

Making Sense of Sector Strategies

Practical Considerations and Best Practices

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) · H RTP Promising Practices (UC Berkeley/CWDB, 2020)



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What Are Sector Strategies?

In A Nutshell

- A. A sector strategy is an industry-driven, community-supported, and worker/learner-focused workforce development model.
- B. A partnership of multiple employers within a critical industry that brings together education, economic development, workforce systems, and community organizations to identify and collaboratively meet the workforce needs of that industry within a regional labor market.

What Are Sector Strategies?

What Makes Them Unique

Sector strategies differ from place-based approaches in their primary orientation:

Rather than starting with the supply of workers/learners seeking jobs, sector approaches start with the demand side—the specific industries that need skilled talent—and build pipelines accordingly.

The Structural Pillars For Effective Sector Partnerships

1. **Leadership, Vision and Alignment**
2. **Industry Engagement**
3. **Sector-Based Service Delivery**
4. **Resources and Capacity**
5. **Continuous Improvement**

5 Key
Elements

Three Cross-Cutting Core Components

1. Engaged Partnerships

Active, committed relationships across employers, education, workforce agencies, community organizations, and worker advocates—moving from transactional to transformational collaboration.

2. Data and Industry-Informed Decision Making

Using labor market data, participant outcome data, and employer input to design, adjust, and continuously improve programs and partnership activities.

3. Career Pathways & Job Quality

Ensuring all stakeholders have meaningful voice in sector strategy design, and that the jobs targeted offer genuine quality—fair wages, benefits, stability, and advancement opportunities.



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CALIFORNIA
ADULT EDUCATION
PROGRAM

Partnerships

Understanding

Trust

Commitment

Make Things Simple and Clear – Set simple rules and guidelines and take pains to make them as clear as possible.

Be Consistent in What You Say and Do – Actions determine not only what happens in a partnership, but the evolution of its character.

Follow Through With What You Say – Before you commit to something, be certain you are ready to follow through.

Be Ready to Go to the Other Person's Point – A partnership in essence is a compromise.

The True Strength of the Partnership is How You Nurture its' Spirit and Energy.

Success Factors for Starting Partnerships

A Clear Foundation – In simple terms, lay out common values, principles and goals that each party shares with the other.

Clear Communication Channels

Clear Vision – (Stay Positive & Move in Small Steps)

Clear Snap of the Workplace – Create a common perspective of the conditions, issues, etc.

Clear Action Plan and Metrics – Scale & Scope of 1st Trainings, Expected Outcomes and How Outcomes Will be Measured

What Does Success Look Like? – An essential partnership discussion.

Partnership Structure and Governance

- **Designate a backbone intermediary organization**—typically a Workforce Development Board, community college, or workforce nonprofit—to convene, coordinate, and sustain the partnership.
- **Build partnerships that are meaningfully cross-sector:** labor representatives, employers, educational institutions, workforce boards, and community organizations all have distinct roles.
- **Establish formal governance structures**, including shared accountability mechanisms, defined partner roles, and regular convenings for joint decision-making.
- **Prioritize relationships with employers that have demonstrated openness to equity practices**, such as fair hiring, inclusive workplace cultures, and upward mobility for frontline workers.
- **Develop trust incrementally**—workforce intermediaries must build employer confidence over time through demonstrated value, not just initial recruitment.



Engaged Partners - Finding Champions - Building a Strong Labor / Management / Community Partnership: Rating Matrix Part 1

Organizational Leadership

	Champion	1 Strong Commitment - high priority	2 Interested - moderate priority	3 Interested but not a priority	4 Skeptical	5 Antagonistic or Competitive
Labor 1						
Labor 2						
Labor 3						
Employer						
Community College						
WIB						
Non-profit(s)						
Other						

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Building a Strong Labor / Management / Community Partnership: Rating Matrix Part 2

Trust

	Champion	1 High	2 Good history/ Growing trust	3 Open	4 Skeptical	5 Suspicious/ No trust
Labor-Management						
Partnership + Community						

Action-oriented approach

	Champion	1 High-Flex	2 Mod-Flex	3 Structured	4 Slow to change	5 Entrenched Model
Partnership						
Staff						

