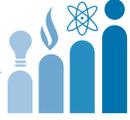


# Strengthening Education Partnerships



## A How-to Guide for Industry

Center For  
**ENERGY**   
Workforce Development

## Introduction

In 2014, Black Hills Energy organized an Industry and Education Partnership Summit at Mitchell Technical Institute in Sioux Falls. The purpose of this meeting, the first of its kind among CEWD's members, was to convene the company's "preferred" education partners in its service area and communicate Black Hills' needs and expectations for a partnership going forward. The company developed a structured and methodological process to identify its preferred education partners.

The Summit was a success, and CEWD documented the purpose and outcomes of the Summit for use by other CEWD members via the [Industry and Education Partnership Summit Toolkit](#).

In 2015, the Michigan Energy Workforce Development Consortium (MEWDC) adapted the Toolkit as part of its strategy to build a talent pipeline for gas and electric line technicians in Michigan. Piloting of the Toolkit was written into a successful grant proposal to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation and became part of the approach Michigan took to identify and engage "preferred" educators in the state.

The distinction in the two uses of the Toolkit was significant: application of it for a state energy workforce consortium with in-state education partners versus a single company with multi-state education partners. This distinction highlighted additional challenges in defining "preferred" educators.

Thus, the MEWDC made some enhancements to the Toolkit and, in doing so, confirmed Black Hills' premise that the Summit is a deliverable of a more in-depth process to identify industry's needs from educators and solidify partnerships between industry and education. Building a mature and sustainable relationship with preferred education partners is a necessity to develop a true talent pipeline, which was Michigan's objective, and is one of the most important actions industry can take to develop a diverse, qualified pipeline of applicants. (For more on the actions industry and education can take, see [Five Things You Need to Know about Energy Workforce Development](#).)

As a result, this document provides industry members with more guidance on the steps needed to define "preferred" education partners and cultivate their engagement prior to implementing an Industry and Education Partnership Summit.

To summarize the benefits of the process, successful engagement of preferred education partners:

- Reduces the likelihood of building discrete or disparate educational programs that serve a single career track or limited hiring need
- Drives the industry to define and communicate their requirements to educators
- Builds accountability among education providers for understanding the long-term needs of the industry and engages them as partners in solution development rather than simply suppliers of graduates
- Enables industry members to base sponsorship of education partners in CEWD's National Energy Education Network on measurable outcomes

It should be noted also that an Industry and Education Partnership Summit is an important deliverable but not the only deliverable of a successful relationship between energy industry members and their preferred education providers. As the project in Michigan pointed out, the Summit was instrumental in building an ongoing partnership and process of focused engagement that continues today.

## Pre-Work Guide

As state energy workforce consortia consider the value of using these materials to develop or strengthen existing educator relationships, several “pre-work” steps are recommended before targeted engagement with education partners begins.

### 1. Consult your Strategic Workforce Plan

Engaging preferred educational partners should be driven in large part by your consortium's need for qualified and diverse candidates to fill key jobs. If your consortium has a strategic workforce plan in place, consult the plan to identify key in-demand jobs and the relevant programs that produce them. Identify how those jobs are currently being filled (new graduates, transitioning adults, contractors, etc.). Identify gaps between your workforce needs and available educational programs. If your consortium does not have a strategic workforce plan in place, now is the time to develop one. For more information about how to develop a strategic workforce plan for your state energy workforce consortium, see the [CEWD Strategic Planning Workshop National Template](#).

## 2. Identify and quantify existing educator relationships

Active state energy workforce consortia that list educators as consortium members should review the value of those relationships. Do the educators around the consortium table offer programs of study that produce talent needed by industry? Are the education representatives active and engaged in the work of the consortium or is their involvement episodic and disconnected to the consortium's workforce development goals? A review of existing education partner members of the consortium should be conducted by the consortium's industry members to confirm the value of their involvement.

