

H RTP ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Industry-Led Problem Solving

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

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This brief focuses on the essential element of having the industry lead the problem solving for the workforce demands unique to that industry. It describes what is meant by being industry led, why this is essential, and what the critical components of operating in this manner are. A separate companion brief provides more detail on promising practices for this essential element, with examples from the field.

Why Industry-Led Problem Solving is Essential

When an H RTP sets out to lead efforts to jointly solve problems facing its industry, it can affect far more than training programs per se: It can affect their whole industry's ability to compete and provide high-quality jobs and career paths. Starting with the jobs—the demand side of what is needed in their particular industry—is foundational. Understanding the actual jobs and skills that are needed is key: all other programmatic decisions follow naturally from this. Once the demand for actual jobs is known, it forms the basis for determining:

- The skills and work experiences needed for those jobs.
- What kinds of training already exists and what needs to be created for workers to acquire those particular skills and experiences.
- The best methods to deliver that training to those workers that addresses real-world content, context, and learners.

- The critical supports workers may need not only to get the jobs but also to succeed—and be able to advance—once they have them.
- Ways for workers to continually refresh their skills and problem-solving abilities so they are prepared for challenges in the future for that industry.

Responding to demand fundamentally changes training; it goes from something that's done because it has the potential to increase participants' chances of getting a job to something that is designed explicitly to help participants get and keep identified and available jobs. This explicit focus on the jobs and particular skills needed in the industry helps not only the workers who secure good jobs but also the employers who can count on getting what they need to succeed in a competitive and changing environment.

When industry leaders, in both management and labor, drive the problem solving, they can 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, or potential policy changes—to augment their knowledge and understanding. Such industry analysis can be an ongoing process, rather than a one-off or periodic report, utilizing a wide range of strategies to gain continuous understanding of demand.

With this proactive approach, employers and their worker representatives will be invested in seeing the training programs succeed because they understand how the trainings are designed to meet the needs they themselves identified. The incentive to participate is layered in the process from the beginning.

Further, because these are industry partnerships, HRTPs also seek to bring their efforts to scale and set industry standards. Striving for scale lifts more of the industry on to the high road path and setting the standards for how they achieve results ensures that training and education programs are most effective.

What is Meant by Being Industry Led?

HRTPs are industry-led problem-solving spaces, an infrastructure where industry leaders – employers and workers --work together to identify shared problems and build shared solutions to those problems. While industry leaders and their thinking about jobs and workforce issues are at the center of the project, this is not an infrastructure to build training per se. Nor is it simply advisory capacity to standing training programs in the community. This is dynamic and sustained industry-driven work to meet industry

demand. It stands in contrast to the standard workforce development approach, where workforce systems, educational institutions, or training providers undertake the process of determining what is needed and then reach out to industry leaders to collect input. Here, the industry leads the effort.

HRTPs 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 industry-leading jobs, but also train for new ways work may need to be performed, and in this way, problem solve for future demand as well.

Starting with the jobs contrasts to 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 potentially be 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.

The workforce systems that do strive to understand the demand side on behalf of the industry often undertake industry assessments based on quantitative labor market data and general employer and other stakeholder input. This can be helpful in pointing a training program and its participants in the right general direction, but it is neither explicitly nor sufficiently linked to available jobs or career paths with actual employers.

HRTPs bring the demand (jobs) and the supply (workers) sides of the equation together very directly and systematically. They focus on training, but are not conceptualizing training as the goal in and of itself. Rather, they focus their efforts on the filling of good jobs and specific skills that are or will be needed in their industry, with workers prepared to succeed in those positions.

This model changes the way workforce development success is measured. Success is not how many workers participate in or complete a training program or graduate with college degrees. Instead, success is how many workers can secure good jobs and advance their careers while meeting employers' needs to be competitive in a changing world. Success can be measured by the HRTPs' effect on workers, firms, and the whole economy—including the impact on equity, job quality, and climate resiliency in our communities.

