Steps for Working with Industry Partners

Strategies to enlist support

1. *Identify specific industry partners who might be helpful*

If a course is covering content relevant to a particular industry, identify companies in the local area doing business in this industry. Contact the college's contract training department to see if any current connections or relationships exist with area businesses. If not, find out the college's local chamber of commerce representative , if any, and/or other business- or industry-related group members available at the institution. Ask any available college liaison to help establish a connection with chosen local companies. Also consider contacting the local One Stop Career Center or state Workforce Development Agency to see if they can provide one or more contacts.

2. *Make initial contacts*

After determining industry partners who might be helpful for a specific course under development, make initial contact—it is often a good idea to send an introductory email, explaining what is needed and why along with full contact information for whomever will be responsible for the relationship long-term. Ask the contact if there is a convenient time to speak with him or her on the phone or if he or she can provide another contact within that company who might be a more appropriate person. Ask a few brief questions so that, after making an initial contact and phone call, it will be possible to determine whether or not the individual is willing to or interested in helping or otherwise developing a partnership. If not, this first or second contact may be able to provide a solid lead for someone else who is. Initiating a relationship with a new person is often the most difficult part of creating a partnership: be persistent. Once a contact that is willing to assist has been identified, schedule a time (perhaps 30 minutes to 1 hour) for a preliminary brainstorming meeting or call.

3. *Brainstorming session*

Invite those who are interested to a brainstorming session. This should be no more than one hour and can be either in person or via phone or web conference. For some courses it may be appropriate to consider inviting additional college faculty. It is a good idea to send relevant information to participants ahead of time, such as the following:
- Overview of the course or program
- Initial outline
- Draft of learning objectives

- Target questions and topics to address during the meeting: for example, brainstorm a list of roles that exist in the field in general and the company in particular and what skills are required to be effective in those roles
- Examples from previous courses, such as workplace scenarios and sample activities assignments. This can help show potential industry partners what sorts of methods and materials might be used and the general character (length, complexity, etc.) of course components to help them make informed choices regarding any resources they might provide in addition to their personal expertise. Typical examples would include training films or video clips, photographs of the work environment or company products, transcripts from real or model customer service calls, annotated diagrams of critical machinery or company workflow procedures, samples or demonstration copies of company products, etc.
- During the meeting, review the draft objectives with the group and make any revisions. Have the group discuss the target items and, if possible, suggest ideas for scenarios that meet the objectives. It is also a good idea to designate someone to take notes.

Ongoing Industry Involvement

It is very helpful to have one person from the brainstorming become your main contact as the course develops, giving ongoing feedback and suggestions about the content and activities. This should be someone who has the time and interest to respond quickly when you need advice. He or she should be a part of the development process, providing feedback and suggestions as content and learning activities are developed. Do scenarios accurately present situations that would arise in the workplace? Do the activities incorporate information that is necessary for success? Is the content relevant for new employees? If there are any concerns, what changes might be made? In addition to the main contact, it is also valuable to have a few other industry partners serve as subject matter experts who review the course as a whole and ensure that it is both accurate and industry relevant.

Industry partners are more likely to remain involved with the course or program development process if they can see direct benefits of their involvement. Their expertise can ensure that students are learning the knowledge and skills they need and that scenarios allow them to apply these in realistic industry situations. The result will be well-prepared potential employees. Make it a point to describe these benefits and to express appreciation during partner interactions. If feasible, suggest use of the course for company employee training, either incorporated into company training programs or available to employees on campus or online at no cost. A reciprocal return such as this could greatly enhance the arrangement's value to an industry partner and solidify its importance and longevity with both parties.