

H RTP ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Worker Voice

Third in the series: *Four Essential Elements of High Road Training Partnerships*

UC Berkeley Labor Center
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Incorporating Worker Voice throughout High Road Training Partnerships (H RTPs)

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. The H RTPs participating in the CWDB's demonstration initiative 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. High road employers are firms that compete based on quality of product and public entities that provide a high level of service through innovation and investment in human capital. They generate family-supporting jobs where workers have agency and voice. This brief highlights why worker voice is essential for the successful development of H RTPs.

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 the high road.

The lessons learned across these industries highlight the essential elements necessary to succeed as a H RTP. Among the most important elements is incorporating worker wisdom throughout all aspects of the partnership. H RTPs are most successful when they bring worker voice into their strategies as a core value to support the partnership. This means workers or their representatives are involved in the full spectrum of partnership activities.

Why Incorporating Worker Wisdom is Essential

Industry partnerships are, by definition, comprised of employer and worker representatives. Incorporating worker wisdom through these partnerships is core to what it means to be industry-led. Including the wisdom that comes from workers' experiences and ideas helps ensure that any problem-solving and training solutions developed are relevant and make sense in the real world. This practice increases uptake of programs offered and deepens buy-in to the partnership itself. Just as businesses are more invested in training programs when they define the demand and shape the programs to meet their business needs, so too are workers and their representatives more invested in programs when involved in shaping efforts to ensure they meet workers' needs. Full inclusion of worker wisdom in the partnership allows H RTPs to “walk the talk” of creating quality jobs, valuing the dignity of workers, and creating leadership opportunities for worker advancement.

What is Meant by Incorporating Worker Wisdom

Incorporating worker wisdom is synonymous with integrating strong worker voice into the industry partnerships. H RTPs do not view soliciting input from workers in the industry as a one-time activity nor as an add-on to other partnership work. Rather, successful H RTPs find ways to bake it in throughout all aspects of what it means to work in partnership. They develop explicit means to include ongoing worker input in problem-solving for the industry and provide equal participation in governance and strategy setting. Worker voice is actively included in program design, implementation, and evaluation. Importantly, worker voice is also tapped for ongoing support for new workers to succeed once on the job.

Components of this Essential Element

The following components empower an H RTP to incorporate worker wisdom—an essential element to success—throughout the partnership. They apply to partnerships at all stages of development—be they newly forming, sustaining or expanding their reach—across all industries. These components produce the benefits of integrating worker wisdom across the full spectrum of what it means to operate in partnership.

- ❖ **Industry Demand**
To fully understand industry and workforce needs
- ❖ **Commitment**
To build strong support for the partnership itself
- ❖ **Infrastructure**
To have balanced governance and decision-making
- ❖ **Program**
To effectively design, deliver and evaluate programs
- ❖ **Reinforcement**
To reinforce trainings and support success while on the job
- ❖ **Whole Person Support**
To turn what would otherwise be barriers into strengths

Each of these critical components are outlined more fully below, with promising practices and examples provided in a companion brief.

Industry Demand

It is critical to include worker voice while conducting the industry needs assessments since problem solving is demand-driven in HRTPs. HRTPs “start with the jobs” (demand side) and then design the programs and solutions that support workers (supply side) to meet that demand. Having worker and/or union participation in an H RTP’s needs analysis process will provide a richer sense of what is going on in the industry. This participation better informs understandings of the changing nature of work, the skills needed for workers to succeed on the job, and the barriers that have made it hard to meet workforce demand in the past. Committing to incorporating worker voice provides perspectives not otherwise heard, often related to work environment, workplace safety, and professional opportunities or perceived lack thereof.

A number of HRTPs regularly utilize focus groups, online surveys, and formal advisory groups of workers. These activities put in practice the core value that the true experts in any industry are the people who do that work at the field level. Conducting a needs assessment at the shop floor level allows the partnership to gather important information to augment more traditional industry assessments. It is also a communications asset that allows for trusted, ongoing conversations about what is affecting employers’ ability to keep qualified workers or to grow the number of jobs. These various methods of explicitly including worker voice allows the partnership to get an honest critique of the

effectiveness of educational and training programs that can influence which strategies the partnership undertakes going forward. Notably, HRTPs have created ways for veteran workers to define job mastery and help set the standards for training programs.

Commitment

HRTPs make the partnership itself a priority, and in this way provide a long-term infrastructure for problem solving. HRTPs in the field have shown how powerful it is to include worker voice to achieve greater buy-in for the partnership itself. Commitment to working in partnership deepens at the front-line level when worker voice is intentionally included. When institutionalized into operations at every level, partnership activities gain a broader acceptance. This helps create a culture of collaborative problem-solving across the industry, as trust builds at all levels and program activities are engaged with more directly at the front-line, improving both the effectiveness and the legitimacy of these activities.

