Employer Engagement Guidebook

for the Design + Delivery of Micro-pathways

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Version 1.0

About this Guidebook

This employer engagement guidebook has been developed for the inaugural and future cohorts of the Lab's **Community College Growth Engine Fund** (Fund). The first of its kind, the Fund supports a national cohort of community colleges and systems, in partnership with employers and regional stakeholders, to create new earn-and-learn pathways to economic mobility—over the course of four years, the Fund will test and scale **micro-pathways** with learners and employers.

What is a micro-pathway?

The Lab defines a micro-pathway as two or more stackable credentials that can be packaged as a validated market signal connecting learners to high-growth careers. Through the Fund, a cohort of six community colleges and systems are using a set of design criteria to guide their work. For micro-pathways to work, they must be employer-initiated and validated. In essence,employers must be actively involved in all stages of the design and delivery of micro-pathways.

Prior to, or at the start of, moving forward with the design of micro-pathways, we recommend that institutions explore their current employer relationships. The Lab has devised an Employer Engagement Matrix plotting tool to facilitate this process. Upon reflecting on the current state of employer relationships, your institution may identify both gaps in the breadth of employer relationships and opportunities for deepening existing relationships. The remainder of this guidebook lays out a series of steps to bring more employers to the table, as well as how to identify which relationships are candidates for deepening and how to go about it.

To set the stage for establishing and nurturing employer relationships, the Lab created a set of five benchmarks for employer engagement:

1. Uses a ladder of engagement to understand the level of the relationship with each employer (advisor, co-design, partner)
2. Includes several employers from the same industry to align on priority credentials, 21st century skills and technical skills
3. Builds relationships at multiple levels of the company (executive, HR, hiring managers) and within the institution (president/chancellor, program leads, staff level)
4. Is beneficial to the institution, the employer, and ultimately the learner, with relevant and regularly demonstrated value propositions for all parties
5. Institutes a feedback loop that is open, honest, and measures progress on clearly defined metrics

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Why employer engagement?

The times have called for a new class of credentials that are faster than a standard degree, ruthlessly hued to learner needs, and more tied to market demand than any before.

The micro-pathway, two or more stackable credentials that can be packaged as a validated market signal connecting learners to high growth careers, in its very definition necessitates postsecondary institutions engaging with employers to gauge market signals.

The Education Design Lab's **Community College Growth Engine Fund** (Growth Engine Fund) is the first initiative of its kind to test and scale micro-pathways. Here, we're asking: How might community colleges pursue strategies to deliver fast, flexible, high-demand, online-enabled pathways and alternative forms of credentialing, while building effective employer relationships? To us, the answers to this question presents an urgent "design challenge," as the impact of this work has incredible potential to address systemic barriers and opportunity gaps for **new majority learners**.

When the Lab starts a "design challenge," we push partners to bring learners and employers to the table. We know that alignment between employers and higher ed is critical, yet is often an incredibly difficult area to approach. Whether we're co-designing a first-year experience program, a next-gen guided pathway model, or an entire new college, having employers at the table is critical for our work to be successful, or at least head in that direction—our approach for designing micro-pathways is no different.

To meet the micro-pathways design challenge, the participating community colleges are using a set of design criteria, which set the principles or aspirations that micro-pathways should meet. They serve as the guideposts for the institutions in the challenge and specifically state that micro-pathways should be "employer-initiated and validated," meaning regional employers:

- Recognize the stackable credentials as required or preferred in the hiring process
- Identify the technical skills and highest priority 21st century skills for the micro-pathway
- Engage in designing the curriculum and learning activities for the micro-pathway
- Provide feedback on the quality of the hires from the micro-pathway, including aggregate data on retention and advancement

There are a variety of high quality resources, guides, and tools on employer engagement. This guidebook builds on the work of our colleagues at Jobs for the Future, Here to Here, the Council on Occupational Research & Development, and the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, as well as our own expertise at the Lab, and applies them specifically to the context of micro-pathways and the Growth Engine Fund's design criteria.

