

## ETA Sector Strategies Technical Assistance Initiative: INDUSTRY CHAMPIONS



**EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION**  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

## About This Brief

This resource is part of a series of integrated briefs to help workforce practitioners build a range of skills needed to launch and advance sector strategy approaches. The briefs are designed to be succinct and connect readers to existing resources, best practices, and tools. For more information, visit <http://bit.ly/22Cxle7>.

## About Sector Strategies

Sector strategies are regional, industry-focused approaches to building skilled workforces and are among the most effective ways to align public and private resources to address the talent needs of employers. While the approach is not new, there is a growing body of evidence showing that sector strategies can simultaneously improve employment opportunities for job seekers and the competitiveness of industries. As such, a number of national initiatives and federal laws (including the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) are driving workforce organizations, in particular, to embrace these approaches, to meet both the needs of workers and the needs of the economy.

At the heart of sector strategies are sector partnerships (sometimes referred to as industry partnerships, workforce collaboratives or regional skills alliances, among others). These partnerships are led by businesses—within a critical industry cluster—working collaboratively with workforce areas, education and training, economic development, labor, and community organizations. Sector partnerships are the vehicles through which industry members voice their critical human resource needs and where customized regional solutions for workers and businesses are formed.



# CONTENTS

<b>A Different Type Of Engagement .....</b>	<b>2</b>
Levels of Industry Engagement .....	2
What is an Industry Champion? .....	3
Put Them to Work! .....	4
<b>Developing Industry Champions.....</b>	<b>6</b>
Overcoming The Stigma Of Government And Building Trust .....	6
Industry Engagement Do's And Don'ts .....	7
<b>Acknowledging Champions &amp; Business Testimonials .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Acknowledging And Celebrating Champions.....	8
Leveraging Business Testimonials .....	9
<b>Key Takeaways.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Resources .....</b>	<b>10</b>



## ETA Sector Strategies Technical Assistance Initiative:

# MOVING FROM BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT TO DEVELOPING INDUSTRY CHAMPIONS

Through review of many promising practice case studies, it is clear that most successful sector strategy approaches are industry-driven, wherein industry partners recognize their self-interest in, need for, and the potential of the partnership. In these cases, the workforce needs of the industry are truly “driving the agenda” of the partnership, as business leaders co-chair the partnerships, set agenda items to accomplish, and act as primary communicators for the effort.

To achieve this type of commitment from industry requires a more significant type and level of industry engagement. It includes a fundamental shift in the approach to partnering with business, both at the strategic and operational levels. The *Jobs for the Future (JFF) Resource Guide to Engaging Employers* details a ladder of increasing engagement that proceeds from businesses simply serving in an advising role to capacity-building, co-designing, convening, and leading roles. The ability of an individual business or private sector leader to engage at a certain level will depend on their circumstances, and all levels of engagement are valuable. However, this brief focuses on how to cultivate business leaders into Industry Champions for sector partnerships. Champions go beyond the traditional role in sector partnerships (sharing workforce challenges and validating data). They are committed to the sector partnership’s vision and are willing to use their power and prestige in the region to sustain and expand the partnership’s work.



## A DIFFERENT TYPE OF ENGAGEMENT

### LEVELS OF INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

There is a difference between simply engaging industry in sector work and truly placing them at the center as we solve their workforce challenges. True sector strategy approaches require pushing past the more traditional hub and spoke model of engagement where a sector intermediary has individual relationships with businesses. This approach may result in some good outcomes, but a much deeper type of engagement is necessary to achieve the high level and scale accomplished by successful sector strategies. (See Appendix A)


[JFF'S A Resource Guide to Employer Engagement](#) breaks down the different types or levels of engagement. The sectors approach necessitates bringing businesses together to discuss industry trends, challenges, and solutions. In the hub-and-spoke model, the center is the intermediary, whereas sector strategies are driven and led by industry and require a deeper investment by employers. Often, employer relationships begin with “advising” level activities such as discussing hiring needs and advising on curricula. As trust builds, deeper levels of “capacity-building, co-designing, convening, and leading” are achieved.

An industry champion would be in Levels IV and V, where there is a strategic partnership and the champion is taking a leadership role. The champion(s) would convene and set the direction of the full partnership. Champions also take responsibility to conduct peer outreach on behalf of the partnership to bring more businesses to the table and participating in partnership activities.