Program Structure

	Champion	1 High	2 Above Average	3 Neutral	4 Below Average	5 None
Worker-Centered Systems						
Connected to Jobs						
Affordability						

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Building a Strong Labor / Management / Community Partnership: Rating Matrix Part 3

Return on Investment (ROI)

	Champion	1 High	2 Mid Level	3 Moderate	4 Low	5 None
Labor 1 ROI						
Labor 2 ROI						
Labor 3 ROI						
Employer ROI						
Community College ROI						
WIB ROI						
Non-profit ROI						
Other partner ROI						

Instructional Approach

	Champion	1 Yes	2 Mostly	3 Some	4 Few	5 None
Consistent Values						
Core Competencies						
Contextualized Curriculum						
Career Ladders						
Totals						

Employer Engagement as the Primary Customer

- Treat employers as primary partners of the workforce system—move from purely transactional relationships (filling job orders) to transformational partnerships (co-designing systems).
- Maintain strong, ongoing relationships with employers between cohorts, not just during hiring periods. Per Scholas's success was partly attributed to staff members identifying good job matches and vouching for participants who lacked social networks.
- Identify and cultivate employer champions who will advocate for equity within their organizations and help improve retention and advancement of graduates.
- Offer flexible, modular upskilling and reskilling options that allow incumbent workers to advance within the sector.

Industry and Labor Market Analysis

Effective sector strategies are grounded in rigorous, data-informed sector selection:

- Systematically identify which occupations and roles are in high demand within the regional labor market before selecting a target sector.
- Use federal and state labor market information (LMI), employer surveys, and industry projections to assess current and future talent gaps.
- Assess industry growth trajectory—target sectors with both current demand and strong future outlook.
- Map the regional ecosystem of employers, training providers, economic development entities, and community organizations prior to launching a partnership.

**Data
Informed
Decision
Making**

Typical Snapshot Assessments

1. **Work Environment (Location, Geography, Weather, Training, etc.)**
2. **Job Trends (Job classifications, numbers, retirements, shortages)**
3. **Technology, Types of Equipment**
4. **Work Operations (How is work organized?)(How is conducted?)**
5. **Labor/Management Relationship**
6. **Current Training (Types; accessibility; trainees; trainers; effectiveness)**
7. **Top 3 issues re: local training and workforce development**
8. **Top 3 wishes for training and workforce development**
9. **Any other points you would like to add**

Build on the Labor Market Data – Conduct An 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.

Career Pathways and Job Quality

Curriculum and Training Design

- Center direct occupational skills training in an appropriate field as the most important component of sector strategy program delivery.
- Integrate career readiness components—general work habits, communication, problem-solving—alongside technical skills. These competencies are transferable across employers and particularly valuable for workers entering new fields.
- Align curriculum with specific employer-validated skills and credentials, ensuring training maps to real hiring requirements.
- Incorporate integrated education and training (IET) for participants with limited educational backgrounds—combining vocational training with foundational literacy and numeracy.
- Build clear, structured career pathways that outline progression steps within the sector, motivating ongoing development.

Wraparound and Post-Placement Support

- Provide supports that address barriers beyond occupational training: childcare, transportation, financial assistance, and mental health services all affect completion and retention.
- Develop post-placement advancement strategies to continue guiding participants' career trajectories after initial job placement.
- Build job retention and advancement components into the core service model—not as afterthoughts.
- Track and report outcomes beyond initial placement, including earnings at 6, 12, and 24 months, credential attainment, and advancement within the sector.

Data, Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

1. Establish outcome tracking systems at program outset, with clear definitions of success metrics aligned to the dual-customer approach.
2. Use data to diagnose challenges in real time—low enrollment, poor completion, weak placement—and test solutions iteratively..
3. Conduct benefit-cost analyses from multiple perspectives (participant, employer, educational) to make the case for investment and measure return.
4. Build evidence not just to prove program effectiveness, but to improve program design—practitioners need answers to operational questions, not just impact evaluations.
5. Share data across partnership members to enable collective accountability and shared learning.