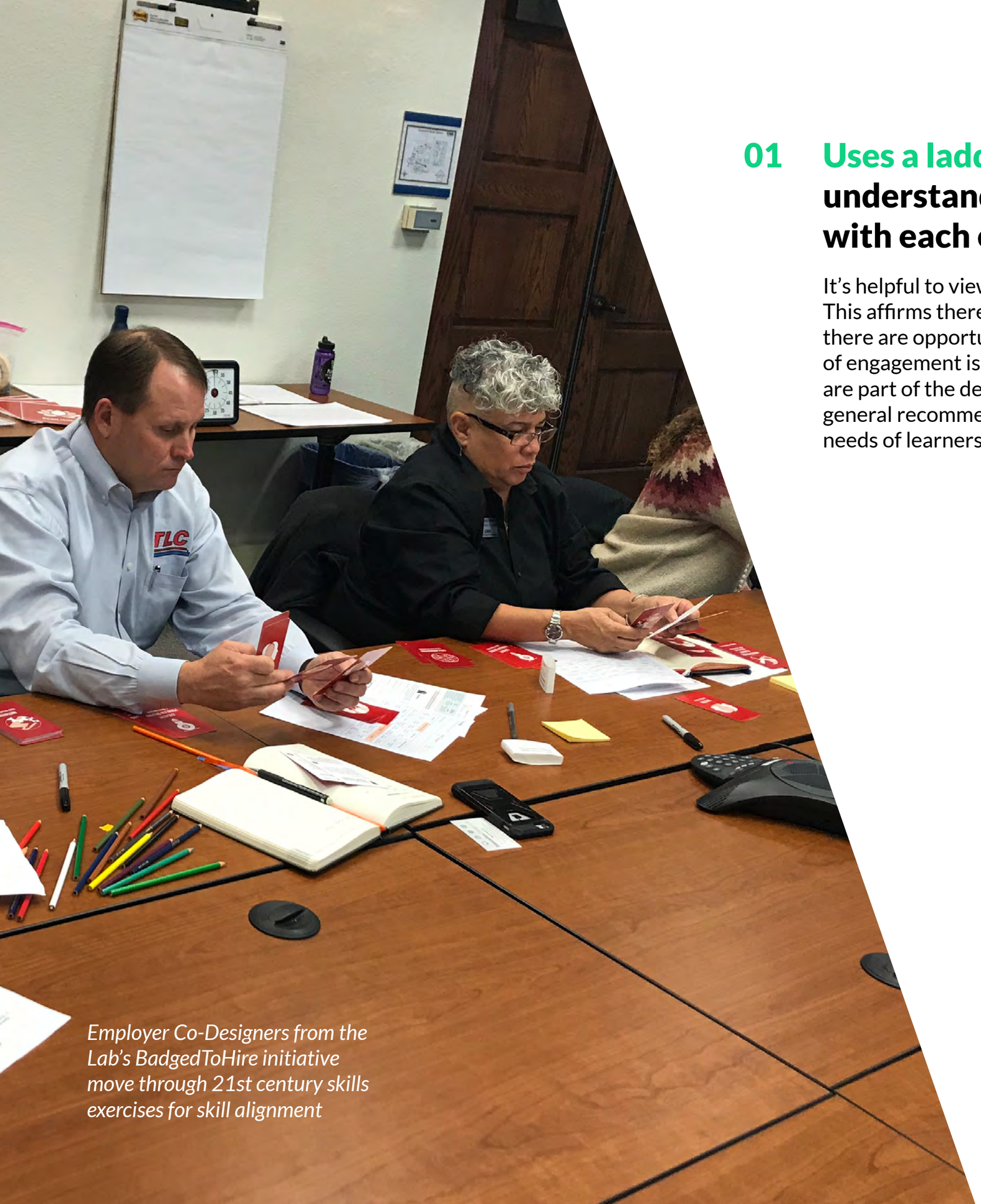
The Guidebook begins with a set of benchmarks that can be used to guide how an institution engages with employers.

Each of the five benchmarks includes a promising practice to demonstrate the way it is being used in the daily work of the six institutions in the cohort. To help determine the extent and value of current employer relationships, institutions can use the **Employer Engagement Matrix** plotting tool shared in this guide. Should an institution determine it needs to expand its breadth of employers, there is a series of **Steps for Getting More Employers to the Table**. Many institutions will wish to deepen at least some of their employer relationships and may ponder, **Which Relationships Are Candidates for Deepening?** as is covered in the next section. The last part of the Guidebook provides a variety of practical ideas on **How to Deepen the Relationship** that can be adapted to meet an institution's needs.

Section 01

Benchmarks for Effective Employer Engagement

How might institutions engage employers in the design and delivery of high quality micro-pathways? Below are five benchmarks that can be used as points of reference as institutions look to both broaden and deepen the array of relationships with regional employers who will work hand-in-hand on the design and delivery of micro-pathways for learners. These benchmarks are based on both the commonalities across the toolkits and resources that informed this guidebook and input from the college presidents that are part of the inaugural Community College Growth Engine Fund cohort.



Employer Co-Designers from the Lab's BadgedToHire initiative move through 21st century skills exercises for skill alignment

01 Uses a ladder of engagement to understand the level of the relationship with each employer

It's helpful to view employer relationships on a "ladder of engagement." This affirms there is value in each type of relationship and at the same time there are opportunities to deepen engagement with employers. The ladder of engagement is grounded in the design criteria and the key activities that are part of the design and implementation of micro-pathways. These are general recommendations and can be customized to the institution and the needs of learners and local employers.