In another brief in this series, Workforce Boards as Sector Intermediaries, the [Boston Healthcare Careers Consortium \(The Consortium\)](#) is profiled. Their industry-led governance structure is a good example of applying the approach of industry champions driving and leading a partnership. The Consortium is led by an industry chair and co-chair as well as an Executive Committee that includes, at a minimum, two additional healthcare employers and representatives from other stakeholder groups. The Consortium is staffed by the workforce development board, the [Boston Private Industry Council \(PIC\)](#).



Ladder of Employer Engagement



	New Relationship		Working Relationship		Strategic Partnership	
	Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV	Level V	
Key Employer Role	Advising	Capacity-building	Co-designing	Convening	Leading	
Stage of Relationship	Initial contact/ new relationship	Establishing trust and credibility	Working relationship	Trusted provider and collaborator	Full strategic partner	
Activity Examples	Discuss hiring needs, skills, competencies; advice on curricula, contract learning; hire graduates	Job site tours, speakers, mock interviews, internships, needs assessment, loan/donate equipment, recruiting	Curriculum and pathway development; adjunct faculty and preceptors	College-employer sectoral partnerships	Multi-employer / multi-college partnerships	

WHAT IS AN INDUSTRY CHAMPION?

Successful sector partnerships are industry-led, but how do you get to that point? One crucial way is through committed industry champions – employers that understand the benefits of investing in their current and future workforce, and with whom you have already built a relationship.

Industry champions believe in the sector partnership and are willing to take the next step from being active participants to becoming advocates and leaders. **Champions leverage their “power and prestige” to recruit additional employers and to further the goals of the partnership.** As discussed in the previous section, champions have moved past the early levels of engagement, since trust and credibility have been established, and are now helping to convene and lead the partnership.

The [Colorado Regional Sector Partnership Convener Training Workbook](#) has a similar definition of industry champions as “those who answer the call for a new approach and will become the core of your regional sector strategy team.” The Workbook also gives the following advice:

**CHAMPIONS not Representatives**  
**DOERs not Talkers-** *Colorado Regional Sector Partnership Convener Training Workbook*



- Recruit for “champions” not “representatives,”
- Seek “doers” not “talkers,” and
- Set the tone early that a sector partnership is about what you can contribute to the effort, not what resources you can access or what product you can sell. The result will be a coalition of the willing.

Colorado considers all engaged employers who consistently participate in partnership activities to be champions. In this brief, we are defining champions as going above and beyond this definition through **demonstrating leadership and taking a role in strategic decision-making**. Defined this way, champions are involved for the **long-term and are focused on their community or industry sector development**, not just on their own individual business’ needs. For example, a champion may only have hiring needs every few years, but they see the value in advancing the workforce for the sector as a whole.

INDUSTRY CHAMPIONS:

- Conduct outreach to peers;
- Participate in strategic decision-making;
- Provide input on training curriculum;
- Volunteer in mock interviews;
- Testify at public hearings;
- Host interns, job shadows, tours; &
- Provide subject matter expertise for trainings & workshops.

## PUT THEM TO WORK!

Once you have engaged the business leader full as Industry champions, they are more likely to reach out to their industry colleagues via phone or email, put their names on invitations or letters, and speak about the sector partnership at public events. Business to business “asks” tend to be most impactful and provide credibility to the effort. In particular, when trying to pull together that first meeting of sector employers, your champions are going to be crucial to ensuring attendance and participation from other businesses. Your champion(s) should also be hosting and chairing the meeting – the conversation is by employers, for employers to speak peer to peer, with workforce and education partners there to listen.

The [Colorado Regional Sector Partnership Convener Training Workbook](#) gives the following specific guidance on the logistics of leveraging industry champions for a launch meeting:

- MEMBERSHIP
  - In the beginning, aim to invite 25-30 employers at your launch a sector partnerships meeting, with the expectation that will lead to about 10 attendees.
  - Over time, you will want to aim for a broader ongoing employer membership of 30-80 members, which employer champions can help you build, with the goal to reach all or most of companies in your region and target industry.
  - A smaller number is too small to have enough momentum and a larger number may difficult to effectively engage in a timely manner.





