

# HRTP ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

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## The Industry Partnership Itself Is A Priority

Second in the series: *Four Essential Elements of High Road Training Partnerships*

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June 2020

### Overview

This brief focuses on the essential element of making the partnership itself a priority. It describes why this is essential, what is meant by partnership, and what the critical components of operating in partnership are. A separate companion brief provides more detail on promising practices for this essential element, with examples from the field.

### Why Making the Partnership a Priority is Essential

The best way to ensure efforts are industry driven—a foundational element of a successful HRTP—is by instituting a structure through which industry leaders themselves jointly and explicitly agree to collaborate not just for one project or program but in a sustained and formalized way. This provides the backbone for the ongoing problem solving that those leaders are uniquely capable of jointly undertaking for their industry. From observation of HRTPs' work in the field, it is clear that an essential element of success is having a strong and durable industry partnership as a goal in and of itself.

### What is Meant By Partnership?

The term “partner” is often used broadly to mean any organizations that work together on a particular program or initiative. What is different about the industry partnership approach undertaken through HRTPs is that the partnerships are entities unto themselves: the durable infrastructure that allows collaborative problem solving beyond

any particular training or grant. H RTP partnerships are comprised of leaders in the industry—including both employer and worker representatives—along with dedicated conveners or intermediaries, all of whom are committed to sustained involvement. They invest the time, energy, and resources to working together and building the partnership itself.

From this core partnership, an H RTP can then reach out and engage other collaborators—such as education and training providers, community-based groups, and economic development and philanthropic organizations—that want to partner on projects or programs as appropriate. Such groups may formally join the partnership itself if there is joint agreement and ongoing commitment. This puts the industry leaders at the center of the work, allowing them to pull in the workforce development system as needed rather than having the workforce development system lead the work and try to pull in industry leaders.

## Critical Components

The following components enable an H RTP to function successfully as an industry partnership. They apply to partnerships at all stages of development—newly forming, sustaining or expanding their reach—and across all industries.

- ❖ **Composition:** Includes major stakeholders in the industry
- ❖ **Commitment:** Leaders—at all levels—are committed to the partnership itself
- ❖ **Infrastructure:** Has developed structured ways of working together
- ❖ **Culture:** Values building a collaborative problem-solving culture
- ❖ **Capacity:** Invests in ability to sustain the work
- ❖ **Comprehensive:** All components are in play to deliver results in multiple areas

Each of these critical components are outlined more fully below, with promising practices and examples provided in a companion brief.

### COMPOSITION: Includes major stakeholders in the industry

Who are the partners? Ideally, an H RTP is comprised of the major stakeholders in an industry and has, at a minimum, three legs of the stool: those representing employers, those representing workers, and an intermediary or sustained convener. Together they share authority and decision-making over the direction of the programs needed to meet

the industry's needs. Together they create the strong scaffolding that allows supply and demand in the workforce world to come together in a systemic way.

In partnerships that may have more representation from some parts of the industry than others, H RTPs have found that an important way to solidify the high-road nature of the partnership is to get all three of the primary stakeholders to be as actively involved as possible. H RTPs that have strong participation from multiple employers convened by an intermediary without deep labor involvement have worked to increase worker voice, and vice versa for partnerships with strong union/worker involvement, which have worked to deepen employer participation.

Intermediaries play an important role. Industries typically do not naturally organize themselves, especially in a sustained way beyond particular issues or projects. Industry leaders may have shared interests and can work on those, but in general they have to be brought together—or be helped to hold together—by a dedicated convener or intermediary that can engage the parties, analyze industry needs, provide programmatic capacity, and support leadership development. Intermediaries can also connect the needs and interests within the partnership with the community workforce development system.

### COMMITMENT: Leaders—at all levels—are committed to the partnership itself

Successful partnerships make sure key leaders within the industry are committed to the partnership—at all stages of development and at all levels of the partnership. This is especially important at the start-up phase, but it is also needed to sustain the partnership as key players and conditions inevitably change over time. When a partnership expands, either into new geographies, new types of work, or when more partners are added, it is also critical to secure commitments to the broadened partnership. Further, the partnership must look beyond the top leaders in the industry and obtain commitments from those who will be implementing the partnership and living it on a day to day basis, such as front-line workers and training participants themselves.

