

SOUTHWEST REGION WEBINAR SHARES BILT MODEL PROCESS & BENEFITS

The benefits of using a Business Industry Leadership Team (BILT) to engage industry in community college technician education programs were the focus of the Southwest Region's April 28 [webinar](#).

Dr. Ann Beheler, who developed the [BILT Model](#) at [Collin College](#) in the early 2000s, describes it as "a strategic approach to get continuous engagement and program alignment."

Beheler has been awarded [Advanced Technological Education](#) grants from the [U.S. National Science Foundation](#) to refine the model and teach other educators the steps for implementing it. More than 150 colleges and universities now utilize BILTs in a wide array of STEM disciplines.

The BILT Model makes employers co-leaders of programs, not just advisors. "Start with asking what they want," Beheler said, explaining the structured process for having industry representatives identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) they would like entry-level technicians to have in 12 to 36 months. These assembled industry "subject-matter experts" then prioritize the KSAs for future employees.

"Consensus is not the goal," Beheler said, explaining that detailed sharing by employers and attentive listening by faculty are most important at this phase. Community college faculty members are in charge of developing and implementing the curriculum that responds to industry's priority KSAs.

Curriculum revisions are shared with BILT members in a "feedback" meeting. Subsequent "trends" meetings with industry are structured discussions that update faculty about the impact of new technologies in workplaces.

"In the workforce area we have be ready to shift," Beheler said, advocating for an annual cycle of well-structured meetings that build the relationships between educators and industry.

Beheler and Hope Cotner, president and CEO of the [Center for Occupational Research and Development \(CORD\)](#), shared positive outcomes from two-year colleges implementing BILTs. [CORD's Pathways to Innovation](#) project, funded with an ATE grant, offered the [BILT Academy](#) for community college educators to learn how to implement the BILT Model.

[Forsyth Technical Community College](#), for instance, now uses BILTs for eight programs. "The shift from advisory board meetings to employer-led BILTs have made a difference for students," Cotner said, citing learn and earn and apprenticeship programs that have been developed at Forsyth Tech.

[Miami Dade College](#) first used a BILT to start a cybersecurity program. Then it created BILTs for programs in cloud computing, data analytics, and artificial intelligence (AI). The AI degree program launched in 2023 currently has 2,000 students, Beheler said. The college is in the process of implementing BILTs for aerospace and semiconductor programs.

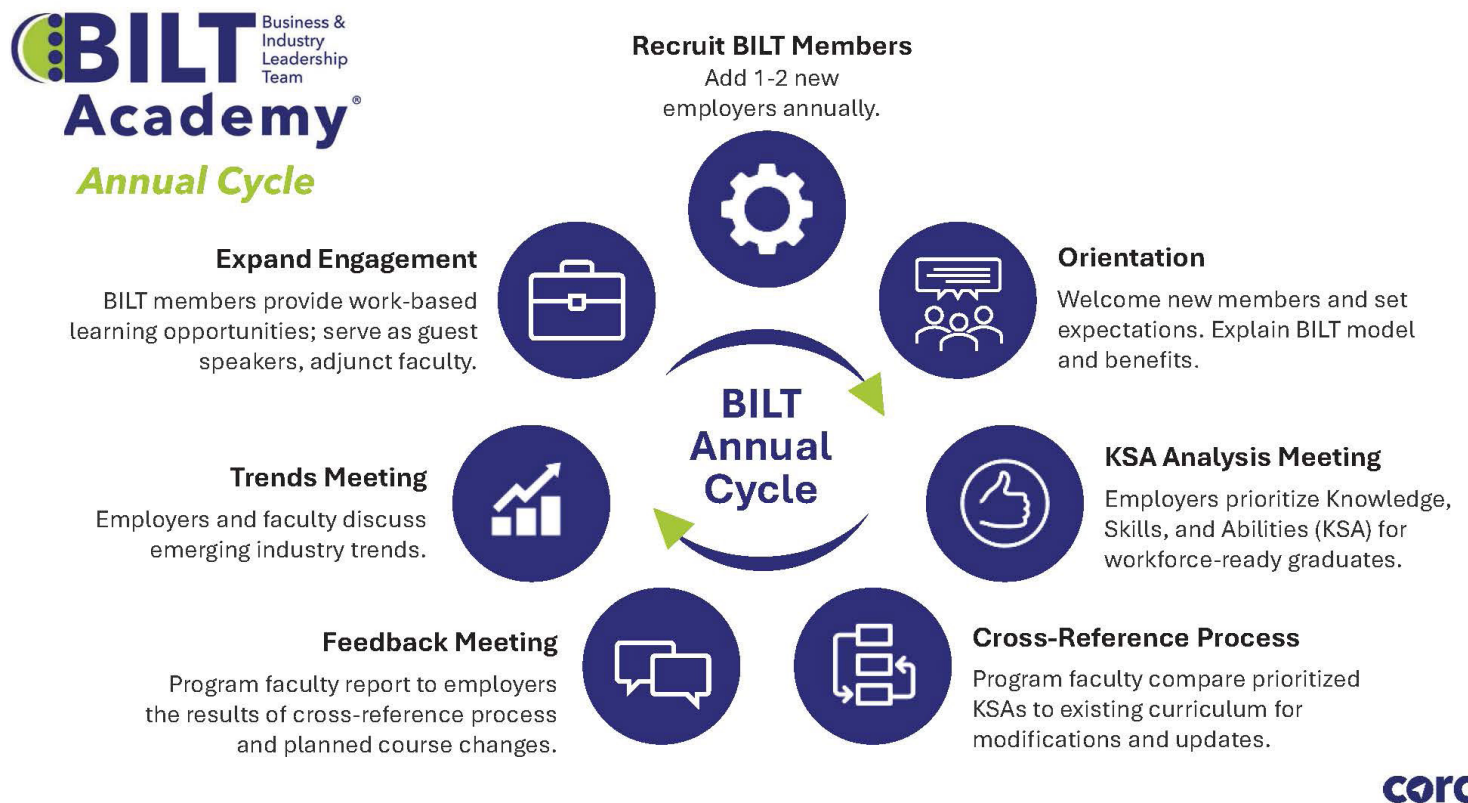
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Dr. Annette Parker, retired president of South Central College, said the college's first BILT for the welding program led to employers contributing equipment and funding labs and scholarships. Parker later used a BILT for the college to help senior leaders understand the broader impacts of various programs and how to wrap resources around students. She said these developments then led to regional planning and enhanced connections with employers, school districts, foundations, and other organizations.

"Doing BILT really puts you at the table where the employers understand you're listening to them. That's why I talked about it in terms of broader impact—about what it means for your leadership, what it means for your community, residents in your community," Parker said, adding, "When they're all looking at the institution as being critical to their success, it starts with these BILTs and building the credibility that they're at the table and that they have a voice for the future."

She also warned against giving up on an idea, if a grant proposal is not funded. "Be a realistic optimist and say, 'OK, if this is declined, that's not the end of the world. We just resubmit it,' Look at the feedback ... Maybe that's a great turnaround, and we would write an amazing second proposal that gets funded," she said.

Both Lunceford and Vemu said the grant-writing process is worthwhile regardless of the outcome. "If you're interested, don't be intimidated. Go out there and try it," Lunceford said.



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