- IDENTIFY AND RECRUIT EMPLOYER CHAIRS
  - Your goal should be to identify one or more civic entrepreneurs who will agree to, at a minimum, chair the launch meeting for a sector partnership.
  - Ideally, one of your employer chairs should host the meeting at their place of business, with one or more of them working with you to tap their networks to identify other civic entrepreneurs in their industry, sign the invitation letter, and send an encouraging reminder email to invitees.
- BUILD THE LIST OF POTENTIAL EMPLOYER CHAMPIONS
  - Working with your employer chair(s), create a list of sector employers.
  - Your goal is to create a critical mass of employer leaders to ensure that there will be enough champions to step forward to drive a sector partnership.
- MAKE THE RIGHT ASK AND FOLLOW UP
  - The best ask is employer-to-employer. The ask should be straightforward: it is essential that we as an industry work together on key issues and opportunities, and team up with community partners who want our industry to be successful for the good of our region.

Between in-person meetings, be sure to maintain ongoing engagement with your champions. In addition to assisting with business outreach, champions should be willing to:

- Participate in strategic decision-making;
- Provide input on training curriculum;
- Volunteer to participate in mock interviews;
- Provide subject matter expertise for trainings and workshops;
- Donate equipment and machinery for training;
- Host individuals and groups for job shadowing and/or tours of their facilities; and
- Testify at public hearings on benefits of job training funds and public/private partnerships, etc.

These activities allow employers to actively participate, engage with students and training program participants, and become more deeply involved and committed to the work. Having employers involved in these activities obviously provides benefits to the sector partnership. These activities also build good will and strengthen relationships, and with photographer and/or videographer to capture these events there is an opportunity to develop additional marketing materials for the effort, or a demonstration of return on investment for participation in the effort.

Established sector partnerships also continue these asks/invitations to keep partnerships and relationships relevant. Long-time industry champions often consider participation in these activities as valuable professional development and leadership opportunities for their junior staff. The [Boston Healthcare Careers Consortium](#) convenes five times per year and gives members, including employers, homework to complete and present at the next meeting. The homework usually takes the form of an occupational survey – selecting one role each time for employers to research the job description, education and skill requirements. The Consortium offers opportunities such as those listed above for employer partners. Often different staff are tapped for these activities, which provides the added bonus of expanding the relationship with the business beyond one person.





## DEVELOPING INDUSTRY CHAMPIONS

Initial strategy for business engagement for a participating employer, and that of engaging an industry champion, are not that different - except for your end goal. When developing industry champions, you are taking a long-term perspective and working on getting buy-in from the employer not just on what the partnership can do for them specifically, but also how the partnership can advance the sector as a whole. Here we specifically move beyond a transactional relationship. Employer engagement of any kind takes time and persistence, which is why focusing first on developing a few champions that will assist in additional employer outreach is an effective and efficient strategy. Practically speaking, it is more efficient and effective to focus on building relationships with two to three employers and achieve success than to target 20-30 employers at once.

## OVERCOMING THE STIGMA OF GOVERNMENT AND BUILDING TRUST

[Accelerated Training for Illinois Manufacturing \(ATIM\)](#) is designed to provide accelerated manufacturing training tailored to specific needs of regional employers. The selected manufacturing occupations for this program are: machining, mechatronics (equipment service & repair), welding, and logistics/inventory. The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), in partnership with the Illinois Department of Employment Security and the Illinois Community College Board, received a Round 1 Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) grant to scale up and sustain regional sector partnerships to address the growing skilled worker shortages in manufacturing.

The ATIM approach to combatting manufacturers' negative perception was to go to work **building trust and credibility** in a variety of ways, big and small, with a **small core group of businesses**.

Michael Baker, Manager of Strategic Planning and Innovation, Office of Employment and Training, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, is the ATIM state lead. Baker had the dubious role of overcoming the stigma of "government" being difficult to work with, inefficient, lots of paperwork and hoops to jump through, or too much effort required for little benefit.

The Michael Baker and the ATIM approach to combatting manufacturers' negative perceptions was to go to work building trust and credibility in a variety of ways, big and small, with a **small core group of businesses**. ATIM was able to build strong relationships with businesses that then became champions and really provided the catalyst to developing the larger sector partnership. For example, these champions helped make it possible for ATIM to procure many work-based learning opportunities for trainees, such as paid internships and on-the-job training.

Overall, ATIM streamlined things for manufacturers, making things as simple and straightforward as possible. ATIM coordinated the many voices and entities vying for industry's attention into one platform that consequently



possessed a greater leverage for change and positive outcomes for all stakeholders. ATIM was also consistent in following up with businesses to provide outcome information and following through on the commitments they made, while always managing expectations.

In presentations, including at the November 2015 Workforce Innovation Fund Grantee meeting, Baker utilizes the below quotes to stress this barrier to engaging industry.

