worker voice:** Per H RTP research, industry means both management and labor. In unionized sectors, union representatives are essential co-architects, not observers. In non-union contexts, include frontline worker representatives or employee advisory voices.
- **Formalize the Partnership Governance Structure** Durable partnerships require formal structures. Informal relationships collapse when personnel change, funding shifts, or challenges arise.

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- **Execute a Partnership Charter or MOU** covering: shared goals and vision; defined roles and decision-making authority; data sharing protocols; co-investment expectations; duration, renewal, and termination clauses; and non-discrimination commitments.
- **Industry Advisory Board (IAB) or BILT governance:** Quarterly minimum meeting cadence (BILT model specifies 3-4 times/year); structured agendas co-developed with employer co-chair; faculty invited as ex-officio non-voting participants who listen rather than defend.
- **Define Tiered Engagement Levels:** Not every employer partner needs to be at the same engagement depth. Create *Aware / Involved / Invested / Strategic* tiers with clear expectations, time commitments, and benefits at each level.
- **Engage Sector Intermediaries:** Workforce boards, chambers of commerce, economic development agencies, and industry associations can aggregate employer demand, reduce institutional burden, and provide neutral convening authority. Per the DOL research, intermediaries are one of the most effective structures for sustaining engagement.

Build the Employer Value Proposition

- Employers engage when they see **clear, specific value**. Generic 'partnership with education' pitches fail.
- The BILT model requires **a customized elevator pitch of 4-5 sentences** addressing: the program, why employer SMEs are needed, what the time commitment is, and what the employer receives.
- The DOL research confirms that **addressing negative employer perceptions proactively — cost, time, skepticism about program quality — is a foundational engagement strategy.**



Industry-Led Labor Market Analysis – Phase 2

Go Beyond Standard Labor Market Data. Traditional workforce analyses rely exclusively on BLS, state EDD, and EMSI/Lightcast data. This data is useful for trend identification but too general for program design.

- **Layer your LMI:** Start with Lightcast or state projections for sector trends, then conduct your own employer-survey-based analysis to identify specific job titles, pathway gaps, and near-term hiring projections at partnering employers.
- **Account for demographics and retirement:** Every H RTP in the California initiative identified aging workforce as a critical factor. Map retirement projections by department and job classification — the WERC County of LA analysis found these varied dramatically, requiring position-specific analysis rather than sector-level projections.
- **Specify policy and regulatory drivers:** Local hire ordinances, zero-emission requirements, healthcare regulations, licensing changes — identify the specific laws and timelines driving workforce demand in your sector. These are more actionable than trend data alone.
- **Identify major industry disruptors:** Technology (automation, AI, robotics), competitive shifts, new business models, and market changes should be explicitly named and analyzed for their curriculum implications.

Conduct the Industry Needs Assessment

The industry needs assessment is a structured, multi-method process that **produces actionable recommendations** — not a one-time report that sits on a shelf. It must **engage the decision-making body** that will use the findings, and it must be updated regularly.

What to Assess:

- **Current and projected job openings** by specific title and employer, not just sector aggregates.
- **Career pathways:** entry-level → journey-level → supervisory, with wage data at each step.
- **Skills and competency requirements for target jobs** — including what will change due to automation/technology.
- **Cross-occupational skills.**
- **Barriers to fulfilling demand:** hiring process friction, training pipeline gaps, schedule incompatibilities, cost barriers for workers.
- **Equity gaps:** gender, race/ethnicity, geographic underrepresentation in target occupations.

Industry Needs Assessment

How to Gather It:

- Stakeholder **forums**, **roundtables**, and **employer convenings** — multi-employer sector tables produce more generalizable findings than one-on-one interviews
- **Individual interviews** with department heads, operations managers, and frontline supervisors
- **Worker and union surveys and focus groups** (in union sectors, union reps service multiple employers and have unmatched sector-wide knowledge)
- **Job description and posting analysis**: Review actual posted descriptions across all partner employers to identify required qualifications and skills.
- **Inventory of existing training programs and their outcomes** — what is already available, how effective it is, and where the gaps are in training.

How to Use It:

- Results in **specific, prioritized recommendations** — not general guidance — agreed upon by partners so buy-in is built into the process.
- Presented to the Advisory Committee for **validation and action planning**.
- Treated as a **living document refreshed annually**, not a one-time deliverable.