Critical Components

The following components enable an H RTP to lead the problem solving for their industry:

- ❖ **Start with the Jobs**
The industry partnership determines demand and leads industry assessments
- ❖ **Strive for Scale**
Lift as much of the industry on to the high road as possible
- ❖ **Set Industry Standards**
Make the high-road approach the best approach

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

START WITH THE JOBS: The industry partnership determines demand and leads industry assessments

H RTPs have found it critical to re-think more traditional approaches to assessing demand and refine the ways to conduct industry analyses to get needed information. In their role as sector navigators, a number of H RTP intermediaries have been commissioned over the years by local workforce development boards to conduct assessments for their respective sectors. Other H RTPs have undertaken such studies on their own, using consultants or outside organizations to do industry research. Each of them has since built upon those initial analyses, providing lessons from the field as to what information is critical to consider and how to gather it. It is important to consider the following:

Rethinking traditional industry analyses:

- **Scope of business engagement**
While businesses are often consulted in traditional industry analyses, their engagement usually involves responding to labor market data and industry trends, rather than providing their own specific workforce information. Employers may be reluctant to share particular information outside of a process in which they have agreed to work together with potential competitors. They may be unsure how relevant their participation is to meeting their particular workforce needs if the assessment is too generic. And they may ignore the recommendations of such studies if these promote public programs that the employers have found in the past to be insufficiently responsive to their business needs for customization, flexibility, or speed.

- **Operational implications**

Traditional assessments cannot adequately capture operational implications that can only be addressed at the employer/worksites level, such as recommendations for programs requiring on-the-job training, supervision, release time, and “backfill” to keep operations going during trainings and budget approvals from employers. Each of these factors can affect actual demand and especially an industry’s ability to scale efforts.

- **Job preparedness**

Traditional industry analyses typically include information on minimum education requirements needed for key jobs, but this may be only one piece of what employers are looking for in order to fill in-demand jobs. They may also need to ensure employees are prepared for the particular work environment, have particular skills that can only be learned through experience, or have a cultural affinity with clients/customers that go beyond education and need to be included in the assessment of industry demand.

- **Practical availability of education and training offerings**

Traditional assessments typically include information about available education and training offerings but may not reflect the practical realities of such programs if there are significant logistical and financial challenges for workers to attend. Uptake of such offerings can be limited if they conflict with work schedules, involve long commutes, or don’t provide the ability to “earn while you learn.” The options listed in any inventory of educational offerings may fall short of meeting the industry demand needed to prepare the workforce in their particular areas.

Traditional industry workforce analyses can provide foundational information and point partners in the general direction to be responsive to a particular industry’s needs. Yet to be more specific and actionable, HRTPs have found it critical that industry analyses include a broader set of information, deploy a range of ways to gather and capitalize on information and knowledge from the industry itself, and use the analysis in ways that guarantee it does not “sit on the shelf.” What follows is an overview of the types of information to be included, how to gather it, and how to use to.

Determining what information is needed to conduct an industry-led analysis:

- **Industry trends**

This should go beyond general market trends to include employer-specific information covering not only gaps between expected supply and demand, but also what may be driving the gaps in current versus future workforce needs, such as demographics and incumbent retirement patterns for critical job openings. It

should generate understanding of the key challenges facing the industry for the future, anticipating major disruptors—whether from technology or new ways competitors are operating—as well as new opportunities that may come from policy or legal requirements.

- **Particular goals of the H RTP partners**

By definition, H RTPs are solving for high-quality jobs. Yet within that goal they may have specific priorities, and information to help them meet those goals should be intentionally gathered. Examples may be jointly determined goals to hire workers from the local community, increase workplace safety, create a more representative workforce, or contribute to climate resiliency in the community.

- **Needed skills and competencies**

Knowing which jobs are in demand without knowing the skills required to perform those particular jobs inhibits the ability to maximize training efficacy. A meaningful industry analysis will include detailing the skills needed for workers to succeed. Some skills may be identified as necessary across a range of occupations in an industry and can then be developed for all.

- **Enabling workers to succeed once on the job**

Investigate how workers can retain jobs once they are determined to be qualified to fill them. This allows the partnership to identify the program supports necessary for long-term success. It is especially important if the duties or activities may be changing in the future as the work changes.