- *I don't make jokes. I just watch the government and report the facts.* – Will Rogers, Jr.
- *The government solution to a problem is usually as bad as the problem.* – Milton Friedman
- *The single most exciting thing you encounter in government is competence, because it's so rare.* – Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (Assistant Secretary of Labor, Ambassador, politician, sociologist)
- *The nine most terrifying words in the English language are, 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help.'* – Ronald Reagan

## INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT DO'S AND DON'TS

Illinois has captured their lessons learned from a decade engaging in sector strategies into [Sector Partnership-based Employer Engagement: A Framework for Illinois](#) which includes a five step "Sector Strategies Recipe" that helps document the steps - from doing your initial due diligence, to launching a sector partnership, to continuing to implement. Baker has also synthesized his industry engagement expertise into the succinct and practical list of Do's and Don'ts to follow when developing your own industry champions.

DO	DON'T
<p><b>DO YOUR HOMEWORK</b></p> <p><i>What do they do? How do they do it? Labor market trends for their sector? Where are they in the supply chain?</i></p>	<p><b>DON'T WASTE TIME</b></p> <p><i>Only purposeful meetings as needed. Don't ignore input.</i></p>
<p><b>DO BECOME A FAMILIAR FACE</b></p> <p><i>Go to them. Speak and network at their meetings.</i></p>	<p><b>DON'T RELY ON ONE STRATEGY</b></p> <p><i>No one-size-fits-all. Every business and situation is unique.</i></p>
<p><b>DO GET PAST THE GATEKEEPER</b></p> <p><i>Leverage mutual relationships and networks. Get to highest-ranking person with one degree of separation.</i></p>	<p><b>DON'T STAY IN YOUR SILO</b></p> <p><i>Be mindful of all resources that can help. Cross-program collaboration. Avoid data wards, government jargon &amp; acronyms.</i></p>

DO	DON'T
<b>DO ASK RELEVANT QUESTIONS, THEN <u>LISTEN</u></b> <i>Validate homework. Leave knowing the root cause(s) of any issues.</i>	<b>DON'T PRESSURE A BUSINESS TO SIGN UP WITH WIOA</b> <i>Provide options. Be ready when THEY are ready.</i>
<b>DO GET KNOWN AS A VALUABLE PARTNER</b> <i>Find a way to improve their profitability. Get written endorsements from businesses you have helped.</i>	<b>DON'T OVER-PROMISE</b> <i>Manage expectations according to your resources. Make sure you're speaking the same dialect.</i>
<b>DO MAKE IT EASY</b> <i>Reduce red tape to the Nth degree. Use Lean principles.</i>	<b>DON'T TAKE THE RELATIONSHIP FOR GRANTED</b> <i>Don't go through the motions. Cultivate multiple long-term contacts.</i>
<b>DO REGULAR CARE AND FEEDING</b> <i>Follow up without pestering. Be prepared to invest adequate resources.</i>	

## ACKNOWLEDGING CHAMPIONS & BUSINESS TESTIMONIALS

### ACKNOWLEDGING AND CELEBRATING CHAMPIONS

As mentioned previously, it is a good practice to take pictures or video at sector partnership events and get quotes from attendees. This material (with permission) can then be used to highlight the good work of the partnership and individual members, including industry champions, through a variety of ways. For instance, look for opportunities to add pictures and quotes to a website, do a feature article in a newsletter, and/or nominate businesses for awards, when appropriate.

For example, [SkillWorks: Partners for a Productive Workforce](#), a workforce funders' collaborative that supports sector partnerships in the Boston area, publishes a e-newsletter that has a broad distribution and allows them to spotlight industry champions and/or training participants. Their [Summer 2015 Newsletter](#) has a great example of both highlighting an industry champion and submitting this champion for an award. MJ Ryan, Workforce Development Director at [Partners HealthCare](#) and Vice Chair of the Boston Healthcare Careers Consortium, was recognized as one of [CareerSTAT's 2015 Frontline Healthcare Worker Champions](#).

[CareerSTAT](#) is an employer-led national collaboration of healthcare leaders who promote employer investment in



the skill and career development of frontline healthcare workers. While CareerSTAT's definition of an employer champion is not same as the sector partnership definition presented in this brief, it is a model for acknowledging good employer practices. Plus, in the case of MJ Ryan and Partners Healthcare, both definitions are met and Partners, among other selected awardees, was profiled and honored at a national event ([2015 Frontline Worker Champion Profile: Partners Healthcare, Boston, Massachusetts](#)).

