

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
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Essential Elements of High Road Training Partnerships

A LOOK AT STATE FUNDED INITIATIVES

The California Workforce Development Board (CWDB) invested in eight High Road Training Partnerships (H RTP) to model a systemic approach to industry-led workforce development that can address critical issues of equity, job quality, worker voice, industry efficiency and environmental sustainability. H RTPs are industry-based, worker-focused training partnerships that build skills for California's high road employers – firms that compete based on quality of product and public entities that strive to provide a high level of service through innovation and investment in human capital, thus generating family-supporting jobs where workers have agency and voice.

The H RTPs in this initiative demonstrate how the sector approach championed by the CWDB can be implemented. The industries they represent are diverse and include both public and private sectors, operating across all parts of the state. Each partnership looks different on the ground, but all are convened by intermediaries that engage both employer and worker representatives. While there is no “cookie cutter” method to the work itself, collectively their efforts provide valuable insights from the field for how to operate on this high road path.

The lessons learned across these industries and stages of partnership allow us to glean the key elements necessary to succeed on this high road path. This initiative has demonstrated that the following four interrelated elements are essential to operating as a successful H RTP.

1) Industry Led Problem Solving

Foundational is that the industry – including leaders representing both employers and workers - leads the problem solving for the workforce demands unique to that industry. This puts the industry and their thinking about jobs and workforce issues at the center of the project. H RTPs are not an infrastructure to build training per se, nor simply advisory capacity to training programs in the community. They provide a systematic and dynamic way to sustain work that meets what the industry itself determines is demand.

In this approach, the industry leads the effort based on their own understanding of workforce demands. H RTPs are able then to bring the demand (jobs) and the supply (workers) sides of the equation together very directly, in ways they have determined are most effective to meet the unique needs of their industry and workers.

In short, successful H RTPs start with the jobs. Their goal is the filling of actual jobs needed by actual high road employers with workers who are qualified for those specific jobs and career paths. They prioritize building particular skill sets needed for upskilling, promotion, re-training for new ways work may need to be performed, and

problem solving for future demand. This plays out especially in how industry analyses are conducted and used. The HRTPs in this initiative provide a way to rethink how such industry assessments are done, what they cover, how they gather valuable information and become the foundation for action.

When industry leaders - in both management and labor - drive industry analyses, they can best identify the actual jobs and skills they need, bring the specific information they have to the table, and include operational considerations from the start. They can also be candid about the threats and challenges they may be facing in their competitive environment.

Industry leaders can then reach out for other information—be it quantitative data, market analysis, potential policy changes, and existing workforce education and training offerings—to augment what they need to know. It can also be an on-going and iterative process, rather than a one-time or periodic report, utilizing a wide range of ways to gain continuous understanding on demand.

Starting with the jobs is different from how most training programs start with a targeted population of workers or potential workers (supply) and develop them to succeed generally in the workforce or for types of jobs that may be potentially available in the local labor market. As excellent as these education and training programs can be, they don't necessarily result in workers being placed or finding success in an actual job that meets employers' needs (demand)—let alone ensures the jobs they get are good jobs.

Re-ordering the work to start with demand and from an industry-led problem-solving foundation then also changes how success is measured. It is not how many workers participate in or complete a training program or graduate from classes. Success is how many workers are able to secure good jobs, advance their careers, and participate in their career plan while meeting employers' needs to be competitive in a changing world. Success is how well the joint efforts helped solve the problem the industry leaders agreed they needed to tackle. Success can be measured by the

H RTP’s effect on workers, firms, industry and the whole state – including the ability to impact equity, job quality and climate resiliency in our communities.

Critical Components:

- **Start with the jobs: Rethinking industry analyses**
- **Scale: Lift as much of the industry onto the high road as possible**
- **Set Industry Standards: Make the high road approach the best approach**

2) The Partnership Itself is a Priority

The best way to ensure efforts are industry driven is through an on-going infrastructure made up of the industry leaders themselves – employers and workers, and where relevant their unions – who jointly agree to explicitly collaborate not just for one project or program but in an on-going way that can continually address the challenges and opportunities in their industry. This initiative demonstrated that an essential element of an H RTP is to have a strong and durable industry partnership as a goal in and of itself. Partnership can be an over-used term, but here it means a formal relationship that is neither loose nor *ad hoc*, but forms the basis for sustained problem-solving. H RTPs in this initiative have developed numerous ways to create and sustain their partnerships over time, creating a systemic approach to the work and building an industry-led skills infrastructure.

