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EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT ROADMAP



California
Community
Colleges

CAREER EDUCATION

Central/Mother Lode Regional Consortium Employer Engagement Roadmap

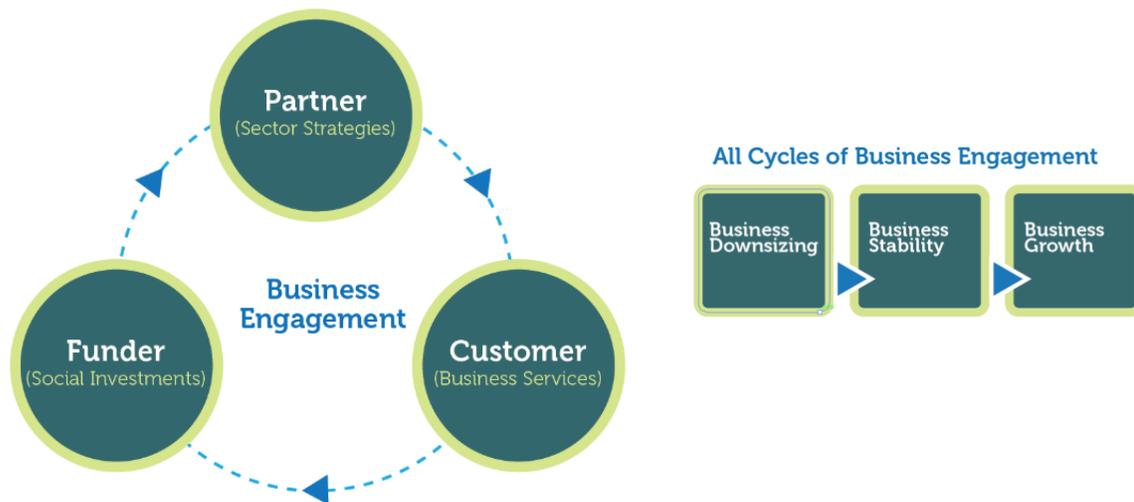
Project Background

The Central/Mother Lode Regional Consortium (CRC) contracted with Full Capacity Marketing (FCM) to create and deploy a regional campaign focused on increasing student enrollments for the CRC member colleges and employer engagement to expand opportunities in work-based learning and job placements.

Because the regional campaign has a dual customer (students and employers), FCM’s sister company, Business U, was utilized as national experts in business engagement. Business U conducted one-to-one interviews with college staff and faculty to provide a baseline assessment of the current state of regional employer outreach efforts. CRC steering committee members provided Business U with the contact names of staff and faculty involved in some type of employer engagement within their respective colleges.

“Engagement” (Figure 1) is defined as those related to “partner activities” such as sector strategies, advisory boards, work-based learning opportunities, job placements; “customer engagement” in utilizing partner services to support a particular business cycle; and “funder engagement” which involves co-investment such as in-kind contributions or sponsorships and the like.

Figure 1. Employer Engagement Types



Demand Side Communications Audit: Employer Engagement

Nine of the 14 CRC member colleges (65%) participated in Business U's interviews to understand the following elements of employer engagement taking place at the campuses:

- the configuration of staff on campus that play a role in business engagement
- if the various staff positions coordinate and leverage outreach efforts to business
- how teams avoid duplication of effort
- the methods of outreach used to expand opportunities for students in work-based learning and job placements
- the key issues experienced by staff and faculty when getting commitments from business and sustaining engagement
- if and how technology is used to capture leads and build/manage relationships
- the communications tools that would be of value in supporting their efforts

Additionally, to complete the analysis, FCM provided an assessment of colleges' websites and current marketing materials used to target business and industry to determine if the communication mediums contained clearly identified calls to action and value propositions.

The interviews, web assessment and review of marketing materials informed the development of demand-side marcomm strategies and communications tools to support the region in engaging business and industry.

Operational Assessment Results

Of the 64 percent of CRC member colleges evaluated, Business U uncovered similar operational protocols across each campus for employer engagement in that a variety of departments and staff conduct outreach using a highly decentralized model. Faculty will conduct individual outreach to support engagement in advisory councils while workforce/economic development divisions and career centers conduct outreach based on the "ask" to what is needed, such as work-based learning opportunities for students, job placements and/or involvement in special events, such as job fairs.