Additionally, industry partners within the consortium should identify existing relationships within their company that might influence preferred provider selection. Keep in mind that consortium members may be unaware of relationships outside their realm of influence. Due diligence is required within the company to assure a full understanding of existing partnerships, which could include "loaned instructor" agreements, equipment donations, advisory board memberships, sponsorships, scholarships, or other financial commitments that may already be in place.

To collect this information, consult with leaders in Operations, Staffing, the company's Foundation, Community Relations, and any other areas where relationships with educators may exist. Review the intent and purpose of the Partnership Summit and gain their buy-in for the plan.

As part of this review, a "qualitative" picture of the existing relationship can be determined by gaining input to the following questions:

- Is the educator open to understanding and addressing your workforce needs?
- Is the educator "easy to work with" and responsive to requests?
- Does the educator invite your company's engagement through invitations to join advisory boards, visit with teachers and students, etc.?
- Is the educator open to feedback on the quality of its candidates?

Once existing relationships within the consortium and within each individual company have been documented, it is helpful for industry representatives to understand the "quantitative" value of the existing partnership in meeting your company's hiring needs. Examples of value include:

- Number of hires from the school into your key positions, by year, for the past 3-5 years
- Success of the school's graduates to pass pre-employment tests, physical abilities tests, and behavioral interviews
- Retention rate of the graduates after they have been hired
- Degree of diversity provided in each graduating class

### 3. Identify additional relevant education programs

In addition to identifying existing relationships with educators, it's important to identify the relevant programs in the state or region that your company or consortium may not be aware of. This step ensures that you don't overlook or miss a school with a strong program that could help fill your workforce gaps.

A free and helpful tool in identifying state colleges and technical schools is the College Navigator tool on the National Center for Education Statistics website, at [www.nces.ed.gov](http://www.nces.ed.gov). The College Navigator tool allows you to enter specific search criteria and identify relevant educational programs by state. As you research programs that might qualify as preferred education partners for your consortium, it's helpful to answer the following questions:

- What type of credential is awarded for each program? (To understand the distinctions between credentials, see the [CEWD Credential Summary](#).)
- Is the credential credit bearing?
- Does the school offer prior learning credits?
- Are the school's credits transferable?
- Does the school have any CEWD certificates already in place?
- Is the school already sponsored in the CEWD National Energy Education Network (NEEN) database by another company?
- Does the school offer dual credit programs with local high schools?
- Are there any existing articulation agreements in place between the school and other community colleges?

## 4. Gain agreement on how “preferred” educator will be defined

The next step is to gain agreement on the criteria or attributes that will define “preferred” status for an educator. This is particularly important when explaining to company leadership or to educators themselves how a selection was made. The definition should hinge on the needs of the industry and its ability to fill key jobs.

When Black Hills reviewed educators for inclusion in its Industry and Education Partnership Summit, the project team brainstormed attributes for defining “preferred” status for the purposes of building more sustainable relationships. The team looked at the following attributes of 50 community colleges and technical schools in the states where Black Hills had service territory:

- **Specific radius / geographic footprint** – Black Hills has service territory in multiple states and wanted to engage educators who could help provide qualified graduates at all of its locations.
- **Readiness to educate / curriculum quality** – The company looked at how ready the educator currently was to deliver energy program curriculum and whether current curriculum was producing talent the company could hire.
- **Accreditations / quality** – This looked at whether the educator provided accredited energy programs and the quality of the accreditation.
- **Placement statistics** – Black Hills looked at the educator's ability to place its graduates, either with Black Hills or other companies.
- **Current company relationship** – Black Hills took into account existing relationships with an educator: whether a Black Hills representative served on an advisory board, whether there were scholarship or internship relationships already in place.
- **Graduation rate** – Black Hills looked at each educator's graduation rate for students in its energy programs.
- **Credit for military training** – Whether an educator provided credit to veterans for prior military training was important to Black Hills as they sought to increase their percentage of veteran hiring.
- **Diverse recruitment practices** – Black Hills wanted to make sure that the educators they partnered with were focused on attracting diverse candidates, which would increase the likelihood that Black Hills could hire more diverse workers.
- **Specialized curriculum** – Specialized curriculum that met a unique job need for Black Hills was also an important consideration in determining preferred educator status.

