**OVERVIEW**

A Sector Partnership is a consortium of employers in one critical industry that come together, convened by an intermediary, to discuss that industry’s shared competitiveness, including identifying common, persistent workforce challenges. No two partnerships are alike, and ideally each region has multiple sector partnerships operating at once, each focused on a different industry.

**WHY SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS?**

Sector partnerships serve two purposes: 1) to align education, training, workforce and economic development in the region to the needs of employers in that sector; and 2) to build long-term career opportunities within the sector for a range of jobseekers and workers. Sector partnerships exist in almost every industry and region of the country, and are gaining ground as the way to do business in the world of workforce, education and economic development. Best-in-class sector partnerships are partnerships that are long-term, employer-led and evolve with the changing needs of the target industry.

While there is no one path to developing a sector partnership, the process typically involves the following general steps:

1. Selection of an industry sector (typically one that is growing and with higher-wage occupations)
2. Identification of an organizing or convening intermediary (e.g. workforce investment board, community college, chamber of commerce, community based organization, or others)
3. Engagement of employers, including two or three “lead champions” who can help recruit their peers to the table
4. Identification and validation of industry skill shortages and the creation of relevant curricula and workforce services. Other non-workforce activities and solutions of importance to employers may be addressed as well
5. Evaluation of the sector partnership’s activities, continuous improvement, and financial sustainability

**While not all successful sector strategies are led by the workforce system as the intermediary, all successful sector strategies include a high-performing, highly-engaged workforce system partner as a “leading” contributor, partner, or principle intermediary.**

**INTRODUCTION TO THE *HIGH-PERFORMING SECTOR-FOCUSED WORKFORCE ORGANIZATION***

A high-performing *sector-focused workforce organization* is one where the principles of sector strategies (supporting industry, aligning resources and programs across workforce systems, and facilitating career mobility for jobseekers and workers) are integrated into and across the organization. Strong industry sector partnership strategies become, thereby, a long-term “way of doing business.”

**SELF-ASSESSMENT (ARE YOU READY TO BE A HIGH-PERFORMING SECTOR-FOCUSED ORGANIZATION?)**

The following 20-question self-assessment measures how *ready* an organization (a state) is to be this kind of high-performing sector-focused organization (state). The assessment is organized along five broad component areas:

* **Organizational Capacity**: *Does your organization have the personnel, policies, measures, and resources in place to support sector strategy outcomes?*
* **Data-Informed Decision Making**: *Are your target sectors and identified industry workforce needs data-informed based on Labor Market Information (LMI), on-the-ground information and employer validation?*
* **Service Design & Alignment**: *Is your organization positioned to prepare a qualified, skilled workforce by facilitating the delivery of high-quality services and programs aligned to sector needs?*
* **Partnerships**: *Is your organization positioned to facilitate a shared sector strategy agenda across employers and sector partners?*
* **Sustainability & Continuous Improvement:** *Is your organization able to measure sector partnership outcomes and use that information to drive future performance? Is there financial support to sustain the partnership?*

The component areas should be viewed as aspirational. They represent the competencies that an organization (state) that is interested in launching or participating in sector partnerships should seek to attain. It is rare that an organization (a state) would excel in all areas.

It is recommended that multiple individuals from the same organization take the assessment and come together to discuss findings. Upon completion of the assessment, consider the following questions:

* What areas represent our strengths? Why?
* What areas represent learning opportunities?
* Is there important sector strategy-related work that we are not doing? If so, what?
* Do we have internal disagreements within our organization about our self-assessment scoring? What can we learn from the different perspectives?
* What are our priorities for the next year?

**Before taking the assessment please answer the following questions:**

* Do you currently have any industry-targeted initiatives that you feel are “*almost a sector partnership but not quite”?*
* If Yes: What do you think could be added or strengthened to move it into an active sector partnership, as defined in the Overview and Why a Sector Partnership sections above?
* Do you currently have any active sector partnerships?
* If Yes: What active sector partnerships do you have? What industries are you targeting?