Ladder of Engagement for Employer Relationships

Advisor

- Reviews occupational labor market information and wage data provided by the institution and provides feedback based on the company's projections
- Participates in a T-Profile session to identify the credentials that are preferred or required in the hiring process, technical skills and the highest priority 21st century skills
- Provides subject matter expertise input into the micro-pathway curriculum
- Potentially will interview and hire graduates that meet their hiring requirements

Co-Designer

Participates in the Advisor activities plus:

- Provides feedback on the micro-pathway prototype at various stages of development
- Reviews and comments on the micro-pathway curriculum as it is developed and the final version prior to launch
- Offers ideas for real-world of work learning activities
- Likely to interview and hire graduates that meeting their hiring requirements

Partner

Participates in the Co-Designer activities plus:

- Offers job shadowing, internships and/or types of other work-based learning
- Supports learners through means such as providing equipment for hands-on learning or mentorship
- May contribute to the holistic support of learners, such as course fees or transportation
- Agrees to interview and hire graduates that meet their hiring requirements
- Enters into a formal agreement detailing the terms of the partnership (ex. MOU or contract)

02 Includes several employers from the same industry to align on priority credentials, 21st century skills and technical skills

Employer input into the creation of micro-pathways is front and center in the design criteria. To ensure micro-pathways lead to successful employment outcomes for learners in high-growth industries, institutions should seek input from multiple employers from the same industry to determine which credentials will be included in the micro-pathways along with the highest priority 21st century skills and technical skills.

Promising Practice

The Lab modeled how to facilitate T-Profile sessions with employers across a number of industries. The **T-Profile** is a useful tool for employers and institutions to establish a shared language and to hone in on skills as they work together to build micro-pathways. Employers noted that using the Lab's T-Profile tool allowed them to better articulate training needs. Below is a quote from an employer who participated in a T-Profile session.

"As an employer, these types of tools help us articulate our needs to local training providers. It's very easy to use...and then translating it up to, hey, we need these things, can you help us train our people or upskill, train our future staff or upskill, our current staff?"

03 Builds relationships at multiple levels of the company (executive, HR, hiring managers) and within the institution (president/chancellor, program leads, staff level)

Buy-in starts with the decision makers at the top, both for the institution and the employer. Once this is in place, relationships can then be built at the tactical level. Institutional leaders need to ensure there is adequate support at the program and staff levels to do the required work on the ground for building high quality micro-pathways. On the employer side, once there is executive sponsorship in place, it is important to involve both HR and hiring managers given their varying perspectives that will help ensure learners have the credentials and skills needed to get through the door.

Promising Practice

At the winter 2021 Employer Engagement sessions, the Lab and the institutions in the cohort heard from employers that robust communication from all partners to align skills and hiring needs is critical to respond to labor market shifts in real time. This includes internal communications at the institution, communications between the institutions and employer partners, and communications between hiring managers, chief hiring officers, and HR departments.

