



The Relationship of Community Colleges and Businesses

BY ANN RUBENZAHL

People are often surprised to learn about the ways in which employers are now partnering with community colleges to help their employees keep their skills up to date or re-train for higher-level jobs in their organizations. George R. Boggs in his 2011 article “The American community college: From access to success, “At the heart of the community college mission is a sense of responsibility for the economic development of the community surrounding the colleges.”

Examples of business/community college partnerships can be found throughout the country:

- Anne Arundel Community College in Maryland is working in partnership with federal agencies (U.S. Cyber Command, National Security Agency) to provide skilled cybersecurity employees and is also providing training for private cybersecurity firms.
- Central Piedmont Community College in North Carolina is providing customized training for staff at the Siemens Charlotte Energy Hub. With its recent \$350 million expansion, Central Piedmont has expanded its partnership with Siemens to include skills assessment for new employees and post-hire training.
- Cuyahoga Community College in Ohio is partnering with local building trades unions to provide entry-level and incumbent workers with opportunities to enhance their skills through a college-sponsored apprenticeship program.
- Closer to home, Rockland Community College was instrumental in establishing a 3D Printing Smart Lab in the school’s Haverstraw Center and Westchester Community College is working with regional advanced manufacturing firms to provide training that leads to entry-level industry certifications.

Some may also be surprised to learn about the community college resources available to help develop employee productivity, and also to help small businesses and entrepreneurs grow and prosper:

- LaGuardia Community College, in partnership with Goldman Sachs’ 10,000 Small Businesses program, offers small-business owners access to a practical business and management education; since its inception, the program has trained 100 businesses that have created jobs, secured loans and negotiated contracts.
- Dutchess Community College partners with The Council of Industry, an association of Hudson Valley manufacturers, to offer a Certificate in Manufacturing Leadership to prepare employees for supervisory responsibility.
- At Westchester Community College, the Academy for Entrepreneurial Excellence (developed in partnership with The Business Council of Westchester) provides individuals with established businesses the skills and knowledge needed to grow their businesses to the next level.

Customized training

- Most community colleges have a department that provides customized training to help their local businesses and government organizations meet their business goals. Often community college customized training is both highly effective and affordable.

The Professional Development Center at Westchester Community College



Programs offered typically include:

- Leadership and organizational effectiveness.
- Business communications — written and oral presentations.
- Workplace languages including English.
- Customer service.
- Sales/business generation.
- Technology programs including computer applications and social media.
- Project management.
- Issues in the modern workplace/compliance.

Grant funding

In some states community colleges have access to grant funding for customized training for businesses. Community colleges in New York state are able to partner with their local businesses and apply for State University of New York funding to provide training for incumbent workers. In recent years, Westchester Community College has obtained grant funding for customized training for companies in the biotech sector, retail food marketing, the not-for-profit sector, health care and others areas to enable them to build computer skills, customer service abilities, culinary skills, managerial expertise and English as a second language.

The fast track

In addition to two-year credit degree programs and one-year credit certificate programs, community colleges offer a variety of short-term noncredit programs designed to prepare individuals to enter the workforce or enhance their skills to make them eligible for promotions in their current jobs. These programs are affordable, taught by working professionals and can result in an independently awarded industry-recognized certificate. Many of the programs are designed to enable participants to earn multiple workforce certificates by layering one program on top of another. In addition, short-term noncredit programs are often aligned with programs that lead to a credit certificate or degree.

Some examples of short-term, noncredit workforce programs are:

- Careers in health care (certified nurse assistant, patient care technician, health information implementation specialist), advanced manufacturing (NIMS and CPT certifications) and business (Microsoft Office Specialist, project management) at Westchester Community College.
- “The new blue collar” manufacturing careers track at Tidewater Community College in Virginia.
- The air conditioning and refrigeration and security officer programs at Hostos Community College in the Bronx.

The win-win

Workforce development and economic development are a focus at most community colleges and some have even included these terms in their mission statements. It is critical for both community colleges and businesses to work in partnership to ensure that community college programs address the skills required for the regional economy, that employers have access to a pipeline of appropriately trained employees and that customized training services enable businesses to accomplish their goals.

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