

TIPS FOR NURTURING PARTNERSHIPS WITH INDUSTRY

Three individuals with significant experience with community college-industry partnerships emphasized during the March CCPI-CAST that collaborations between employers and two-year colleges are critical to workforce development efforts.

Though their roles and perspectives from their work in three different states varied, the panelists on the Model Community College and Industry Partnerships CCPI-STEM podcast agreed that effective collaborations are built on relationships that take time and attention to nurture in order to be fully beneficial for students and communities.

“Collaboration between colleges and industry—it’s essential for driving innovation, enhancing learning, addressing real-world challenges. I would say by working together, we leverage the strengths of both the academia and the industry to achieve common goals and create positive impact on society,” said Michelle Rivard, an analytical technologist at [Dow Inc.](#)

Be Persistent

As a member of Dow’s Great Lakes Tech Group Steering Committee, Rivard facilitates communication between the company and [Delta College’s](#) chemical technology program in Michigan. She leverages her industry knowledge and academic background to provide insights “to help ensure that communication is clear, effective, and fostering a strong partnership.”

Rivard advises college personnel to be persistent when reaching out to potential industry partners. “Don’t give up. If industry doesn’t answer you the first time, be sure to either send out that email again or try to meet them in person,” she said.

Be Open to Ideas from Industry

Melanie Williamson, dean of innovation at [Bluegrass Community and Technical College \(BCTC\)](#), emphasized that community college personnel need to be proactive in their interactions with employers and cognizant of the goals of the college’s various industry partnerships. She said part of her job is making sure that BCTC, a seven campus college in Central Kentucky, is “living up to what [each] partnership was at the beginning of it.” She also stressed the importance of college personnel making the best use of industry representatives’ time. She said, “We’re constantly looking at the advisory board and saying, ‘What can we do better? What can we change? What do they need?’”

Williamson also encouraged college personnel to consider ideas from industry, even unusual suggestions. “Consider the crazy ideas,” she said.

Involve Faculty & Staff

Steven Partridge, vice president of strategy, research, and workforce innovation at [Northern Virginia Community College \(NOVA\)](#), said collaboration with industry “is just a way of life for us” at the six-campus college that has 73,000 credit students and 5,000 non-credit students.

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“Our goal is to make sure every program at NOVA leads to a good-paying job and that requires us to talk with employers upfront,” he said. The college uses an array of labor market data “to both create new programs and sunset existing programs because jobs have a life cycle. And as we all know from listening to different reports, the kids entering school today will probably enter jobs that don’t even exist today.”

With so many employers in the densely populated metropolitan area outside of Washington, D.C., Partridge said NOVA personnel use data to assess new partnership ideas.

But, he said, when the college began pursuing new industry partnerships a few years ago it was important to say ‘Yes,’ to industry requests particularly from large employers like Amazon.

After years of working to develop a deep relationship with Amazon, Partridge said NOVA has a memorandum of understanding with the web services company to be “their test bed for new education offerings for programs that they want to offer both to their employees and want to offer to other higher ed institutions.

“So it’s a great relationship that we hope to replicate with other local employers. But again, I think the one takeaway would be if you want to build those partnerships, it takes a lot of work and it’s not one person’s job, but coordinating that is a full-time job as well.”

Respond ASAP

The panelists’ other suggestions included learning industry’s terminology, priorities, and timelines.

Partridge summarized the imperative for prompt response to employers’ requests for new programs this way: “People in academia sometimes don’t realize that that speed is something that differentiates us from other organizations, because if we can’t keep up, they will do it with other organizations, they will do it themselves. So if we really want to be a leader in the field, if we want to be a partner with business, we have to keep up.”



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