- **Barriers to fulfilling demand**

Assess the barriers that have kept the most in-demand jobs in that industry from being filled or from getting sufficiently qualified workers to meet the need. In-depth industry-led analyses may examine training pipeline challenges, operational challenges, and barriers that workers themselves identify for not applying for certain jobs or participating in available training programs.

- **Connecting supply and demand**

Based on the assessment of jobs and skills needed, compile an inventory of what already exists in the WFD world to meet the need. Determine the desired outcomes, then evaluate how well these programs are actually working. Next, assess what aspects of the training are working or can be modified to meet the identified needs, addressing any unique barriers for the learners in this industry. This result-oriented analysis helps determine how best to meet the identified training needs and address the barriers to learning and employment. Because these industry analyses are being driven by what the industry needs, rather than by metrics developed by the workforce development and education world, the specificity of the data becomes an asset.

Gathering valuable information:

The range of intelligence gathering processes required for such an analysis results in the compilation of a rich set of data for industry partners to act upon. HRTPs have used numerous strategies and methods to acquire this robust information:

- **Be comprehensive**
Make it truly an industry-led analysis. Include multiple employers and, if union represented, multiple unions. When including multiple entities, ensure participation from both large and small players so the whole industry is represented. If one large employer covers the entirety or majority of its industry, make sure to include multiple departments or functions of that employer to best capture total job needs and career pathways.
- **Deepen the role of intermediaries**
Each of the HRTPs in this initiative includes an intermediary organization that brings together industry leaders, including management and worker representatives. These intermediary organizations often also serve as the sector intermediary for public workforce development systems.

When industry leads the quest to understand demand, the role of the intermediary organization changes to fit with this overall approach to the work. The intermediary's work goes beyond sector research or simply making recommendations. Intermediaries can help facilitate the implementation of recommendations directly with those employers and worker representatives in their H RTP, thereby helping ensure the training is relevant to the jobs the workers will fill.

- **On the ground input**
Typically, industry analyses use multiple means to gather intelligence. Ways to collect "on the ground" information include stakeholder forums and roundtables; individual interviews of key employer, union, and community leaders; and surveys and questionnaires.
- **Tap into union knowledge**
Union networks are essential partners in collecting best practices to build strong HRTPs. And HRTPs are developing and using tools to tap into union knowledge. As one example, through technical assistance from the initiative, WORJC used an Industry Needs Assessment tool developed by the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership to gather knowledge from key union representatives about the industries they serve. Since most union representatives service several companies under contract in a specific area for a particular industry, they are a key source

of knowledge of trends and developments within the regional sector. The tool is a questionnaire meant to be administered not as a general survey but rather as a communication asset that allows for trusted, ongoing conversations about what is impacting employers' ability to keep and grow jobs.

- **Utilize industry networks**

Tapping into industry consortia and networks that can provide access to industry players or targeted populations is also a powerful way to ground the understanding of demand in industry needs.

- **Review jobs for skills needed**

To get as specific as possible within the industry, HRTPs have found ways to dive into the details of job descriptions themselves. For example, The Ed Fund has created a "Job Bank"—a multi-employer library of the descriptions of critical jobs across all the employers in the partnership. It allows The Ed Fund as intermediary to aggregate the skills that would be helpful to train for. Similarly, with technical assistance from the California Federation of Labor, JVS has been able to research all of the publicly posted position descriptions for critical jobs in the water industry to identify the qualifications and requirements.

How to use the Assessment:

The reason to conduct an industry analysis is so it can be used in strategy setting and ongoing problem solving by the parties in the partnership. To meet that goal, any industry assessment should:

- **Provide actionable recommendations**

Truly valuable industry assessments provide specific recommendations for what, why, and how to prioritize particular jobs for particular trainings and support. They should be the foundation for an action plan that leaders can embrace with resources and commitments—rather than sit on the shelf as general guidance without a life beyond it. Each of the industry assessments referenced in this brief have specific recommendations which were, in most cases, agreed upon by the partners as part of the process, which deepens the buy-in for using the findings.