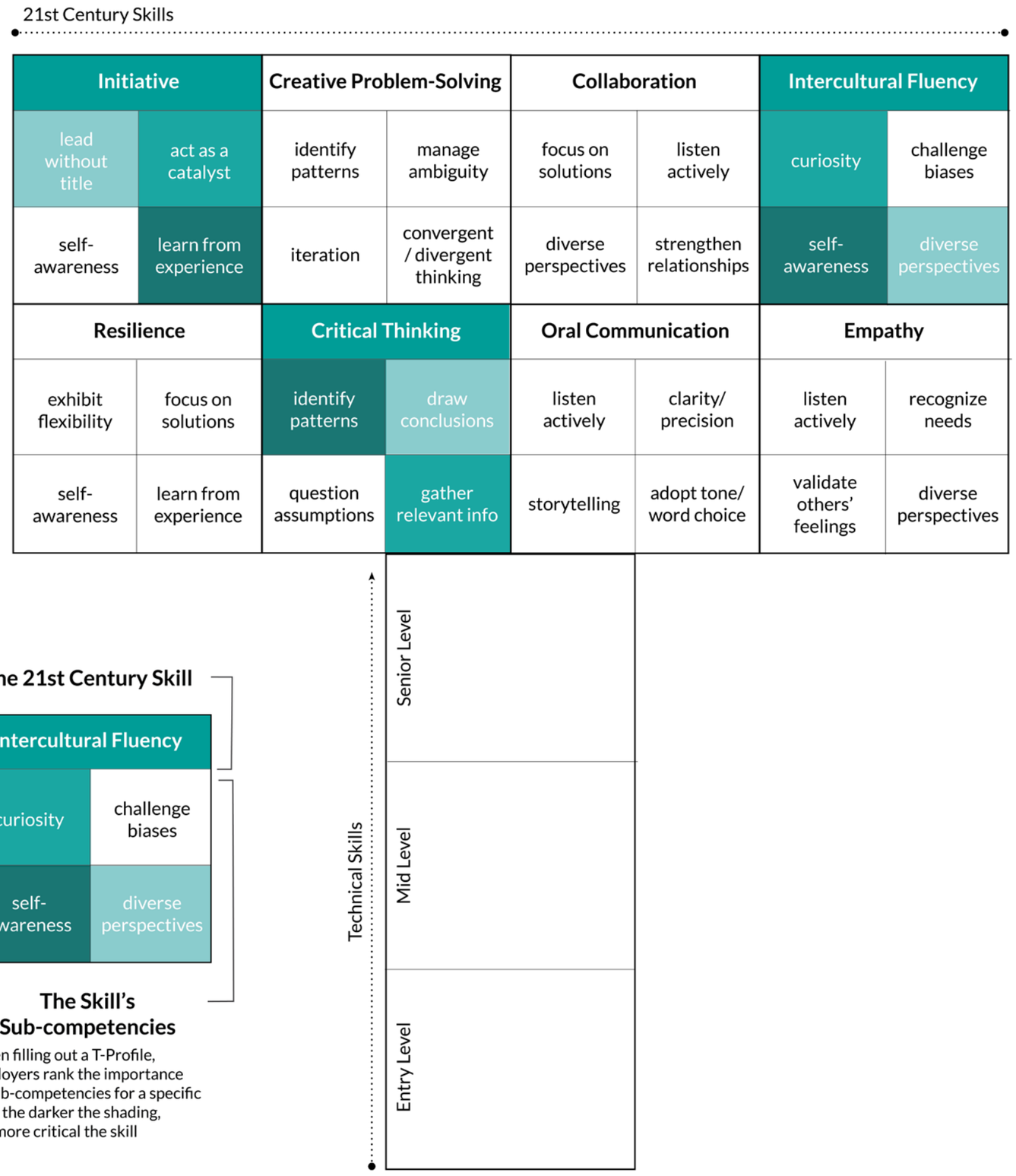
The T-Profile

The T-Profile is a visual construct that represents the optimal combination of 21st century skills and technical skills for a specified job.

It demonstrates mobility up and across career ladders, making explicit the range of motion of different skill sets. When we work with employers, we often ask them to fill-out a T-Profile for each role they have either a high need for or those that are hard-to-fill. Employers use a shading system to identify which 21st century skills are most critical for the position, followed by a ranking of the most important sub-competencies (the darker the shading of the sub-competency, the more critical the skill).

Learn More + See Examples from Employers:

Four Insights from Employers: How Learning Providers Can Design Industry-aligned Pathways



04 Is beneficial to the institution, the employer, and ultimately the learner, with relevant and regularly demonstrated value propositions for all parties

Micro-pathways are based on learner- (human-) centered design principles, so ultimately supporting the economic mobility of learners is the goal. The institution is the facilitator of the learner journey, so they benefit when the learners benefit. Employers need to see the benefits from their perspective, which is where having a clear value proposition comes into play. This needs to not only happen at the front end, but should be continuously assessed to ensure the employer and the institution are getting value, and that learner needs are being met.

Promising Practice

Each institution in the cohort developed a customized Employer Engagement Action Plan that details how they would be involving employers throughout the design year and pilot. The plans cover items such as exploring employer demand data, skills profiling, curriculum development, work-based learning opportunities, guest speaking appearances, resume assistance for learners, and career fairs.

05 Institutes a feedback loop that is open, honest, and measures progress on clearly defined metrics

Effective employer engagement is grounded in a commitment to open, honest communication, responsiveness, and joint problem solving. The institution should have both formal and informal feedback loops in place with employers that encourages this type of feedback. In addition, both the employer and the institution should agree upon a set of metrics that clearly defines success for both stakeholders and can be tracked over time.

Promising Practice

Pima Community College has aligned the work of the Fund to the **Opportunity America framework** for measuring data around employer engagement and to structure its employer engagement practices. This includes a set of guiding principles including bringing in the “employer voice” at the forefront of program improvement processes and activities, continuous engagement that sets the foundation for effective and purposeful meetings, and using engagement and process management as a team effort and vital to program improvement and growth.