It is important to acknowledge and celebrate the work and best practices of industry champions. This can take many forms and provides champions and their companies with good public relations and advertising. Plus, it is good relationship-building and can foster a healthy sense of competition among other companies in the partnerships.

## LEVERAGING BUSINESS TESTIMONIALS

In engaging your industry partners, it may be useful to leverage existing business testimonials in the form of quotes, endorsement letters, and videos. This is an extension of the business-to-business approach and even if you do not have testimonials from business champions in your partnership or region, it may be helpful to use other partnerships' public testimonials in the same sector and/or from employers with similar geography and company size. Some examples of public business testimonials are the National Fund for Workforce Solutions and New York Employment and Workforce Solutions. Sharing these testimonials with businesses can demonstrate the type of partnership you are trying to develop and the benefits of participating from their peers.

The [National Fund for Workforce Solutions](#) (National Fund) has developed a number of videos on how their collaboratives serve their communities (particularly in the context of job seekers and businesses facing skills shortages), as well as organize employers, and improve their communities and public workforce systems.

### [What We Do: How Pittsburgh Works is Helping Workers and Businesses](#)

Pittsburgh Works is a collaborative based in the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board. This video primarily highlights the partnership with Burns and Scalo Roofing and the company's President/CEO and Human Resources Director detailing the many benefits they receive.

### [Dan River Region Hospital CEO employer engagement video](#)

This contains interviews with three healthcare CEOs in Virginia (Memorial Hospital, Halifax Regional Health System, and Danville Regional Medical Center) on the business imperative to invest in the region's workforce and the anticipated value to business-led training opportunities.

### [What We Do: CareerWorks Improves Newark's Workforce](#)

This video contains Vice Presidents in Human Resources from Newark Beth Israel Medical Center praising the collaboration and the impact on their employees and patients. They view it as both a "community involvement and front-line worker strategy."



**New York Employment and Workforce Solutions** (a division of the New York State Department of Labor) The Fulton, Montgomery & Schoharie Counties in New York provide services to businesses through their Employment and Workforce Solutions Centers. They have a very succinct [Fact Sheet](#) that details these services. The Business Services Representatives at the centers highly value business testimonials and believe they go a long way towards attracting new business partners. A few written testimonials are available on their website:

- [Manpower](#)
- [NTI Global](#)
- [River Ridge Living Center](#)

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Sector strategies call for a **change in the way industry engagement is done**. A transactional, hub and spoke model is not enough to accomplish the type of participant, program, and systems change outcomes of successful sector partnerships. The best sector partnerships have **businesses as “champions” who are convening other employers and driving the agenda**. ATIM worked to overcome the stigma of government to build strong **industry champions who proved to be the catalyst** to convene a larger group of employers and develop a deep and sustainable sector partnership with a group of committed businesses.

The **business to business ask is very powerful** and can open more doors than when a workforce system approaches businesses. Although the goal may be to engage twenty-plus businesses in a sector partnership, initially focusing and investing time and energy on two to three companies and developing them into champions can be an effective and efficient strategy. Once you have succeeded in developing these relationships, you can then **put the champions to work!** If you are just beginning your industry engagement efforts, existing **business testimonials** from other programs may be useful in outreach to potential industry champions.

## RESOURCES

1. [ETA Sector Strategies Implementation Framework](#) & ETA Sector Strategies Assessment Tools
2. [JFF'S A Resource Guide to Employer Engagement](#)
3. [Boston Healthcare Careers Consortium \(The Consortium\)](#) & [Boston Private Industry Council \(PIC\)](#).
4. [Colorado Regional Sector Partnership Convener Training Workbook](#)
5. [Commonwealth Corporation's Partnerships: A Workforce Development Practitioner's Guide](#)
6. [Accelerated Training for Illinois Manufacturing \(ATIM\)](#)
7. [Sector Partnership-based Employer Engagement: A Framework for Illinois](#)

