

Economic and Workforce Development Ecosystem Guide

This guide, which is a supplement to the Advanced Manufacturing Apprenticeship Program (AMAP) Case Study, highlights the learnings specific to economic development organizations and public workforce entities. Read the case study for more context on the story, this partnership model, and lessons learned.

These guidelines are designed for stakeholders that advance economic and workforce development in a specific region to support cross-sector collaboration on inclusive workforce development, as part of their broader business attraction strategy. This organization can be a public-private partnership, a public entity, or nonprofit organization, and industry-specific expertise is ideal.

“If you’re going to be an economic development organization, you have to be able to bridge industry and community interests by identifying points of alignment and common interest.”

JOSH METZ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND COFOUNDER, MONTEREY BAY DART

Key Capabilities

We recommend that economic and workforce development organizations prioritize the following capabilities and follow the implementation guidance to fully realize their potential for inclusive economic development.

- At least one or two **paid, full-time staff** to support relationship development with private and nonprofit sectors, identify potential partnerships, and facilitate collaboration
- **Relationships** with companies in your industry of focus, including a deep understanding of business priorities, industry trends, and workforce needs
- Trusting relationships, directly or indirectly through an intermediary, with **local community based organizations (CBOs) and community organizers** who have a deep understanding of community skills and needs
- Ability to **bridge the gap between private and nonprofit sectors, including CBOs**, including navigating the many actors in each sector, translating opportunities across sector-specific jargon, and facilitating relationship and trust building
- **Facilitative capacity** to support cross-sector groups in identifying mutually beneficial opportunities to support the success of high-tech industries and secure high-quality jobs for local residents

Implementation Guidance

- 1. Develop expertise in a specific industry** that has high growth potential through hiring new talent or hiring talent from the community. This can also mean training up existing staff, or contracting experts.
- 2. Cultivate relationships with businesses** who operate in your region or may be interested in operating in your region, as well as with CBOs who serve the major demographic groups in your region.
- 3. Communicate your position as a bridge** between private, nonprofit, and education sectors in service of inclusive regional economic development. Make clear the link between business retention, workforce development needs, economic diversification, and community-driven priorities of economic mobility.
- 4. Build an inclusive table for businesses to build relationships with CBOS** who represent the interests, needs, and assets of local communities, ensuring representation across demographics.
 - a.** Leverage existing, complementary efforts, like DART did with the SIEDI group, to efficiently connect organizations who are already thinking about economic and workforce development. This effort could be accomplished through a coalition, a group assembled by a local community foundation, or another organization facilitating CBO networks. For example, DART invited a representative from Mujeres en Acción, a SIEDI participant, to their annual symposium.
 - b.** Help employers translate their job and training opportunities in a way that is clear and accessible to the local community.
 - c.** Help CBOs and other workforce organizations understand the relevant job opportunities and what kinds of skills employers need in their workforce.
- 5. Support action.** Encourage participating employers and CBOs to pilot something together and learn in action. Oftentimes these tables are not action oriented and build relationships with no clear purpose, but for AMAP, they got stronger by engaging in the pilot together and learning.

Impact Potential

- **Incentivize industry development** by demonstrating the presence of a willing and talented workforce that can be upskilled efficiently.
- **Building cross-sector ecosystem capacity** to collaborate on inclusive economic development through industry-specific workforce development efforts.
- **Identify policymakers and other statewide stakeholders** who can advocate for supportive policies, tax incentives, and resources for inclusive economic development (e.g., apprenticeship funding, zoning laws, infrastructure development).
- **Connect local workforce development efforts to strategic, timely national conversations** on climate-friendly industry development, skills-based talent, and local hiring within federally funded initiatives such as the CHIPS Act to secure additional support and visibility.

“You can improve the wellbeing of the worker, which improves the community, the schools, the safety. This investment makes business sense because it affects their ability to recruit top to bottom, and it’s also valuable for the government and economy in terms of business attraction.”

JACOB MARTINEZ, FOUNDER AND CEO, DIGITAL NEST

PUBLIC WORKFORCE SYSTEM INSIGHTS

- **Public funding opportunities are not designed to support employer-led training efforts** due to long timelines and significant requirements. Philanthropy can help cover this gap, but reducing barriers to supporting time-sensitive opportunities to upskill local workers for high-quality jobs is also important.
- **Community colleges are an important partner in community-driven job training programs** like AMAP. Registering apprenticeships through the U.S. Department of Labor, which may not be an option from the outset but should be put in motion as soon as possible, aids collaboration between employers, community colleges, and public workforce systems.