The Strong Workforce Program calls for transformational relationship-building approaches with business and industry, as often curriculum development and other engagement activities related to "heavy lifts" require different strategies in the market other than those that are transactional in nature.

Business U's national study¹ and assessments across the country reveal that workforce and education organizations only engage approximately 3 percent of employers within any given market. Because colleges primarily work in a siloed approach and decentralized model with respect to employer engagement, the individuals conducting outreach tend to go back to the same employers repeatedly, thus limiting opportunities for students. That leaves 97 percent of the market untapped that could increase opportunities in work-based learning and job placements for students.

These challenges are currently present within the CRC region and align with Business U's findings in its national study. Commonalities between the CRC region and the state of business engagement nationally are highlighted in the sections below.

CRC's Business Engagement Current State Compared to National Benchmarks

Business U serves on the workforce taskforce led by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) and California Forward that focuses on the goal of successful execution of Strong Workforce Program and enhancing student skills across the state to meet the demands of California businesses. As such, Business U co-authored a white paper with California Forward for policy makers on investing in a business engagement ecosystem² that served as a centerpiece for discussions on how regions can better coordinate and expand outreach to employers across California. The paper extrapolated California data from Business U's national study to inform strategies and conversations.

One of the survey questions asked participants to report key challenges in engaging business and industry with workforce and education initiatives, and, depending upon the type of respondent (e.g., education stakeholders, workforce development boards, economic development organizations), between 60 percent and 72 percent indicated that employers were not giving them the buy-in needed to move their mandates forward. When probed further, survey participants indicated three key challenges to employer buy-in: 1) employer time commitment; 2) coordination among partners and 3) measuring business engagement.

Challenge #1: Employer Time Commitment

According to the national study respondents, workforce and education organizations encountered resistance in getting businesses to commit to engagement activities, including partnerships in advisory committees, sector strategies, career pathways and/or work-based learning activities. CRC member colleges confirmed that there is often difficulty in not only engagement, but sustaining engagement over time.

Based upon Business U's national fieldwork in 2016, and in combination with the preliminary results from the national study, the resistance may stem from a host of reasons, such as workforce and education stakeholder

organizations not using “real-time” data to build a strong business case for engagement; meetings being too time consuming, inefficient, and lacking clear outcomes and objectives and/or employers perceiving that the work is not relevant or of value to their immediate needs.

Measures for current workforce and education initiatives are focused and accountable to job-seeker or student success, versus solving an employers’ immediate need and/or providing assistance to help grow their business. The transactional nature of workforce and education programs emphasize these supply-side outcomes, which may be short-sighted when attempting to create sustainable employer engagement. To help demonstrate value, workforce and education organizations need to consider focusing on building long-term “transformational” relationships with their industry partners by gaining a clearer understanding of the differences between transactional and transformational engagement approaches, and how those efforts align to their engagement strategies.

This lack of understanding is prevalent as evidenced by the results³ of a self-assessment tool used in Business U’s Business Engagement Boot Camp®. Workforce and education practitioners who attend the boot camp are asked to self-assess their business-engagement practices to pinpoint challenges and identify opportunities for improvement.

The majority of participants have a difficult time articulating the differences between a transactional and transformational strategic approach to business engagement and understanding why both approaches are of value to businesses and employers. Of the 1,096 self-assessments collected in 2016, 73 percent of “boot campers” reported primarily engaging in transactional efforts versus taking a long-term approach to build a transformational relationship with business customers, which requires a coordinated effort among system partners – a key challenge articulated nationally by the study participants.

This is one of the key reasons that Business U will be conducted a live webinar with CRC stakeholders on application of transactional and transformational approaches to employer engagement.

Challenge #2: Partner Coordination

Most workforce and education programs are deployed in isolation and are not integrated with the services executed by other employer-facing public sector entities (e.g., workforce boards, economic development, chambers and small-business development centers).