- **Include the end user in the design**

Identify the partnership body—whether the governing board or an advisory committee or a joint training design work group—that will use the findings of the report and implement the recommendations. Include them in the development of the assessment itself so as to ensure it meets the needs of those who will use the work.

- **Update findings a regular basis**

The assessment should never be a one-time thing but rather should be a living document that gets refreshed regularly either as a whole or in its component parts. For example, the Industry Needs Assessment is a tool for ongoing union and worker input that can—and should—be iterated often. Advisory or other committees and consortia can provide new information as they do their regular work.

STRIVE FOR SCALE: Lift as much of the industry on to the high road as possible

To bring as much of the industry on to the high road as possible and make that approach the norm, HRTPs are set on bringing their efforts to scale to achieve maximum impact. That means engaging more employers, unions, number of jobs, and workers.

- **Assume expansion takes different forms**

HRTPs have found it is crucial to give significant strategic consideration to how best to expand their partnerships to new geographies, more unions, more employers, and more job pathways. Even when expansion is within the same industry or same umbrella union, it is not safe to assume the environments are the same and are therefore ripe for expansion. The personalities, cultures, and past practices in a certain location, local union, or business are likely to vary and require thoughtful attention.

- **Identify incentives for more industry leaders to participate**

More employers and unions may be willing to participate in an industry-wide approach if they see how it helps them meet regulatory or legal requirements, achieve operational improvements and better customer satisfaction, or gain a competitive advantage or more high-quality jobs and less turnover.

- **Test new efforts by planning beyond pilots**

Successful HRTPs commit to continuous learning and recommend starting with pilots to test new efforts and come to joint assessments of effectiveness. Yet even when starting with pilots, HRTPs in this initiative have found it important to design such pilots to inform state-and-industry-wide practices. Then, the pilot becomes not just a test of an activity at a single time and place, but a strategic tool to address broader industry needs, changes, and opportunities.

- **Undertake thoughtful assessments of new approaches**

Most HRTPs write up or come together to review what they learned from one approach or pilot before they expand it to others so that they avoid repeating mistakes and instead leverage what worked well.

SET INDUSTRY STANDARDS: Make the High Road Approach the Best Approach

Setting and consistently meeting industry standards helps to ensure consistency across the industry and to establish the highest goals for workforce training and education. Striving for standards is a critical component of H RTP success and it applies not only to what programs are provided but to how the trainings are delivered as well.

- **Set industry standards for programs**

The H RTPs in this initiative use a range of approaches to raise up the industry as a whole. For example, as a requirement to partake in the program being created by HTA for hotel room attendants to sign up for additional shifts with participating hotels, workers will participate in an HTA-administered Environmental Health and Safety, Customer Service, and Hotel Logistics course. This program, which is similar to one currently used for banquet servers and is akin to hiring/placement systems used by the skilled trades in construction, is groundbreaking for the hospitality industry.

Other H RTPs are also setting standards that raise up their whole industry. In the building services industry, BSP's impressive Green Janitor Education Program has been proven so effective that utilizing it allows a building to secure a "point" under the rigorous LEED standards, and provides the most inexpensive and easiest way to implement green practices. In health care, The Ed Fund has been working with HCAP as part of its nationwide industry approach to set standards for health care apprentices. It will allow employers to set consistent expectations and professionalize key jobs, such as medical assistant, medical coder, and radiation and surgery technician. In the public sector, WERC's efforts with the County of LA to develop, place and support workers with high barriers to employment in public sector jobs are highlighting the need to institutionalize the standards being developed into County human resources targeted hiring policies.

- **Set the standard for delivery of training and supports**

H RTPs are committed to learning what teaching and learning strategies are most effective and strive to set consistent standards to execute those practices. For example, HTA has piloted and refined the Integrated Basic Education Skills and Training (I-BEST) model and the Integrated Education Training (IET) mode of team teaching to pair ESL with the instruction of technical and soft skills. This has led to success in training, placement, and retention. As another example, CTW! has been sharing effective apprenticeship and mentoring methods across the multiple labor management partnerships that participate in their public transit consortium, setting the standard for incorporating worker voice and partnership values for results.

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.