The approach the MEWDC took to identify preferred educators differed slightly from Black Hills' approach, based primarily on the existence of relationships within the State of Michigan. The MEWDC reviewed 34 community colleges and technical schools in the state against the following attributes:

- **Current programs** – whether a MEWDC industry partner was currently engaged in support and hiring from an energy program at a community college or technical school.
- **Current relationship** – the MEWDC is a long-established state energy workforce consortium and has long-term relationships with educators in the state; the status of these relationships, as summarized on page 4, was an important attribute in determining rankings.
- **Geographic location** – the proximity of an education program to energy operations was important as Michigan's placement data indicated that many graduates preferred to attend school and find jobs closer to home.
- **Potential willingness to work toward:**
  - Common core curriculum
  - Stackable and transferrable credentials
  - Industry recognized certificates
  - Articulation agreements between institutions
  - Recognition of prior learning at the secondary level

This attribute was driven by the MEWDC's work to develop a talent pipeline for gas and electric line technicians, founded on CEWD's Energy Industry Fundamentals curriculum. The MEWDC selected its education partners based in part on their perceived willingness to implement a common curriculum and enter articulation agreements with select high schools and other technical schools.

## 5. Select approach for ranking the desired attributes

Depending on the number of attributes a company or consortium considers important, it may be helpful to rank the attributes in terms of importance. This step is not required, especially if the list of attributes is relatively short.

The Black Hills project team ranked their desired attributes using the Method of Pairwise Comparisons. There are a variety of tools state consortia can use to rank attributes like Black Hills did. For more information on the Method of Pairwise Comparisons, see <http://www.ctl.ua.edu/math103/Voting/methodpc.htm>.

Based on the ranking of the attributes, Black Hills looked at 50 identified educators against the ranked attributes and categorized them in three tiers:

- Tier 3 schools were those Black Hills might send job openings to but weren't schools where an expanded relationship would benefit the company.
- Tier 2 schools did not meet all of the attributes but might in the future or might be currently providing specialty curriculum that was of value to Black Hills.
- Tier 1 schools met all of the attributes and were strong candidates for strengthening the relationship with Black Hills.

Ultimately eight educators were invited to the Black Hills Industry and Education Partnership Summit.

The MEWDC did not use the Method of Pairwise Comparisons to rank desired attributes but were able to identify 10 community colleges and technical schools that met all of their defined attributes and, as a result, were invited to participate in the MEWDC Industry and Education Partnership Summit.

## 6. Identify key contacts

After both Black Hills and the MEWDC identified the preferred education institutions to invite to their Summit, they worked to identify key contacts for each of the institutions. While some contacts were well established, others had to be identified through research. When identifying key contacts for education partners, ensure you involve the people within your company or consortium who are most connected to the programs you want to hire from. It's important that a technical school's leadership be aware of the outreach but equally important to direct your outreach to the instructors and leads of your pertinent programs. That way, all contacts with a vested interest in the relationship with industry are aware of the request.

The MEWDC assigned outreach with new institutions to an existing member of the MEWDC with the belief that personal outreach initially would be more effective in gaining the educator's commitment to attend the Summit. An example of the Education Institution Data Collection Template used by the MEWDC can be found at <http://www.cewd.org/toolkits/industry-education-partnership/index.php>. After personal contact had been made via phone or email to identify the most appropriate invitees, the MEWDC co-chairs sent follow-up emails with more information.