Finding common ground and reasons to work together on a sustained basis is not always easy, especially if the parties have been historically adversarial or inexperienced in working together. This can be true between labor and management, or between multiple employers who have had to compete with one another in the industry. H RTPs have developed numerous strategies to build these multi-party commitments. Notably, they often do not start by coming together to develop training programs, but rather to solve a challenge or take advantage of an opportunity. Then the education and training become solutions to meet that challenge or opportunity.

Partnerships require time and effort to succeed and need investments of energy and resources. It is essential to have more than buy-in on paper but rather firm commitments to lead the partnership work together. Ways that HRTPs have found to develop this commitment include having the partners:

- **Jointly Understand External Industry Challenges/Opportunities**

A powerful way to build and sustain support for the partnership is for the partners to develop a shared sense of the forces affecting their industry. These can be everything from legislative and policy changes, demographic trends such as an aging workforce, major market disruptions, or need to gain a competitive advantage, depending upon the scope and composition of the partnership.

Working in partnership provides a way to get ahead of those changes and to do so collaboratively. Working jointly to meet the challenges or take advantage of the opportunities means energy doesn't get wasted fighting each other, resisting the change that's needed, or missing the chance to really drive the future together. Importantly, securing commitments to work together in a sustained and structured way allows the parties to be prepared for whatever may come next, as no one-time program or collaboration will be sufficient to address the constantly evolving future.

- **Address Internal Operational Challenges/Workplace Environment**

Many of the HRTPs in this initiative identified internal challenges—such as workplace safety, employee absenteeism, or the need to bring more culturally competent services and care to customers—as important reasons for their partners coming together to work on problems they had yet to solve on their own or through other means. Knowing they would jointly commit to address these issues provided the incentive that many of the partners needed to participate. Having data and candid conversations about what had worked or not worked in the past was often critical to the partners' buy-in for the new approach.

- **Utilize Champions Across the Industry**

Every HRTP in this initiative has identified having strong worker and manager champions for the partnership as critical to securing support, at all stages of partnership development. It is key to breaking through at the start-up phase, especially when the partnership may present a fundamentally different type of relationship and defy a long history without collaboration.

Having champions is just as important for sustaining and expanding the partnership. It allows those who were not involved in the effort from the beginning to hear from those they respect as to the value and benefit of working in what

may be a very different way. The identification and utilization of champions should explicitly include worker and manager champions, at multiple levels, who are key to generating support at deeper levels of the partnership.

- **Build Off of Tangible Results and Data**

Another way HRTPs build leadership commitment is to generate concrete examples, data, and proof of improvements achieved through working in partnership. There is a robust body of work showing positive results in various industries. HRTPs in this initiative have been able to leverage their own partnership results to deepen or expand their work to more stakeholders.

- **Continually Reinforce the Partnership to Sustain Buy-In**

Successful HRTPs cannot stress enough the need to continually care and attend to the partnership itself. Once it is launched and operating, with programs running, it is can be easy to get busy with the work and forget that the work includes continually reinforcing the partnership itself. It is the backbone holding up the ability to do the work at all.

An often overlooked but powerful way to reinforce the partnership itself is to consistently use the structures and processes that have been created by the partners. Doing so allows HRTPs to be prepared to on-board new leaders and provide already agreed upon role clarity for those leaders. It makes it efficient to communicate decisions and provides clear roadmaps for updating sponsors of the work who may not be actively involved in the work itself. As multi-party entities, communication and understanding across and within the partnership is key. Following the processes that have been put in place helps ensure the infrastructure is strong and the parties see how valuable it can be to meet goals they couldn't meet as well on their own.

## INFRASTRUCTURE: Has developed structured ways of working together

Because the partnership itself provides the foundation for working together, it is important to establish the processes the partnership will use to operate efficiently, to foster problem-solving, and to sustain itself through changes over time. While partnerships can fall along a continuum of informal to formal ways of structuring themselves, HRTPs have found that a few things are key to have no matter what structure they choose:

- Governance structures that fit the developmental stage of the partnership. This can take the form of developing a charter laying out clear roles and responsibilities, crafting a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), or establishing the partnership as a separate legal entity, such as a non-profit organization or (depending upon applicability of federal law) operating as a Taft-Hartley Trust.
- Clear decision-making processes that are agreed upon, and leaders trained together in how to use them. Commonly used ones are Interest Based Problem Solving (IBPS) and Consensus Decision Making (CDM) because they advance joint problem-solving.
- Leadership expectations that support collaborative working relationships among all stakeholders, and development and training for new leaders on the norms that will be sustained through inevitable changes in composition of leadership.