Successfully engaging industry for the long haul to help solve complex workforce issues requires, at a minimum, “time” to develop and execute strategic transformational relationships with both business and system partners. To be successful, workforce and education entities might need to work outside of their

comfort zones and address territorial behavior that is usually based on the fear of losing contacts, funding and/or credit for their contribution to the work and performance.

One set of measures that can track whether partners are effectively collaborating are referral patterns – both making and receiving referrals – among regional organizations that are employer facing. Referral patterns (Figure 2) are key indicators of an organization’s expanded reach and its commitment to solve the broad needs of businesses during all business cycles. Moreover, by developing an expanded portfolio of business solutions delivered by system partners, engagement practitioners become a resource conduit with breadth and depth for businesses in their community, thus taking the first step in building a relationship that is based on trust and credibility.

Figure 2. Referral Patterns among Business-Facing Organizations: National Study Results

		FROM			
		ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	EDUCATION	CHAMBERS	SBDCS
TO	Workforce Boards	46.2%	64%	75%	25%
	American Job Centers	7.7%	40%	75%	50%
	Economic Development	N/A	52%	100%	75%
	Community Colleges	84.6%	N/A	100%	25%
	Chambers	69.2%	52%	N/A	75%
	SBDCs	76.9%	44%	75%	N/A

All of the CRC colleges that were interviewed indicated that they were more focused on immediate transactions with business that pertained to the college’s needs versus helping the business solve challenges that would warrant a referral to another organization. Business U will introduce the concept of developing a business solutions portfolio to support CRC colleges in transformational relationship building approaches that will sustain employer engagement over time.

Challenge #3: Measuring Business Engagement

It is an everyday standard for businesses to work toward increasing the value they bring to customers, to expand their reach, and to enter new markets. What underpins these practices are decisions driven by market data, satisfaction surveys, repeat business, and other customer-focused indicators. Businesses with a long-term view adopt a customer-centric approach by analyzing and leveraging market data and consumer behavior patterns to: 1) anticipate future needs; 2) build their product line; 3) evaluate the various service levels and customer touchpoints within their organization for continuous improvement; and 4) increase their employees' knowledge and required skill set so they can remain competitive and lead the customer experience. Conversely, there are few if any agreed upon standards or requirements for workforce and education organizations to measure, monitor or manage their business engagement efforts or report on employer relationship-building activities.

A performance indicator with promise is to measure what is important to the customer. For example, in Business U's Business Engagement Boot Camp®, graduates from across the nation report that their business customers most frequently ask them to track cost per hire, turnover costs, time to hire and cost savings and profits resulting from improved business processes and increased productivity. When asked if these types of measures are tracked, all of the CRC member colleges interviewed indicated that these are not metrics tracked.

While there is no requirement to track these type of demand-side metrics but doing so could increase employers' interest in partnering with workforce and education initiatives that may require a longer investment of their time. By assessing and improving the value proposition for employer's workforce and education organizations could see an increase in industry's commitment to work with them. One strategy for the CRC member colleges is to develop a regional demand side scorecard that captures the results of working with community colleges.

B2B vs B2C Differentiators

In terms of marketing efforts, it is natural that a majority of the communications strategies for community colleges revolve around students versus employers. While there are similarities in marketing to business-to-consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) markets, there are key differentiators⁴ that should be taken into consideration if CRC colleges want to increase market penetration among regional employers.

- The B2B audience is seeking efficiency and expertise. Collecting and communicating employer successes with an emphasis on how a partnership with a community college can contribute to a competitive advantage is a critical message. This is more than “doing well by doing good” and an

enjoyment derived from working with students; a B2B message seeking engagement needs to demonstrate expertise and value.

