Key characteristics of productive partnerships

Long term relationships with industry partners can give presidents insight into where jobs will be for their students in the future. In his book, "What Excellent Community Colleges Do," Josh Wyner suggests that "to prepare a skilled workforce, colleges need to understand whether their programs are aligned with labor market needs." With this in mind, the college president's workforce strategy should include identifying how the college can help students be attractive job candidates to local industries.

Community colleges and businesses are different types of institutions, often with different aims, but that does not need to be an obstacle to developing a shared purpose and mutual understanding. Indeed, building and maintaining strong relationships with local industries has a long-run benefit for colleges: college leaders can develop an in-depth understanding of the local employment environment. This relationship can help inform college leaders' decisions, helping them develop programs at the college targeted at providing students with an education that prepares them to enter the workforce.

What are helpful mindsets for building these relationships?

- Chris Lowery, senior vice president for Workforce Alignment at Ivy Tech Community College, explains that the campus president plays a vital role in successful workforce development strategies, likening the campus president to a quarterback. From his perspective, consistent interaction between the campus president and community leaders, whether business leaders, school superintendents, or mayors, is essential for the campus president to understand a community and to help build positive change in that community.

- Research supports this perspective. **Levin et al. (2010)** find that along with a strong commitment to funding, college leaders should build strong relationships with the community to sustain successful programs: "solid connections to local communities and a strong internal commitment to funding are essential to the life of a program."

- When developing relationships, college leaders should keep in mind the **perspective of potential business partners**: "Businesses are accustomed to making decisions and acting on them—now. Whereas a for-profit business's prime audience is its stakeholders, the community college has multiple constituencies, both internal and external. The main way that this concern was dealt with was by both sides staying in constant dialogue."

What are characteristics of productive relationships with industry partners?

- Research suggests that college leaders can create **stronger, more effective programs** through long-term relationships with local industry partners: "The college program with promising practices, often as a result of faculty behaviors, develops and maintains relationships with local communities, industries, institutions, and agencies."

- These relationships can give presidents insight into where jobs will be for their students in the future. In his book, "**What Excellent Community Colleges Do**," Josh Wyner suggests that "to prepare a skilled workforce, colleges need to understand whether their programs are aligned with labor market needs" (p. 6). With this in mind, the college president's workforce strategy should include identifying how the college can help students be attractive job candidates to local industries. According to Wyner, college leaders should use data and build relationships with local industry leaders to understand the market: "[e]ffective community college leaders don't just look at the data; they talk about where the economy might be headed with the people who know best: employers…By examining data and maintaining strong relationships with employers, they understand what students need to get jobs. They act swiftly to do whatever is needed—from program design to resource allocation—to align their programs accordingly" (p. 97-98). Wyner also suggests that colleges can work toward this goal by partnering with state systems who can help them understand how to effectively use data from the U.S. Department of Labor (p. 96).

- In addition, Levin et al. identify **connections** between colleges and local industries as one of the pillars of successful workforce programs, in part because this connection provides colleges (and their students) with a source of industry expertise.Just as in any honest relationship, improvement comes through the mutual exchange of constructive criticism.

- As Wyner notes, relationships between colleges and industry are particularly valuable when they allow for the mutual exchange of constructive criticism. Indeed, there is a clear consensus among experts: it is vitally important to keep the lines of communication open between college and industry leaders.

- See **Practical Steps for Building Relationships between Colleges and Industries** for more details.

- See **Creating a Navigator for Industry Partners** for details on how a liaison can help in this regard.

> **"** When developing relationships, college leaders should keep in mind the perspective of potential business partners: "Businesses are accustomed to making decisions and acting on them—now. Whereas a for-profit business's prime audience is its stakeholders, the community college has multiple constituencies, both internal and external. The main way that this concern was dealt with was by both sides staying in **constant dialogue**."

Further Reading

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