Infrastructure

HRTPs have learned it is critical to formally integrate worker voice in the leadership, strategy setting, and decision-making bodies of the partnership. The long-running partnerships in this demonstration initiative, for example, have designated an equal number of slots for workers or their representatives on their governing bodies as they have for other stakeholders. They also include formal roles for workers to drive programmatic committees. In unionized settings, these provide direct opportunities for rank and file members to take an active role in their union.

Program

HRTPs ensure that those who know the work best can help shape trainings, educational programs, and curriculum development. One of the defining characteristics of HRTPs is their commitment to including workers before, during, and after trainings are conducted. This prevents wasted efforts investing in programs not seen as relevant by workers. It also prevents programs from being delivered out of context from the day to day work environment and the needs of the workers being trained.

Even when trainings are chosen because they have proven effective elsewhere, HRTPs draw on their own workers' wisdom to round out the expertise included in the curriculum received from others.

Utilizing worker feedback loops allows H RTPs to test enthusiasm for programs and career pathways, helping identify what type of services should augment training. H RTPs have also found it invaluable to develop explicit forums such as surveys, worker committees, and participant summits to generate worker insights while trainings are underway and in the evaluation of efforts to ensure continuous improvement.

Reinforcement

Incorporating worker voice does not stop once trainings are designed and delivered. Rather, lifting worker voice continues into the reinforcement phase, as H RTPs have devised ways to formally tap into the expertise of incumbent workers to support training participants once on the job.

Apprenticeships, in particular, include this in the very design of their programs, relying on the experience and skill of more seasoned workers to support those learning on the job. The concept is applicable to other training programs that extend support to training participants past successful completion of the training to success at the job itself. After all, the goal of any training program isn't the training. It is success on the job. For workers, it is the ability to keep—and grow—in the job. For employers, it is to retain qualified and loyal employees.

Peer Mentor programs are a powerful way that some H RTPs deliver this type of support. Despite the intense preparation of classroom and field training, the first weeks or months of a new job can be the most stressful. H RTPs in this initiative have found that trained peer mentors help bridge that critical period. Mentors provide not only the technical but also the emotional and practical guidance to orient new workers into the culture and structure of the work environment. Mentors teach real-world skills by modeling core competencies of the job and instill the art of problem solving that is central to partnership culture.

The key takeaway from H RTPs with established Peer Mentor programs is that the mentor system needs to be structured and intentional. Many worksites rely on informal mentoring between co-workers but don't necessarily provide the structured support that could benefit both the trainees and their mentors. Successful Peer Mentoring programs acknowledge and support the mentors as well as the mentees, and provide another opportunity for rank and file leadership development.

The impact of a solid mentor program is experienced not only by the new workers who have a better chance of succeeding, but also by the mentors themselves. Incumbent workers who are trained mentors build camaraderie and express a renewed sense of pride

over their work. Mentorship programs also contribute to measurable improvements such as reductions in employee absenteeism and customer wait times, and improved service and workplace safety.

Another way to tap into the wisdom of incumbent workers is to set up shadowing experiences for employees interested in changing jobs or starting a training program. Some H RTPs have developed formal shadowing opportunities, or “exposure days,” where employees can better understand if a new job or career path is what they want to embark on *prior* to undertaking time-intensive training. Like Peer Mentor programs, shadowing programs provide leadership opportunities for incumbent workers and develop new champions for the partnership work.

Whole Person Supports

H RTPs are breaking new ground in developing comprehensive programs that support workers through the whole person concept. They embrace the fact that many workers who have what are normally seen as barriers to employment also bring unique life and background skills that can be invaluable on the job. They acknowledge that creating cultural alignment between the work environment and the workers is needed for good job matching, especially for those with limited work experience or high barriers to success.

This intentional focus on cultural affinity is especially important in the public sector, service sector, or other industries that interact with a wide range of customers and clients. It is also applicable to any industry that recruits workers for in-demand jobs with diverse or small applicant pools where candidates for jobs have typically been considered unqualified. Cultural affinity is defined not necessarily as demographic diversity or languages spoken—but more intangible attributes like empathy skills that make one comfortable and effective with a particular culture.

Processes and standards for recruitment, work readiness, assessment, and training curricula are adapted to make sure that lived experience is validated as a competency that people with high barriers to employment may bring to work. Incumbent workers can be tapped as peer mentors, drawing on their own lived experiences succeeding in the work world. The system of support allows for the workers—both experienced and new—to bring their full potential to the needs that the H RTP is working to fill.