### CULTURE: Values building a collaborative problem-solving culture

While it is critical to get leadership commitments to work together and set up structured ways to do so, what really allows a partnership to thrive is creating and sustaining a culture that enables the whole to be greater than the sum of its parts. The H RTPs that have flourished for, in some cases, more than a decade, have found that having a culture of working truly together is what allows them to get so much done and so well.

Such a culture includes establishing working relationships based on trust among the parties, clear and consistent communication, and accountability to the partnership—its values, goals, and particular work plans—while embracing innovation and continuous learning that is data driven. Creating and sustaining a culture like this takes persistent work, but it is critical to making the joint efforts successful. These qualitative aspects of culture-building may seem elusive, but H RTPs in this initiative have found a number of ways to achieve them through intentional focus on doing so.

### CAPACITY: Invests in ability to sustain the work

What makes partnerships unique as the vehicle for high-road training efforts is the commitment to work in partnership for the long haul. H RTPs live beyond any program, project, or grant, and this requires attending to all the factors that can sustain the partnership itself. Beyond the need to continually reinforce buy-in as outlined above, H RTPs have found that, even though it can be challenging to make time to do so while also running programs, it is essential to attend to what it takes to institutionalize the partnership. This includes having a dedicated intermediary or staff, maximizing and diversifying funding, supporting champions in concrete ways, and investing in leadership development.

## COMPREHENSIVE: All components are in play to deliver results in multiple areas

While this brief has tried to tease out the component parts of a successful partnership, they are intertwined and reinforce each other, just as all four of the essential elements of an H RTP do. Success requires partnership component parts to be attended to in a comprehensive way. Doing so then provides H RTPs the ability to make an impact in multiple areas. For example, the H RTPs in this initiative have demonstrated that through their partnerships they can meet their industry's workforce needs and simultaneously drive improvements in equity, climate resiliency, and job quality.

## About This Series

Through the H RTP Initiative, the CWDB invested close to \$10 million to develop, refine, and expand the number of skill-focused, industry-based training partnerships that advance equity by linking workforce innovation to regional challenges of job quality, economic mobility and environmental sustainability. The UC Berkeley Labor Center was commissioned by the CWDB to gather key learnings from the field from the eight H RTPs that were funded in the demonstration phase of the initiative. This brief is part of a series that includes an overview and explanation of the Essential Elements of successful High Road Training Partnerships as well as promising practices and examples of those essential elements across all of the participating H RTPs. For further information on the specific projects undertaken by the H RTPs in this CWDB initiative and the impact they have had on advancing the goals of equity, climate resiliency and job quality, see the project overviews written by the UCLA Labor Center, commissioned by the CWDB to lead the evaluation process for the initiative. For more information about the H RTP initiative, see <https://cwdb.ca.gov/initiatives/high-road-training-partnerships/>.



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# H RTP Initiative

The California Workforce Development Board (CWDB) designed the High Road Training Partnership (H RTP) initiative to model a sector approach that can address critical issues of equity, job quality, and environmental sustainability. H RTPs are industry-based, worker-focused training partnerships that build skills for California's high road employers. These firms compete based on quality of product and service, achieved through innovation and investment in human capital, and generate family-supporting jobs where workers have agency and voice.

This brief is part of a series that includes an overview of the principles of partnership, snapshot profiles of each of the H RTPs participating in the initiative, an overview and explanation of the Essential Elements of successful High Road Training Partnerships, as well as promising practices and examples of those essential elements across all of the participating H RTPs.

For more information on the initiative and other briefs in this series, see <https://cwdb.ca.gov/initiatives/high-road-training-partnerships/>

## Essential Elements of an H RTP

### 1) Industry-Led Problem Solving

Foundational is that the industry leads the problem solving for the workforce demands unique to that industry. Industry includes both employers and workers or their representatives.

### 2) Partnership Itself is a Priority

Industry leaders conduct their problem solving through a dedicated and sustained partnership.

### 3) Worker Voice

Worker wisdom is explicitly incorporated throughout all aspects of the partnership.

### 4) Industry-Driven Training Solutions

The development, delivery, and reinforcement of education and training programs derive from what industry partners decide is needed.

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