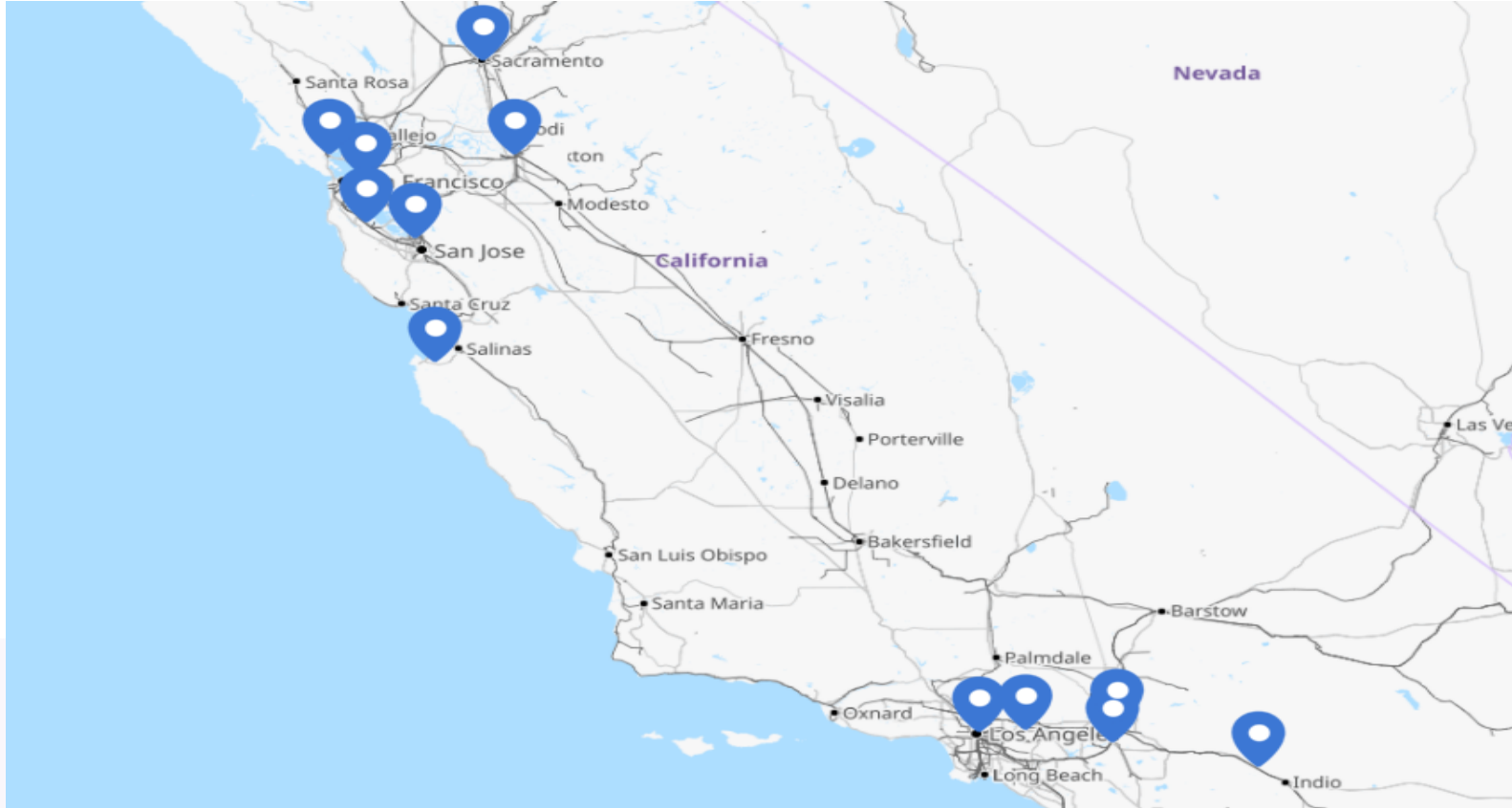
**Build
Evidence**

&

Share Data

California Transit Works

A Transit Sector Partnership



<https://www.catransitworks.org/about.html>

<https://vimeo.com/399819658?fl=pl&fe=sh>



**Questions? Need assistance? Want
guidance for your team?
Contact Debi to learn more!**

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