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| **CAPABILITIES OF A HIGH-PERFORMING SECTOR-FOCUSED WORKFORCE ORGANIZATION** | **IF YOU THINK YOUR ORGANIZATION RATES AS A “5” YOU CONSIDER IT TO HAVE THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS** | **RATING (circle one)**  1=Not at all  2=Making progress but long way to go  3=Have some of this, sometimes  4=Yes, in place now  5=Not only in place, but we’re excelling here |
| **ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY**  *Does your organization have the personnel, policies, measures, and resources in place to support sector strategy outcomes?* | | |
| **1. Institutional *culture* that supports industry sector partnerships** | * Leadership (executives, board) that understands the importance of and *prioritizes* industry relationships for the purposes of aligning education/training to industry needs * Strategic plan/mission that emphasizes the organization’s role in driving job-driven industry growth * The agility and flexibility to make changes to programs and services as new target industry workforce and other needs become available * Staff members, regardless of position, who understand their role and are accountable for serving industry needs * Staff who consider the workforce system’s success in regional sector as essential to meeting any program performance measures * Leadership and staff that recognize the importance of listening to and implementing actions developed by employers | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **2. Organizational structure that serves industries and workforces within a sector strategy framework** | * Staff with an explicit role, not only to foster business relationships, but to examine, across businesses, broader industry workforce trends * The organization’s board includes private sector representatives that reflects target industry mix * Administrative structure/policy supports sector partnerships (e.g. sector partnerships are explicitly built into organization’s policy goals as the way to engage with target industries; or oversight and coordination of a sector partnership is part of an existing committee reporting to the organization’s Board or executive committee) | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **3. Staff that are knowledgeable about current target industries and have opportunities to hone knowledge as targets change** | * Staff that have ample opportunities to attend targeted industry-related professional development events for the purposes of staying fresh on technologies, growth trends, and workforce needs * Staff that are encouraged to share industry knowledge/ learnings with others throughout the system to maximize reach * Selected staffs have existing professional relationships with a number of employers within the industry | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **4. Viewed by partners as a credible and neutral facilitator responsible for the workforce system as a whole** | * Viewed by all partners as a neutral and informed party with ability to create a shared vision of sector strategies and facilitate outcomes | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **DATA-INFORMED DECISION MAKING**  *Are your target sectors and identified industry workforce needs data-informed based on LMI, on-the-ground information and employer validation?* | | |
| **5. Understanding of your region’s most important industry sector(s) through use of rigorous labor market data and workforce planning information** | * Used mix of economic, labor market, and industry data to identify regional industries that are targeted because they are concentrated, growing, and offer family-sustaining wages * Within the target industry(ies), use mix of LMI sources to determine baseline of most promising occupations and workforce needs * Data used represents *regional* labor market (vs. only a WIB’s service area) * Formal process in place to periodically review data and make adjustments | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **6. Process in place to identify priority areas for sector partnership action and to translate LMI and employer data into skill and program gaps** | * Formal and continuous process to work with employers to review LMI data and identify/validate workforce needs and specific KSAs (includes process for developing maps showing skill transferability and connections among credentials currently offered) * Formal process to ID gaps between existing regional education, training, and business services & new/enhanced programs | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **7. Consensus among key regional partners of the target industries and related workforce needs** | * Regional community colleges, economic development organizations, and workforce system use similar data tools to reach similar decisions on key targets and workforce needs * Industry-wide data and workforce needs are regularly shared across partners | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **SERVICE DESIGN & ALIGNMENT**  ***Is your organization positioned to prepare a qualified, skilled workforce by facilitating the delivery of high-quality services and programs aligned to sector needs?*** | | |