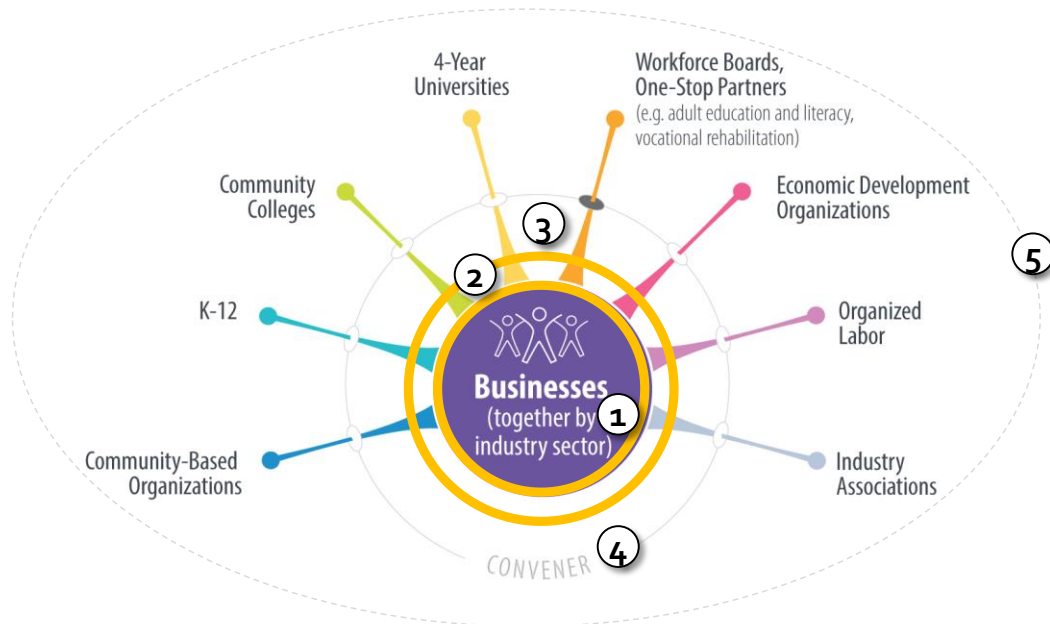


8. [SkillWorks: Partners for a Productive Workforce](#) & Their [Summer 2015 Newsletter](#)
9. [CareerSTAT's 2015 Frontline Healthcare Worker Champions](#)
10. [National Fund for Workforce Solutions](#)
  - [What We Do: How Pittsburgh Works is Helping Workers and Businesses](#)
  - [Dan River Region Hospital CEO employer engagement video](#)
  - [What We Do: CareerWorks Improves Newark's Workforce](#)
11. **New York Employment and Workforce Solutions** (a division of the New York State Department of Labor)
  - [Manpower](#)
  - [NTI Global](#)
  - [River Ridge Living Center](#)



## APPENDIX A: WHAT MAKES A HIGH-QUALITY SECTOR PARTNERSHIP?

Sector partnerships are regional collaborations of businesses within one industry cluster that work closely with government, education and training, economic development, labor, and community organizations to identify and solve workforce and other challenges. While not new, there is a growing body of evidence showing that sector partnership approaches—or sector strategies—can help regions move to a more strategic role building regional talent pipelines, addressing skill gaps, and creating meaningful career pathways for a range of workers in important regional industries.



At their core, effective sector partnerships:

1. **Put businesses at the middle** of the conversation, brought together at scale by industry. By bringing them together by industry, partners begin to discover pressing and, often, broader workforce challenges. At the middle, businesses *drive* the conversation.
2. **Treat businesses as partners**, no longer just the end customer. In this model, community partners work with businesses to build customized solutions, rather than provide off-the-shelf program-based 'solutions.'
3. **Align partners.** Sector partnerships are driven by solutions; solutions that, more often than not, require multiple partners collaborating and leveraging programs and funding,
4. **Require a credible third party "convener."** This entity could be a local workforce development area or another organization. The convener acts as a neutral body, ready to guide the partnership and align partners.
5. **Are convened on a regional scale.** Because labor markets and industry clusters cross county and service area lines, so too must sector partnerships.

Sector partnerships are the vehicle through which businesses voice their talent needs and regional partners collaborate to develop customized solutions.





## About The Author

The lead author for this brief is Patricia Maguire, Senior Program Manager, Jobs for the Future.



**Maher & Maher** completed this project, which has been funded, either wholly or in part, with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration under Contract Number BPA DOLQ131A22098, TASK ORDER DOL-ETA-14-U-00005. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of Labor, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement of same by the U.S. Government.

Maher & Maher is a specialized change management and talent-development consulting firm focused on advancing the collaboration between workforce, education and economic development.



Jobs for the Future (JFF) designs and drives the adoption of innovative, scalable approaches and models—solutions that catalyze change in our education and workforce delivery systems.

---