Learners and employees of our employer strategic partner, Goodwill San Antonio, provide feedback, ideas, and input for work-based micro-pathways from our **UpSkill SA!** *initiative*

MART
VOTE

Section 02

Taking Stock of Current Employer Relationships

A helpful exercise to do prior to deciding which relationships might be prime for deepening is to take stock of the institution's current employer relationships. An honest look at the value each relationship is bringing to the employer, the institution, and ultimately the learner, will enable the institution to see where there might be gaps and determine if more employers are needed at the table. Some of the Community College Growth Engine Fund cohort has realized that in order to offer their learners ample opportunities for employment in their chosen occupations, more employers will be needed to meet the goal of 600 learners completing micro-pathways and into employment. In addition, some have also determined that in order to offer learners work-based learning or to help them fund micro-pathways a number of their relationships will need to be deepened.

Employer Engagement Matrix

Create a visual picture of employer engagement across the various levels of the Ladder of Engagement and identify where there might be opportunities to deepen employer relationships

Directions:

Step 1: Create a list of employers the institution is currently engaging with in the design and delivery of its micro-pathways. You will also need fine tip markers in blue, red, green and yellow to plot a "dot" for each employer.

Step 2: Go down your list of employers one at a time. Think about your relationships and interactions with that employer. You may want to have others available to provide their take. How would you rate the engagement level of this employer?

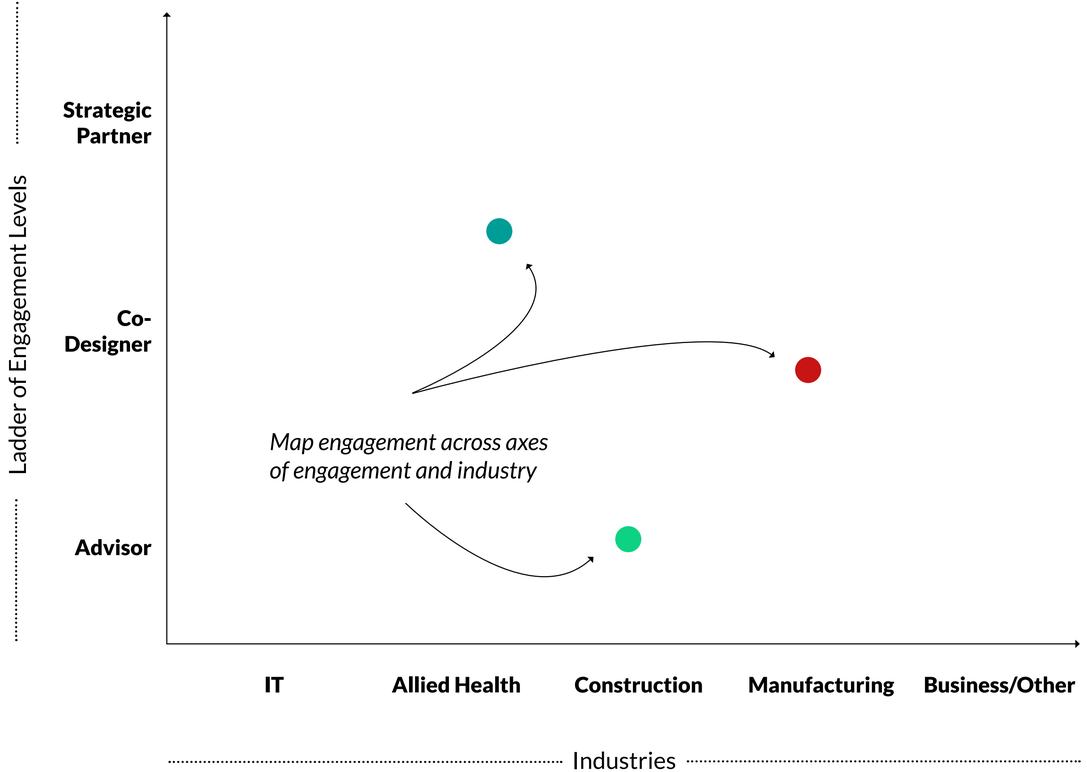
Step 3: Look at the Employer Key. Decide which color best describes the engagement level of the employer. Make a dot using the colored felt tip pen that is big enough to see but leaves plenty of room for the other dots.

Step 4: Complete Steps 1 + 2 with your entire list of employers.

Step 5: Have a look at your plotting matrix. You can draw some conclusions based on the clusters and colors of dots! This exercise may help you see:

- You have the right balance for your institution in the number and quality of employer relationships.
- You have gaps and need more employers at the table.
- You have room to deepen employer engagement.
- You would benefit from discontinuing certain relationships and put that energy into others.

These are just a few scenarios. Share with others at the institution and get their impression.



Employer Key

Employer is very engaged + valuable
Most likely will be at minimum at the Co-Designer level and potential moving towards or at the Partner Level.