Going
Beyond
Standard
Labor
Market
Data

Curriculum Co-Design & Credential Alignment – Phase 3

The structured BILT/KSA process, faculty cross-referencing, stackable credentials, and industry-recognized certifications

Conduct an Annual KSA Analysis Meeting

- Once a year, convene the BILT for a structured 2-2.5 hour KSA analysis. This is the heart of the employer co-leadership model.
- Within one week of the KSA meeting, all faculty teaching in the program meet to map prioritized KSAs to existing courses. This is the faculty's process — they retain full curricular authority.
- Industry tells faculty what is needed; faculty determine how and when to address it.



Curriculum Co-Design & Credential Alignment – Phase 3

The structured BILT/KSA process, faculty cross-referencing, stackable credentials, and industry-recognized certifications

Host Trends Meetings

- In addition to the annual KSA meeting, hold **2-3 shorter (45-90 minute) virtual Trends Meetings per year**. These provide the forward-looking intelligence that keeps curriculum ahead of industry — not just reactive to current needs.
- Trends discussions **focus on industry innovation 3+ years into the future** — not current hiring needs.
- **'Seed' the discussion** in advance by asking 2-3 BILT members to come prepared to discuss 1-2 specific trends they are seeing.
- Use a **structured trends checklist**: define the trend; discuss implications for educators; assess timing/adoption; identify mashup skills needed; project risks.
- The first Trends Meeting after each annual KSA meeting must include **faculty feedback** on how KSA priorities were implemented in curriculum.
- **Present additional WBL and engagement opportunities** (internships, guest speaking, resume review, mock interviews, student mentoring).
- Ask advisory members for **referrals** to new members — aim to add 1-2 new employer voices per year.

Work-Based Learning Infrastructure - Phase 4

Building the systems that connect learners to employer sites through the full WBL continuum

WBL Tier	Activities	Commitment Level
Awareness	Career panels, site tours, informational interviews	2-8 hours/year; any employer; minimal commitment
Exploration	Job shadows, guest lectures, project briefs	4-16 hours; liability waiver; no wage requirement
Preparation	Project-based learning, simulated workplace, capstones	Moderate; remote-friendly; no on-site requirement
Training	Internships (paid), co-ops, pre-apprenticeships	Semester-long; FLSA wages; learning agreement required
Deep Training	Registered Apprenticeship	1-5 years; full employee; OJT + RTI; federal registration

Maintaining instructors' connection to current industry practice through structured, ongoing employer engagement

Establish Faculty Externship and Industry Connection Programs

- **Implement structured faculty externships:** paid, periodic placements of instructors in industry settings.
- **Offer industry guest lecturer series:** integrated with specific learning objectives, not standalone 'career day' visits. Faculty work with advisory members to identify guest topics that directly address KSA priorities from the annual analysis.
- **Develop Practitioners-in-Residence arrangements:** part-time industry professionals teaching co-courses, supported by instructional coaching from full-time faculty. Particularly effective for emerging technology areas where faculty credentials lag industry practice.
- **Ensure access to industry training platforms:** Cisco NetAcad, AWS Academy, Siemens SITRAIN, healthcare simulation systems. Advisory members may be able to facilitate access to employer-sponsored training at reduced or no cost.
- **Create Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)** that span institutions within the same sector — cross-college faculty networks aligned to regional employer partnerships.

Faculty & Instructor Industry Currency - Phase 5

Data, Continuous Improvement & Scale - Phase 6

Measuring outcomes, closing feedback loops, and expanding the model to new programs and employers.

Both the institution and employer partners should have visibility into the same outcome data.

Metric	Definition
Enrollment & Completion	Number placed, completions, withdrawals with reasons
Credential Attainment	Certificate, degree, and IRC completion rates
Placement Rate	% employed in related occupation within 6 months
Starting Wage	Average and median wage at time of employment; comparison to regional living wage
Retention Rate	% still employed at 6 and 12 months post-program
Employer Satisfaction	Annual survey rating of graduate preparedness (benchmarked)
Learner Satisfaction	End-of-placement survey rating of WBL quality and learning
Equity Disaggregation	All outcomes by race, gender, age, income, disability status
BILT Engagement Metrics	Member attendance rates, KSA meeting completion, Trends meeting participation

Plan for Scale from the Start

Research is explicit: **even when launching a pilot, design it with scale in mind.** Pilots that are not designed to inform broader practice produce valuable learning but limited impact.

The H RTP model distinguishes **three scaling approaches that apply to workforce education partnerships:**

Connect: Link learners to existing high-quality training providers and employer opportunities — scale through aggregation, not new program creation.