- The B2B engagement process tends to be rationally and logically driven, while consumer choices are typically emotionally triggered. This means the messaging strategies for employers need to be differentiated from the student messaging in the CRC career education campaign.
- B2B clientele want to be educated and provided with expertise so the importance of positioning the demand side of the CRC campaign needs to articulate a clear business case of support for career education and how it benefits business and industry.
- Highly detailed content is required for B2B marketing so leveraging labor market reports and retooling the data to highlight sector trends is a strategy that could be highly effective for the CRC campaign.
- B2B marketers have a much longer chain of command to deal with since procurement, accounting and their superiors often need to approve purchases. This means that transformational relationship approaches are important for sustaining engagement in the CRC.
- The B2B buying cycle is often much longer than the B2C decision process. Therefore, it requires much more nurturing and close attention. B2C buys tend to satisfy immediate needs, while B2B decisions are meant to complete long-term goals which align more with transformational relationship building approaches than the traditional transactional approaches demonstrated by community colleges.

When employers look to community colleges to find solutions to their own workforce needs, the vast majority will be interested in partnering mainly to gain information, tools or new relationships that will benefit their own businesses⁵. The marketing materials deposited in the drop box by CRC member colleges were primarily focused on student recruitment and education. CRC colleges do not have a standard set of employer marketing materials that detail the continuum of engagement opportunities and most importantly the value propositions for engagement.

In evaluating CRC college websites, FCM noted key areas of opportunities as noted below.

- Only 28% of the colleges (4 of 14) have links for employers to inquire about partnering with the school to train a future workforce or to develop programming.
- Only one college district demonstrates that engaging new employer partners is a priority as evidenced by how the information is presented prominently via a pull down menu item on their website's landing page.
- None of the consortium's college CTE webpages provide any method to collect information via web-forms for employers to initiate contact with the college CTE staffers.
- Lack of information for industry partners gives the impression that the college is not market-responsive to the labor needs of employers in their region.

Summary CRC Business Engagement Audit

The CRC region is not alone with respect to the identified challenges pertaining to business engagement. As such, Business U is working with FCM and the CCCCCO to create a Sector Strategy Toolkit that helps Doing WHAT MATTERS™ for Jobs & the Economy key field talent and the colleges they support with employer engagement. To supplement this toolkit, Business U has designed a set of marcomm strategies to support the CRC region in coordinating efforts to cast a wider net and raise awareness of regional employers about the continuum of engagement activities to which they can engage with their local college and the value propositions for doing so in the following sections.

Demand Side: Marketing & Communications Roadmap

The overall goal of a strategic marketing & communications (MarComm) plan is to deliver the right brand messages to the right target audiences through the right mediums and campaign tools (e.g. printed collateral, social media marketing, online/print advertising, website, public relations, videos, special events) in order to engage them with specific calls to action. In the case of CRC's CTE rebranding campaign this includes increasing enrollments in CRC member colleges' career education classes, as well as engaging employers in a continuum of activities that increase opportunities for students, such as work-based learning and job placements.

As the post-secondary marketing environment has become increasingly crowded, executing an effective engagement and enrollment campaign requires using multiple touchpoints at every stage of the "sales funnel" – from brand awareness through engagement/enrollment. The CRC marketing plan incorporates a minimum of the consumer marketing standard three to five touches to increase brand awareness at the **regional level**, followed by multiple strategies that can be implemented at the **college level** to garner interest from students and employers. According to a recent Google study⁶ of the Higher Education Journey, the highest conversion levels happen after 10+ interactions with potential students over a 30-120 day period. Therefore, FCM recommends a partial launch mid-November continuing through February 2019, as noted below in the recommended strategies focused on employers.

Regional MarComm Strategies (Demand Focused)

The following three overarching strategies and multitude of tactics pertain to repositioning community colleges, conducting proactive outreach, and building system capacity to build transformational relationships with business and industry. These strategies are recommended to cast a wide net in generating employer leads for CRC member colleges, collectively, and building awareness and support for career education.

Strategy #1: Shift the positioning of community colleges when targeting businesses to demonstrate its value in making businesses more competitive.

Measurable Objectives:

- Percentage increase in employer engagement in career education (by engagement type; overall)
- Percentage increase in employer market penetration in supporting career education (by sector; overall)
- Repeat business customers

Tactic 1.1: Develop an optimized regional website that serves as a hub for brand messages that resonate with targeted high-growth sector employers to build awareness of career education programs and elicit responses to learn more.