Critical Components:

- **Composition: Include major stakeholders in the industry**
- **Commitment: Secure leadership commitment to the partnership itself**

- **Infrastructure: Develop partnership structures**
- **Culture: Build a collaborative problem-solving culture**

3) Incorporate Worker Wisdom throughout Partnership Efforts

This initiative demonstrated that industry partnerships are most successful when they integrate worker wisdom into all aspects of their efforts as an essential element of the high road approach. These H RTPs have developed innovative ways to explicitly bring worker voice into their strategies and tactics as a core value undergirding the partnership. This includes inclusion in the full continuum of partnership activities, ranging from the process of determining industry needs, to developing, implementing and reinforcing job trainings, to evaluating and monitoring success, and celebrating the culture of continuous learning and collaboration.

H RTPs have found it critical to include worker voice fully in assessments of industry needs. Doing so can better inform understandings of the changing nature of work, the skills needed for workers to succeed once on the job, and any barriers that have made it hard to meet workforce demand in the past.

When worker voice is institutionalized into the partnership at every level, partnership activities gain a broader acceptance and buy-in at the field level. This then can help drive organizational culture change as trust builds, program activities become more effective and the realities of worker experience with such programs are respected.

Critical Components:

- **Industry Demand: Include worker voice to fully understand workforce needs**
- **Infrastructure: Include worker voice to balance governance**

and decision-making

- **Program: Include worker participation in design, delivery and program evaluation**
- **Reinforcement: Include workers to reinforce trainings and support success while on the job**
- **Whole Person Supports: Include worker wisdom to turn what would otherwise be barriers into strengths**

4) Industry-Driven Education and Training Solutions

Having all of the above three essential elements in place allows those industry leaders to then jointly identify the most relevant ways to train, develop and support workers to succeed for the specific jobs and career paths they've identified. Note that the order of these is important. The development of education and training programs results from the industry partners determining the needs and then problem solving together with strong worker voice to uniquely shape what will be designed, delivered or reinforced to meet demand for the industry.

With the industry driving the solutions, the partnership can tap into education and training providers as appropriate and contextualize the learning specific to those particular jobs and workers. The H RTP can choose to utilize what is already out there, develop and deliver their own programs or use a hybrid specific to their particular workforce needs.

This essential element affects not only who will provide the education and training needed for the industry but also the how. The training methods themselves will be more nuanced and effective than ones developed outside of this industry-driven approach because they will have been identified and evaluated by the industry partners for what is needed to get ahead of changes unique to their industry. The

H RTPs in this initiative have identified a number of important factors to get right in how education and training is actually delivered.

Critical Components:

- **Demand: Determine what needs to be taught and learned**
- **Supply: Understand who the learners are**
- **Education and Training Providers: Decide if, when and how to work with community colleges and training providers**
- **Education and Training Methods: Determine methodologies appropriate for this industry/these jobs/these workers**
- **Support Success and Address “Failure”: Address operational needs, work environment and wrap around supports for learners**

Conclusion

This initiative found that when these four interrelated elements are utilized together, they provide a fundamentally different approach that upends traditional workforce development by putting the employers and workers at the center of skill delivery systems rather than the other way around. It allows the industry to then pull in the training they need, rather than the education and training partners trying to push out their efforts to potentially interested employers and employees. It allows for a sync-up of supply and demand in a systemic way to get the outcomes that high road employers and workers need.

This initiative has both captured and furthered the promising practices that can lift more industries on to the high road. **The result is not a program or a project or a curriculum, but a nimble, industry-led skills infrastructure that can negotiate the future of work in ongoing needs of employers and workers alike.**

For more information on these essential elements and their critical components, as well as promising practices developed from the field, contact the CWDB at 916-657-1440.