Create: Develop new programs for underserved training needs where quality options do not exist — requires higher investment and longer lead time.

Aggregate: Pool learner demand across multiple employers to justify specialized programs (e.g., medical coder training for a consortium of health care employers) — identify the most scalable model when employer demand is fragmented.

Plan for Scale from the Start

Additional scale strategies from HRTP and BILT research:

- Start with one program at one college; let success inspire adoption in adjacent programs. This is the consistent BILT adoption pattern nationally.
- Recruit an internal 'influencer' champion — a faculty lead, dean, or VP who can clear institutional barriers and inspire peers.
- Use sub-BILTs for large departments: one 'super BILT' for broad sector trends; separate sub-BILTs for specific program disciplines (e.g., Networking BILT, Cybersecurity BILT, Programming BILT within an IT department).
- Leverage sector intermediaries to aggregate employer demand across multiple institutions — this reduces per-institution burden and produces stronger regional LMI signal.

Build regional employer networks: use advisory members to become champions to recruit members. Employer-to-employer recruitment is more effective than institution-to-employer cold outreach.

These Phases are Cyclical, Not Linear

- Phases 2 and 3 (Industry-Led Labor Market Analysis and Curriculum Co-Design and Credential Alignment) repeat annually.
- Phase 6 (Data, Continuous Improvement & Scale) feeds back into Phase 2 (Industry-Led Labor Market Analysis).
- Phase 4 (WBL Infrastructure) generates real-time intelligence that refines Phase 3 (Curriculum Co-Design and Credential Alignment).
- Successful partnerships treat the entire model as a continuous improvement loop, not a one-time launch sequence.

A Note on Iteration

Challenges

Challenge	Evidence-Based Response
Employers view participation as too time-consuming	Present precise time commitments upfront (the BILT Orientation Meeting is a 45-minute low-stakes introduction). Use tiered engagement so every employer can participate at their capacity level. Demonstrate efficiency: going through 120 KSAs electronically takes 20 minutes; employers appreciate precision over open-ended conversation.
Faculty fear losing curriculum control to employers	Clarify explicitly and repeatedly: BILT/KSA meetings focus on job competencies, not course design. Faculty retain 100% curricular authority. The BILT tells faculty what graduates need to know; faculty determine how and when to teach it. This distinction must be stated at every BILT meeting.
Institutional resistance to the BILT or co-leadership model	Start with one program. Document outcomes. Let success build the case for expansion. Recruit an administrator champion who can clear institutional barriers. Frame it for administrators as an enrollment and retention driver — which evidence supports.
Advisory boards remain 'rubber stamp' committees	Convert existing advisory boards to BILT model explicitly. Hold an Orientation Meeting to explain the new model and secure commitment. Be transparent that the shift requires real engagement, not attendance. Expect some existing members to self-select out.

Challenges

Challenge	Evidence-Based Response
Difficulty finding committed SME employers	Prioritize subject matter expertise over seniority or name recognition. Recruit first-line hiring managers and technical executives alongside senior leaders. Use 'network the network' — each BILT member recruited should provide introductions to 1-2 additional candidates. Check in with BILT members every 12-18 months on their WIIFM.
Different organizational cultures between education and industry	Per the DOL research, culture gaps are among the most cited barriers. Use the Partnership Coordinator as the cultural translator. Address employer skepticism about public program quality with data. Frame workforce development as a business issue, not a charity.
Programs misaligned with actual labor market demand	This is the central problem the entire model addresses. The KSA process, industry needs assessment, and trends meetings exist specifically to close this gap. Use real-time LMI (Lightcast) alongside employer-sourced intelligence. Never rely exclusively on standard LMI data.
Equity goals in tension with employer preferences	Employer skills-based hiring commitments, paid placement requirements, and fair chance hiring policies should be explicit in the MOU from the start — not added after a problem occurs. Frame equity as a talent strategy and business case, not compliance. Provide data on diversity ROI.
Data collection burden on employers	Limit employer data requests to the minimum required for program improvement and grant compliance (see Module 9 of WBL Kit). Offer aggregate sector intelligence in return — employers should receive value from the data relationship, not just provide it.
Sustainability of funding and engagement over time	Build multi-source funding from the start: Perkins V, WIOA, state workforce grants, employer co-investment, and philanthropy. Tiered employer engagement (including financial contribution at the Strategic tier) creates shared investment. Sector intermediaries spread the cost and reduce institutional burden.



**Questions? Need assistance? Want
guidance for your team?
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