Tactic 1.2: Produce and deploy videos from the “voice of the business” in which the businesses talk about the value of partnering with community colleges and how this solves many of its key workforce challenges. The Find It. Be It campaign will house employer-specific videos that demonstrate the value propositions of partnering with the community colleges.

Tactic 1.3: Use third-party credibility to improve awareness, knowledge of and value in career education options within the CRC region. For those employers and students who could not attend the on-camera video interviews, collect written testimonials to utilize for proactive outreach. Log into Business U’s eUniversity and download the third-party credibility ebook for more details.

Tactic 1.4: Leverage the content from the employer section of the Find It. Be It. campaign website and work with each college to develop specific pages just for business and industry.

Tactic 1.5: Colleges can use the campaign’s style guidelines and insert Proud Partner of Find It. Be It. Campaign on its website for cross promotions.

Tactic 1.6: Tailor the Ways to Engage employer brochure for the Find It. Be It. campaign with specific engagement calls to action for each college.

Tactic 1.7: Leverage the Centers of Excellence reports and retool industry-specific data to create eNewsletter articles, blogs and guest blogs to target high growth sectors.

Tactic 1.8: Utilize the campaign PR toolkit to garner media support for how each college engages business and industry and the value businesses receive from this partnership.

Tactic 1.9: Create a bank of social media posts for CRC colleges to target employers using B2B-focused messages.

Strategy #2: Support colleges in moving away from a decentralized to a centralized system for proactive employer outreach to expand reach and opportunities for students.

Measurable Objectives:

- Percentage of referrals made to partner agencies to solve a business' immediate need when outside of workforce & education.
- Percentage of referrals received from partner agencies to community colleges
- Repeat business customers
- Percentage increase in employer engagement (by engagement type; overall)
- Percentage increase in employer market penetration (by sector; overall)

Tactic 2.1: Coach colleges on how to develop a centralized outreach team to avoid duplication of effort when conducting outreach.

Tactic 2.2: Encourage use of CRC's technology platform to conduct proactive outreach and monitor results.

Tactic 2.3: Establish regional and college-specific objectives for market penetration rates in specific industries that align with career education.

Tactic 2.4: Develop a business solutions portfolio for use with a consultative approach to business and industry.

Tactic 2.5: Track metrics that matter to employers.

Strategy #3: Build the capacity of employer-facing staff and faculty at CRC colleges to increase reach and expand opportunities for students.

Measurable Objectives:

- Percentage of referrals made to partner agencies to solve a business immediate need when outside of workforce & education.
- Percentage of referrals received from partner agencies to community colleges
- Repeat business customers
- Percentage increase in employer engagement (by engagement type; overall)
- Percentage increase in employer market penetration (by sector; overall)

Tactic 3.1: Develop a track of accredited learning events to help CRC employer-facing staff and faculty on how to successfully apply transformational relationship building approaches.

Tactic 3.2: Support each college in the development of a localized Business Engagement Action Plan.

Tactic 3.3: Utilized Business U's eUniversity to receive coaching via the collaborative forum on applying employer tools to individual colleges.

References:

¹ The Current State of Business Engagement. Business U, 30 September 2017

² *Investing in a Business Engagement Ecosystem*. Business U and CAFWD, 31 Oct. 2017, i.cafwd.shipb.us/caeconomy/resources/Investing_in_a_Business_Engagement_Ecosystem_10-31-17.pdf.

³ *2016 Business Engagement Self-Assessment Results*. Business U, Inc., 2017, *2016 Business Engagement Self-Assessment Results*

⁴ "What Is the Difference between B2B and B2C ." CPSA, 13 July 2015, www.cpsa.com/resources/articles/what-is-the-difference-between-b2b-and-b2c-sales.

⁵ "Developing Market-Relevant Curricula and Credentials: Employer Engagement for Community Colleges in Partnerships ." *Http://Skilledwork.org*, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, 2015, skilledwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/EmployerEngagement.pdf.

⁶ "Google Education Clickstream Study." *Google*, LLC, 2012, https://ssl.gstatic.com/think/docs/education-trends-through-the-eyes-of-your-customer_research-studies.pdf