## 7. Plan and implement an Industry and Education Partnership Summit

Having identified your preferred education partners, the next step is to convene industry and education in a Partnership Summit. Key planning steps leading up to the actual event include:

- Securing a location for the Partnership Summit
- Developing communications materials about the Summit
- Sending those materials to invitees, including relevant leaders of your company
- Planning the agenda and preparing presentation materials
- Following up with invitees to ensure your education partners are represented

When selecting a location for the Partnership Summit, you may want to consider the approach taken by both Black Hills and the MEWDC. Black Hills hosted its Partnership Summit on the campus of Mitchell Technical Institute, a school Black Hills already had a strong partnership with. During the Summit, other educators were able to tour the Mitchell Tech facility and learn about existing programs that Black Hills valued. The Partnership Summit sponsored by the MEWDC was held at Lansing Community College, a strong education partner of Consumers Energy. Holding the Summit at an educational campus offers several advantages:

- If the educator is already considered a strong partner to your consortium, the positive elements of the partnership can be reinforced
- The cost of using the facilities is typically significantly lower than the cost of renting a commercial or public meeting facility and using their catering options
- Security requirements are typically lower than would be the case if the Summit is hosted by industry at an operating plant or headquarters building

## Implementation of a Partnership Summit

Following is a list of updated materials to help industry partners in a state energy workforce consortium implement an Industry and Education Partnership Summit. The materials, which can be found at [www.cewd.org](http://www.cewd.org), include templates for activity planning, budgeting, and inviting educators. Also included are presentation templates for the actual Summit, during which CEWD, industry, and educators would provide overviews.

1. [2014 Black Hills Summit School Selection Presentation](#)
2. [Educators Template for Partnership Summit](#)
3. [Generic Partnership Summit Presentation Template](#)
4. [Industry Template for Partnership Summit](#)
5. [Generic Summit Agenda Template](#)
6. [Generic Summit Invitation Letter](#)
7. [Partnership Summit Activity Planning Timeline](#)
8. [Partnership Summit Budget Template](#)

## Post-Summit Implementation and Sustainability

### 1. Rapid Follow-Up with Educators

Rapid follow-up with educators is critically important to sustaining the momentum and tone of partnership that occurs in an Industry and Education Partnership Summit. Industry members should plan before their Summit how they will follow up with their education providers in the days afterward. The first priority is to confirm with your preferred providers that they are onboard with supporting your consortium as strong partners of industry. Strong partnership means that the educator invests in the strategic outcomes of a consortium and its industry members. Examples of investment include:

- Active participation in the consortium and its task forces
- Ensuring industry representation on educators' advisory committees
- Providing "supply" data on graduates and other meaningful pipeline information
- Working with industry to identify and address graduates' skill gaps or knowledge deficiencies
- Implementing energy curriculum that results in industry-recognized credentials and greater optionality for students

Confirmation of their agreement can be collected virtually via email follow-up from the consortium's leadership or via phone calls inviting additional questions or conversation.

### 2. Incorporation of Education Pipeline Strategy into the Consortium Strategic Plan

During or shortly following the Summit, industry and education should reconvene to agree on tactical actions to strengthen the talent pipeline. These steps should be incorporated into the state energy workforce consortium's strategic plan and assigned to appropriate task forces or committees within the consortium. If representatives of the preferred education providers are not already engaged in the consortium, they should be assigned to task forces for direct engagement in action planning.

## 3. Sponsorship for Membership in NEEN and CEWD

Another important step in sustaining the relationship between industry and education is for the industry members of the consortium to sponsor their preferred education providers as members of CEWD. Industry sponsored membership in CEWD is free and entitles the educator to significant benefits including recognition as a member of CEWD's National Energy Education Network (NEEN) and access to CEWD materials, resources, and curriculum. Sponsorship also enables industry to identify those education programs of most significance to the consortium's workforce development needs. Those programs are then highlighted and visible to job seekers through [www.getintoenergy.com](http://www.getintoenergy.com).

The strength of the partnership between industry and their preferred educators is assessed annually when CEWD's industry members renew their CEWD membership and review and confirm their list of preferred education providers in the NEEN network.

## For More Information

For help in strengthening your consortium's partnership with its education providers, contact your CEWD regional consultant or check out the toolkit resources underpinning this guide at <http://www.cewd.org/toolkits/industry-education-partnership/index.php>.

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