| **8. Capability to fill the industry’s *immediate* workforce needs** | * Ability to work with education partners to develop responsive curriculum/courses for target sectors to provide immediate access to customized and certification programs * Ability to work with partners to systematically support target industries in business outreach, hiring services, retention programs | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **9. Capability to meet the industry’s *longer-term* pipeline needs across a range of skill levels** | * Agility and flexibility to, with higher education partners, develop new credit-bearing courses/programs rapidly in target industry areas * Willingness of various educational units (e.g. community colleges, career & technology institutions, private schools) to work together to address an identified regional long-term workforce need * Partners in place to execute industry career awareness and outreach strategies | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **10. Experience with and capability to develop meaningful career pathways in target sector areas** | * Commitment and ability to address sectors’ range of skill needs (i.e. entry-level, higher-skills) * With partners, demonstrated experience with designing education and training paths that enable students to move easily between academic and career technical programs, to and from work, and to advanced credentials | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **11. Experience with and capability to design and implement, with employers, “learn and earn” education models in targeted sector areas** | * Ability to build or experience building models such as:   + On-the-job training   + Cooperative education   + Paid internships   + Pre-apprenticeship or apprenticeship programs | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **12. Capability to respond to non-workforce needs directly related to the industry’s economic development or growth opportunities** | * Openness and willingness to address non-workforce issues in partnership with employers (e.g. marketing and branding, access to technology and innovations, streamlining suppliers or supply chains, transportation and logistics issues, etc.) * The right partners are at the table to help address non-workforce issues quickly and meaningfully * Sector partnership organizes itself into committees that can help organize responses and action focused on critical non-workforce issues | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **PARTNERSHIPS**  *Is your organization positioned to facilitate a shared sector strategy agenda across employers and sector partners?* | | |
| **13. Industry as a true strategic partner in building and enhancing services and programs, and engaged in a variety of meaningful ways** | * Industry partners help define program strategy and goals, identify necessary skills, competencies, and commit resources to support education (e.g., equipment, instructors, internships), and, where appropriate, hire qualified students who complete programs * Specific vehicles for soliciting ongoing feedback from industry partners (not just during WIB or college advisory meetings) * Ability to ID and convene a network of large and small employers within the sector(s) * A smaller number of business “champions” has been identified who can encourage wider industry engagement | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| 14. **Partnerships with wide array of industry associations and labor unions**  **that support the training and possible placement of workers in targeted sectors** | * Unions/industry associations advise on curriculum and program design and align training and services with programs in targeted sector areas | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **15. Partnership with K-12, career and technical education, adult education programs, and universities to align**  **curriculum and course credit facilitating pathways for students** | * Education (K-12, community and technical colleges, universities, private training providers) and workforce organizations are actively working to form dynamic alliances in support of target sector customers. * Demonstrated working relationship (e.g. administrators/staff sit on boards, deeply engaged in joint workforce initiatives), no turf issues * Ability to develop common scope in order to align and provide a bridge from secondary and post-secondary education to a career or to attain credentials required by the target industry sector | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **16. Partnerships with regional, and/or local economic development organizations** | * Demonstrated working relationship (e.g. work regularly with local chamber of commerce, development agencies) to jointly address regional growth strategies, including education and training issues) * Ability to develop common scope in order to serve industry and workers | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **17. Working relationships with community-based organizations to reach populations that are currently underrepresented in the key target sector(s), provide adequate support services** | * Demonstrated working relationships with CBOs in this regard; no turf issues * Ability to develop common scope in order to serve industry and workers | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **SUSTAINABILITY & CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**  *Is your organization able to measure sector partnership outcomes and use that information to drive future performance? Is there financial support to sustain the partnership?* | | |
| **18. Ability to “build the buzz” about the value of sector partnerships as a means to continuously secure stakeholder buy-in** | * A connection with area media that can lead to stories on the sector partnership * Marketing brochures developed to explain sector partnerships * Agreement among sector partners to explain the concept to their boards of directors and customers. | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **19. Sector partnership measures of success identified, defined, and tracked, with continuous improvement processes built in** | * A common agreed-upon dashboard of success indicators (i.e. consensus around sector strategy “outcomes”) * Organization’s board, executive committee, or program committee reviews sector partnership metrics as part of their duties * Process in place for collecting, analyzing data and using the ROI metrics to make future partnership adjustments | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |
| **20. Ongoing financial support to establish and expand sector partnerships** | * Understanding of existing and new funding sources (e.g. grants, foundation support, and/or partner-organization budget allocations) * Willingness to be innovative in finding resources to support the sector partnerships (e.g. identify aspects of the new WIOA that could fund partnerships, submit grant proposals, etc.) | **1 2 3 4 5**  *Describe rating briefly:* |