

Strategies and Tips for Employer Engagement in Adult Career Pathways Programs

Learn the language of business and their needs.

- Research the needs of local employers with respect to hiring needs and skills gaps.
- Identify potential partners based on industry needs and standing employer relationships through existing programs, local workforce investment boards, or other partner agencies.
- Gauge the willingness of employers who need to address skill deficiencies to enter partnerships with adult education programs.

Reach out to CEO or senior-level executives in companies where there is potential for partnering.

- Engage individuals passionate about education with the corporate authority to commit company resources to the partnership.
- Build on existing relationships and establish parameters for the partnership that will enable the group to accomplish mutual goals.
- Schedule an initial meeting of employers interested in pursuing a partnership. Bring preliminary research data or industry analyses to the meeting to demonstrate your understanding of and commitment to addressing the hiring needs of your potential new business partner(s).

Engage employers in program design, curriculum development, and work-based learning.

- Select a career pathway for program development based on market demands.
- Ask employers to identify basic skill requirements, technical/occupational skill requirements, and soft skill/employability competencies of entry-level and incumbent workers in the chosen pathway(s).
- Work alongside employers to review and align existing or develop new curriculum that meets national/state standards to support local job market needs.
- Request authentic workplace materials, scenarios, and examples from employers to assist in contextualizing the instruction.
- Ask employers to identify the credentials they value for occupations in the chosen pathway(s).
- Ask employers to provide work-based learning experiences for adult learners (e.g., job shadowing, internships).

Invite feedback and other support as the program develops.

- Enlist employer partners to participate in the job placement process (e.g., conducting mock and actual interviews, hiring graduates, assisting with job placement at other businesses).
- Ask employers to provide feedback about the success of program participants once they are hired.
- Establish a program revision/evaluation schedule to ensure program content continues to be responsive to changes in the industry.
- Approach employers about providing funding, equipment, or other resources to help reduce barriers to student persistence and completion.

Maintain regular communications.

- Keep employer partners informed about the development of new curricula and program design.
- Promptly respond to correspondences from employer partners and follow through on action items agreed upon by the partnership.
- Recognize employers for their input, support, and guidance as the program matures.
- Collect data to ensure all parties' needs are being met.

Employer engagement facilitated by adult educators can strengthen and expand ACP programs that will enable adult learners, local companies and, ultimately, communities, to prosper.