

Workforce & IET Success Through Strategic Partnerships

Building Employer-Aligned Systems That Drive
Enrollment, MSGs & Credentials



Denise K. Esslinger
Professional Development Consultant
denisekaye77@gmail.com



About Me

- ❖ Wife for 25 Years
- ❖ Mother of Two Sons
- ❖ 25-year Career in Education
- ❖ 6 years as an Adult Education Administrator
- ❖ Curriculum Developer for the Largest Program in Indiana
- ❖ President of IAACE
- ❖ 2025-2026 COABE SAAEF Fellow
- ❖ State and National Presenter



Why This Matters Now

- ❖ Workforce Shortages Continue Across Sectors
- ❖ Employers Demand Job-Ready Skills
- ❖ Funding Requires Measurable Outcomes
- ❖ IET Expectations Continue to Grow



Federal Priorities

- ❖ Transform the workforce system through industry-driven training, system integration, accountability, and innovation
- ❖ Strong alignment expected between WIOA Title II, Perkins-CTE, and emerging initiatives like Workforce Pell
- ❖ **Performance targets should emphasize wage growth and employment outcomes**
- ❖ Greater collaboration at the state level with a focus on employer-driven program design

Strategic Recommendations

- ❖ Prioritize the following: Career Pathways, Skilled Trades, and High-Demand Positions
- ❖ **Build IET programs around employer-defined priorities**
- ❖ Leverage braided funding to support IET, PRAP, and Work-Based Learning
- ❖ Position AE as an on-ramp to CTE, workforce, and postsecondary credentials
- ❖ AE/CTE collaboration is a growing priority
- ❖ Data capacity and reporting alignment are becoming prerequisites

Today's Session Outcomes

- ❖ Identify Core Elements of Effective Employer Partnerships
- ❖ Apply Collaborative Enrollment Strategies Aligned to Employer Needs
- ❖ Connect MSGs, Curriculum, and Credentials to Workforce Outcomes
- ❖ Leave with Practical Tools Adaptable to Your Program



Reflection Share







What's your biggest challenge when working with employers – or getting started?

The Shift We Must Make

From Transactional Training
→to Strategic Partnership Systems

Strong Partnerships Are:

-  Intentional
-  Structured
-  Mutually Beneficial
-  Data-Informed



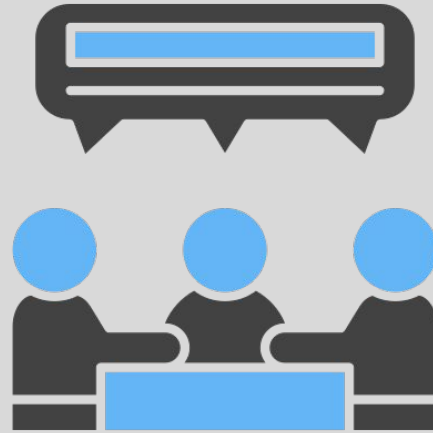


Core Elements of Effective Employer Partnerships

- ❖ Clear Program Impact Statement
- ❖ Defined Roles and Responsibilities
- ❖ Consistent Communication
- ❖ Shared Metrics of Success
- ❖ Credential Alignment

Moving From Concept to Conversation

Strategic partnerships begin with strategic conversations.





Common Pitfalls

- ❖ Handshake Agreements without Documentation
- ❖ Training Not Tied to Advancement
- ❖ One-Way Communication
- ❖ No Shared Accountability





Discussion



*Which strengths do you
already have?*

Which are missing?

Enrollment: Partnership Strategy



Employers Actively Help Recruit Students



Scheduling Reduces Barriers



Instruction is Contextualized



Onboarding Connects to Employer Expectations

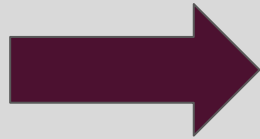


Learners See Advancement Pathways

Employer-Connected Enrollment System



Strong partnerships create shared responsibilities for learner success.



**Clear
Referral
Process**



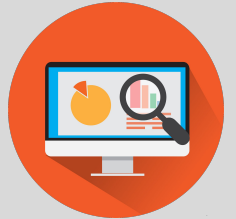
**Coordinated
Onboarding**



**Regular
Progress
Updates**



**Defined
Points of
Contact**



**Transparent
Data
Tracking**



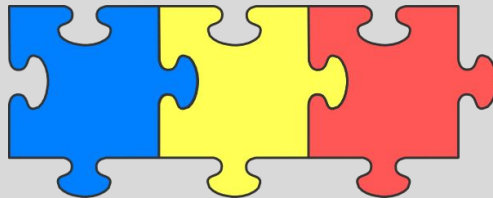
Stop Separating Instruction from Outcomes



Too often:

- ❖ Adult Education → Focuses on MSGs
- ❖ Workforce Team → Focuses on Workforce Preparation and Workforce Training
- ❖ Employer → Focuses on Certification(s)

Strategic Programs → Align All Three



Aligning MSGs to Workforce

Examples of MSG Alignment:

- ❖ Educational Functioning Level Gains
- ❖ Credential Attainment
- ❖ Skill Progression



How does this align with employer expectations?

Instructional Tools that Drive Workforce-Aligned Skill Gains

Using Structured Resources to Intentionally Support MSGs and Advancement Aligned to:

- ❖ Educational Functioning Level Gains
- ❖ Employer Competencies
- ❖ Credential Readiness
- ❖ Advancement Pathways

ENGEN



Employer-Aligned Milestones

How would an employer know that a employee is ready for the next step?

- Supervisor Skill Sign-Off
- Safety Certification Completion
- Demonstrated Workplace Communication
- Completion of Training Modules





Defining a Quality IET



Step 1 → Sort

In your group, categorize the IET cards:

- ❖ Adult Education
- ❖ Workforce Preparation
- ❖ Workforce Training
- ❖ Integration
- ❖ Not IET

Step 2 → Discussion

- ❖ Did other groups sort the cards differently?
- ❖ Which cards sparked the most debate?
- ❖ Which examples clearly demonstrate true integration?
- ❖ Which cards might represent clear misunderstandings of IET?

Strengthening Partnerships to Lead to IET Certifications

Strong IET Models Align:



Adult Education



IET Instruction



Certification Provider




Employer Validation

*Where do
certifications already
fit in your current
partnerships?*

Key Takeaways

- ❖ Partnerships Must Be Intentional
- ❖ Enrollment, Instruction, and Credentials Must Align
- ❖ MSGs Can Be Employer-Validated Milestones
- ❖ Instructional Resources Must Support Advancement
- ❖ Data Strengthens Sustainability





*What is one
partnership action
you will take in the
next 60 days?*

“Every strategic partnership expands the path forward for the learners we serve.”

**Thank
You!**