Employer is somewhat engaged + valuable
Most likely will be at minimum at the Advisor Level and moving towards or at the Co-Designer level.

Employer is very or somewhat engaged + not valuable
Most likely will be at the Advisor level but may be inconsistent and unreliable, at times.

Employer is not engaged + not valuable
On your list but probably should not be. May want to try to re-engage or move on.

IDEAS
SPECTRUM
SOLD OUT
EDUCATION TO PIPELINE
ENTER COLLEGE
COLLEGE CREDENTIAL
EMPLOYMENT
000 THOUSAND
5 MILLION
3 MILLION
800 THOUSAND
1 MILLION
MAKE

Section 03

Getting More Employers to the Table

If there's one statement that rings true for most community colleges, there can never be too many employers at the table. Between the fluctuations in workforce demand, leadership changes in organizations, and a variety of other factors, some employers who have been highly engaged one day can potentially be off the radar the next. Creating a pool of employers allows for the ebbs and flows of employer engagement, leaves room for flexibility in the levels of engagement, and ensures the institution is not asking too much of any one employer. For institutions that want to bring additional employers to the table, below is a series of recommended steps and tools.

Step 1: Craft an Employer Value Proposition

For micro-pathways, the employer value proposition first and foremost should focus on "employer initiated and validated" micro-pathways. This means programs that are developed based on regional employer demand and align to their priority technical and 21st century skills. A value proposition also focuses on what differentiates the institution from its competitors. Below is a high-level, general format for employer value propositions. This is included as part of the low-fi micro-pathways prototypes the cohort created and can be used for new micro-pathways.

> *We offer [stakeholders] [benefit] to help them [address these needs] and unlike [competitors] we [differentiator].*
>
> *Example from the Fund cohort: We offer employer partners access to a high skilled workforce with employer-validated technical and 21st century skills to improve on-the-job performance, and unlike other training providers, we prioritize diversity and equity in our recruitment and talent pipeline development.*

Especially when bringing new employers to the table, there needs to be compelling motivation for collaborating with the institution. This is where the institution can include "value-added" assets. These can be resources, for instance business and industry expertise, facilities (such as meeting space or training facilities), equipment, and relationships that can be leveraged. In addition, appealing to employers with a local base to their recognition as a good corporate citizen can be an important motive and publicly recognizing them can be highly valued. As the institution moves forward with each individual employer relationship, articulating individual value propositions for that employer can facilitate benchmark #4 relevant and regularly demonstrated value proposition.

Step 2: Take Advantage of Opportunities to Connect with Employers Informally

Given a community college's focus on the community they serve, representatives from the institution are likely participating on local boards of directors or are volunteering where local employers are also serving. Take advantage of getting to know employers informally through these means. These opportunities can open the door to new employer engagement opportunities.

Another way to connect with employers informally is to periodically host a networking event, such as a breakfast, and invite employers who have not previously engaged with the college or are new to the community along with those employers who have invested relationships with the college. Also invite other partners, such as community-based organizations and workforce boards. Another event option is to host or co-host an industry-focused roundtable. College leaders and faculty SMEs can discuss the state of specific industries, problems they are facing, and embark on discussions around workforce needs, potentially identifying where the institution may be able to assist. This could be an event sponsored by the institution or co-sponsored by other local industry groups. The tool below is a planning tool that can be used or modified for a networking event for employers.

Your Tool:

Co-Host an Employer Focused Networking Event

Step 3: Target Employers + Conduct Outreach

For finding potential new local employers, one excellent source is through the local chamber of commerce. They have ongoing relationships with local employers and can provide guidance as to who might be the best fit. Another source is the Identify Employers in a Specific Industry in the tools section.

Prior to conducting outreach with new employers, be sure to check across the institution to see if there may be other areas of the college that are already working with those employers. This prevents redundancy and there may be ways to build on these established relationships. In aligning to benchmark #3 builds relationships at multiple levels of the company start with the decision makers at the top, and once this relationship is in place, outreach can be expanded to the tactical level of the company.

There are a number of tools below to support the research of potential employers, tracking employer outreach (and engagement) and a sample outreach protocol. In addition, the Fund team is working with a marketing consultant on materials that explain micro-pathways and their value that might be useful to include as part of this outreach. These materials should be ready over the summer.

Your Tools:

Identify Employers in a Specific Industry

Outreach Plan Worksheet

Sample Outreach Protocol

Employer Engagement Action Plan

Step 4: Start with a Small Ask

With new employers, it typically is more effective to start with lower levels of commitment and a small "Ask," such as discussion around their demand data or participating in a T-Profile session. These Asks don't require a big commitment and are also centered specifically on their workforce needs. Then, show how this information is being used in the design of the micro-pathway. From the start, initiate a feedback loop that is open, honest, and measures progress on clearly defined metrics as described in benchmark #5. Ensuring early wins with a tangible benefit is more likely to result in higher levels of commitment later on. Start small and build up from there.