High Road Training Partnerships: Participating in the CWDB Demonstration Initiative—By Industry

Health Care	
Convener	Shirley Ware Education Center (SWECE) SEIU-UHW Education Fund (The Ed Fund)
Employer Representatives	Kaiser Permanente Dignity Health Alameda Health
Worker Representatives	SEIU-UHW West, SEIU Local 1021, and worker leaders

Hospitality	
Convener	Hospitality Training Academy (HTA)
Employer Representatives	JW Marriott Los Angeles L.A. LIVE The Ritz-Carlton Los Angeles Sheraton Grand Los Angeles Courtyard by Marriott Los Angeles L.A. LIVE Residence Inn by Marriott Los Angeles L.A. LIVE Concession Companies Operating At LAX
Worker Representatives	UNITE HERE Local 11

Goods Movement	
Convener	The Port of Los Angeles (The Port of LA) (Labor Relations & Workforce Development Division)
Employer Representatives	Pacific Maritime Association (PMA)
Worker Representatives	International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Locals 13, 63, 9

Public Sector	
Convener	Worker Education and Resource Center (WERC)
Employer Representatives	LA County Chief Executive Office LA County Depts of Health Services, Parks & Recreation, Public Works, Beaches and Harbor, Fire, and Internal Services Ambulance and transport companies
Worker Representatives	SEIU Local 721 Los Angeles & Orange County Building Trades Councils

Water	
Convener	Jewish Vocational Services (JVS)
Employer Representatives	BAYWORK consortium of water agencies City and County of San Francisco
Worker Representatives	IAM Local 1414 and AFSCME

Public Transit	
Convener	California Transit Works! (CTW!)
Employer Representatives	Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority Alameda Transit District Golden Gate Transit District
Worker Representatives	Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Locals 192, 265, 1575

Distribution & Logistics	
Convener	West Oakland Job Resource Center (WOJRC)
Employer Representatives	Employers located at the Oakland Army Base (OAB)
Worker Representatives	Northern California Teamsters Apprentice Training and Education Fund, Teamsters Local 70 and business agents

Janitorial Services	
Convener	Building Skills Partnership
Employer Representatives	Over 40 Janitorial employers in California BOMA Greater Los Angeles Leadership Training and Education Fund (LTEF)
Worker Representatives	SEIU-United Service Workers West (USWW)

About This Series

Through the H RTP Initiative, the CWDB invested close to \$10 million to develop, refine, and expand the number of skill-focused, industry-based training partnerships that advance equity by linking workforce innovation to regional challenges of job quality, economic mobility and environmental sustainability. The UC Berkeley Labor Center was commissioned by the CWDB to gather key learnings from the field from the eight H RTPs that were funded in the demonstration phase of the initiative. This brief is part of a series that includes an overview and explanation of the Essential Elements of successful High Road Training Partnerships as well as promising practices and examples of those essential elements across all of the participating H RTPs. For further information on the specific projects undertaken by the H RTPs in this CWDB initiative and the impact they have had on advancing the goals of equity, climate resiliency and job quality, see the project overviews written by the UCLA Labor Center, commissioned by the CWDB to lead the evaluation process for the initiative. For more information about the H RTP initiative, see <https://cwdb.ca.gov/initiatives/high-road-training-partnerships/>.

H RTP Initiative

The California Workforce Development Board (CWDB) designed the High Road Training Partnership (H RTP) initiative to model a sector approach that can address critical issues of equity, job quality, and environmental sustainability. H RTPs are industry-based, worker-focused training partnerships that build skills for California's high road employers. These firms compete based on quality of product and service, achieved through innovation and investment in human capital, and generate family-supporting jobs where workers have agency and voice.

This brief is part of a series that includes an overview of the principles of partnership, snapshot profiles of each of the H RTPs participating in the initiative, an overview and explanation of the Essential Elements of successful High Road Training Partnerships, as well as promising practices and examples of those essential elements across all of the participating H RTPs.

For more information on the initiative and other briefs in this series, see <https://cwdb.ca.gov/initiatives/high-road-training-partnerships/>

Essential Elements of an H RTP

1) Industry-Led Problem Solving

Foundational is that the industry leads the problem solving for the workforce demands unique to that industry. Industry includes both employers and workers or their representatives.

2) Partnership Itself is a Priority

Industry leaders conduct their problem solving through a dedicated and sustained partnership.

3) Worker Voice

Worker wisdom is explicitly incorporated throughout all aspects of the partnership.

4) Industry-Driven Training Solutions

The development, delivery, and reinforcement of education and training programs derive from what industry partners decide is needed.