Section 04

Deepening Existing Relationships

This next section focuses on how to deepen existing employer relationships. It can be used in conjunction with the previous section with getting more employers to the table after those relationships have been established and early wins demonstrated. It also provides guidance on how to decide which established relationships to target, such as those that on the advisor level, can potentially be deepened and moved up to co-designer or partner, or if a co-designer might be opportune for a partnership.

Which Relationships Are Candidates for Deepening?

Some employers may be a good fit for one specific level, whereas with others there may be opportunity to move up the ladder of engagement and deepen the relationship. Questions to ponder when targeting which relationships to deepen:

Which companies have strong partnerships with other players in the regional ecosystem, such as community-based organizations?

Employers who are open to partnering and understand the importance of creating connections within the regional ecosystem have a good chance of being candidates for deep relationships with other ecosystem partners, such as the community college. Conduct market intelligence to determine who these companies are, such as following local media. Other good sources include the local Chamber of Commerce, the local workforce board and economic development agency. They have extensive knowledge of employers in the area. It may also be worthwhile to explore national employers who have a regional presence, such as AWS or CVS Health, who have strong connections with community colleges across the country.

Which companies have social impact commitments to their local communities?

Given that micro-pathways focus on the economic mobility of **new majority learners**, companies that have social impact commitments are more likely going to be willing to provide the extra time and resources needed for co-design and more so for partnerships. As was shared by Dr. Falecia Williams, President of Prince George's Community College at the March 11, 2021 President's Forum, aligning with employers who are focused on equity, social justice, and focused on the well-being of their communities are the best candidates for being partners with the community colleges.

What is the capacity of the employer?

We know small- to medium-sized businesses make up the majority of employers in communities. Given their limited capacity, they can be stretched yet at the same time sometimes they are the most enthusiastic supporters. Discussing capacity is important in working together to determine how the employer can contribute to the relationship. View each employer with an individual lens.

Has the employer been responsive in the past?

This can be related to capacity but may also be a factor to consider if an employer is a good match for deepening the relationship, especially when considering what is involved with being a co-design and partner. Lack of responsiveness can put a damper in the micro-pathway design process given the back and forth needed to provide input. Some employers have good intentions and want to be co-designers but they may have other internal commitments that can get in the way of the institution getting what it needs from co-designers and partners.

Who are the "champions" at the company?

Finding a "champion(s)" at the company is more likely to bring about success for deepening engagement. A champion is someone (or a few key players) who carries the torch for the initiative and ensures there is buy-in at all levels of the company. It is helpful to determine if the employer champion(s) in the past (if there has been one) has been consistent or changeable. When there is frequent changeover in champions, it can be hard to build momentum and deepen the relationship. If there has not been a champion, seek to find an individual who is passionate about workforce development and the potential or micro-pathways. While buy-in at the executive-level is important, the champion(s) can be at any level, as long as that person is able to influence senior management and others.

How-to Deepen the Relationship

Ensure there are internal champions in place.

Not only is it important for the employer to have a champion(s), but the same is true for the institution. For institutions, there most likely will be several individuals based on their industry of focus. These are individuals who understand micro-pathways, can communicate their value proposition, and are also skilled at relationship management. These champions should serve as the key contacts and should remain consistent over time. The champions ensure everything runs smoothly for the employer, especially when it comes to the higher levels of commitment of co-designer and partner. In the spirit of making the essential work for champions visible and acknowledging their importance, mention them in press releases, recognize them at college convenings and community forums, and/or provide them with stipends.

Use the ladder of engagement visual as options for engagement.

You can use the ladder of engagement from this guidebook or create a custom version for your institution. The ladder can be viewed as a menu of options for employers. By presenting a visual that is simple and concrete is a great conversation starter of what the options can be, keeping in mind that it is also important to be flexible.

Be creative and flexible.

One employer may want to engage in several ways while another may be interested in just one type of engagement, which may not neatly fit into the typical engagement ladder. For example, an employer may be considered an advisor and participates in the activities at that level, but wants to donate equipment, which could be at the partner level. It's not that important what the label is for the engagement ladder, but instead to be appreciative of what each employer has to offer.

Make employer participation user-friendly.

Employers are busy and more likely to co-design and partner if the institution makes it easy to participate. This means providing clear resource and time commitments up front and plenty of notice with dates and times that they will be participating in events, such as a T-Profile session. Institutions in the cohort have suggested 1-2 months notice. Keep in mind the capacity of small and medium-sized businesses who make up the bulk of employers in the community. Being off site can be a big ask, so if there are opportunities to piggyback events, even better. For example, host a career fair and interviewing event in one. Other time saving tools, such as a checklist for reviewing curriculum, can help employers feel more comfortable about deepening their engagement.

Be clear about the commitment involved at each level of engagement.

For each item, provide concrete examples of what engagement looks like, such as how other employers have participated in the activities. In addition, it's important to share the potential time commitment and resources involved for each of the activities. See some examples below.

With new micro-pathways, the institution will be reviewing regional real-time labor market information data. In addition, as part of being an advisor, the institution would meet with the employer for one hour to hear more about their projected hiring needs to validate this data. This would be a one hour engagement.

Co-designers provide input and review micro-pathway curriculum as it is developed and prior to final launch. This would mean that the employer has the ability to see several versions of the curriculum at different stages and provide concrete feedback to ensure skill development will meet employer needs. This constitutes spending 1-2 hours per quarter reviewing and commenting.

Partners have the ability to ensure learners are trained using x equipment that is donated to the institution. This would cost x dollars, however, saves x dollars from having to train those individuals on that equipment once hired.

Show appreciation of the employer's contributions.

While having access to a skilled workforce is an employer's primary motivation, showing how their engagement has made the difference in the lives of learners is certainly appreciated. Take advantage of opportunities to highlight important employer contributions, such as naming a Lab after the employer partner(s) that made it possible. Include employer logos in marketing materials to learners and intermediaries. Highlight successes of employees who, for example, were guest speakers or served as a collaborator on projects. Sending a personal note to their CEO/executives can put the institution in a positive light and make the employees who are on the ground working with learners feel good.

Periodically check in with the employer to see if adjustments are warranted.

We all know what it feels like when we have over committed ourselves with good intentions. By instituting an open honest feedback loop as stated in the benchmarks the employer will feel more comfortable sharing if they have over-committed. Help the employer back down the ladder gracefully.

Share the benefits of being a co-designer or partner.

For employers who have been advisors, share the greater impact they can have by being co-designers, such as a say on the technical and 21st century skills in the micro-pathways (employer-initiated and validated), and therefore, a better prepared local workforce. Partners stand the most benefit for micro-pathways. By having learners available through internships or other work-based learning activities, employers have access to individuals who are work-ready. It's important to not only point out that type of benefit, but other benefits as well that align to the employers overall goals, such as access to a diverse, qualified workforce, less internal training, etc.

Learn What Works with Us

The Lab has created this Employer Engagement Guidebook for the Community College Growth Engine Fund cohort and will be a work in progress. As we come across additional tools and resources that may be useful, these will be incorporated. In addition, the more we learn about bringing additional employers to the table and deepening engagement with employers, we will post success stories from the cohort. Please reach out to Growth Engine Fund Innovation Coach Valerie Taylor with your ideas, comments, and additions.

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About the Lab

The Education Design Lab (Lab) is a national nonprofit that co-designs, prototypes, and tests education-to-workforce models through a human-centered design process focused on understanding learners' experiences, addressing equity gaps in higher education, and connecting learners to economic mobility. At the Lab, we believe that human-centered design allows stakeholders to map and galvanize their existing strengths to best center and meet the needs of the students that they serve. The Lab's process also considers the needs of employers, translating curriculum and program design to make skills more visible to students and employers alike. You can learn more at **eddesignlab.org**.

About the Community College Growth Engine Fund

The Community College Growth Engine Fund is a catalytic investment in community colleges to position them as drivers between innovation and employment. The Fund is being launched in response to the urgent need for community colleges to deliver skills-focused, market-driven education as regions mitigate the growing skills gap. The current COVID-19 crisis, the massive unemployment and displacement that has resulted, and the historic inequities in our labor market underscore the need for urgency to drive the learnings for how community colleges shorten the horizon to skill-based employment while putting learners on the path toward degree attainment. The Fund will create a roadmap for scale to reach every learner and worker in the country and give them a path to economic dignity.

Hosted by the Education Design Lab, the Fund is investing in six forward-leaning community colleges and systems to lead a demonstration of how community colleges can leverage innovation capacity, regional partnerships, and dynamic labor market data to identify and build sub-degree "micro-pathways" with designated credentials that employers validate. These micro-pathways will enable learners to earn at-or-above median wage salaries and stackable credit for degree attainment.

Together these institutions, with support from the Lab, will produce new pathway models, new credential signal power for industry groups to rally around, as well as learnings and insights to enable adoption, replication, and scale by other learning providers and regions. You can learn more and meet the cohort at **eddesignlab.org/project/growthenginefund**.

Get an inside look on our on-the-ground work—delivered right to your mailbox.
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