

GreenWays



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT | TOOL 4.1

EMPLOYER VOICE IN PARTICIPANT SELECTION

TOOL 4.1

Employer voice should be strong in each program area, from participant selection, through training, and ultimately, placement. This tool explores participant selection as the first element in that program sequence, providing an example of the robust role that employers can play in a program area. Including employers in the participant selection process creates a feeling of co-ownership and investment in the program while teaching the employers about the population you serve. Use this table to consider multiple strategies for incorporating employer partners into your participant intake process and to determine which works best for your program. Remember that employer commitment is not easy to secure. Find out what level of involvement they are willing to take on.

WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOL

Program directors, staff responsible for candidate review and selection

BENEFITS TO YOUR PROGRAM

Training programs often engage employers in the latter stages of program delivery, when participants have already learned the skills they need to enter the workplace as an intern or employee. Getting employers to connect to your program even before training has begun can help you and your participants in several key ways:

- > When employers have reviewed and helped select participants, they establish a connection to them that inspires more extensive involvement. They may want to mentor, host interns, or hire participants they have met and liked.
- > Employers sometimes determine that programs aren't starting with the "right kind" of participants, or that too much remediation is required. By helping select participants, employers can make sure they feel comfortable with them as job candidates. This might mean that you have to adjust your entry requirements, because employers often push for more restrictive criteria, with more basic skill, experience, and language requirements.
- > This is an opportunity to share information about the goals of your program. Meeting candidates and learning their back stories allows employers to put a face to what you've said about your mission and to gain an appreciation for the obstacles students are overcoming just to participate in the program.

BENEFITS TO EMPLOYERS

The benefits from these activities do not only extend to training programs. Employers also gain from being involved in participant selection. Major advantages of being involved at this early stage include:

- > Employers have the opportunity to make sure that the program will meet their needs, because they can help align the attributes of participants with what they need in their workforce.
- > If they participate in the selection process of each cohort, employers have the opportunity to identify specific candidates who are well-suited to their business and current labor needs.
- > In meeting potential participants prior to the start of a training program, employers have the opportunity to attract the strongest candidates to their company before their competitors.

OPTIONS FOR EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

This table offers several roles that employers can play in the participant selection process. Feel free to define your own role for employers. These strategies are not mutually exclusive, as long as you have enough employer partners who are interested in getting involved at each step. Each of these activities requires time and effort from both employers and your staff.

For any activity that you select, establish your next steps to make it happen. This might require a culture shift within your organization. Make sure that all relevant staff members are open to incorporating employer input before you bring employers to the table. Be clear with employers about what is expected of them and what impact their participation will have. Also, if the engagement needs to happen with each cohort, create a timeline that reflects the repeated commitment prior to each new course.

SELECTION OPTION	EMPLOYER ROLE	HOW IT HELPS EMPLOYERS	EMPLOYER TIME COMMITMENT	EMPLOYERS INTERESTED	STAFF RESPONSIBLE
Intake criteria creation	Employers work with program staff in creating intake criteria against which potential participants will be assessed for acceptance into the program.	Criteria reflect employer concerns and create greater legitimacy in final selection.	1 day commitment up front (not per cohort)		
Resume and application review	Employers review applications and resumes from potential trainees and score each applicant based on weighted criteria provided by the program staff. Employer scores are incorporated with other selection criteria.	Provides an early read on who the trainees are and where they are coming from. Intake mirrors the job application process they are familiar with.	1/2 day per cohort—can reduce by distributing applications instead of having all employers review all applications		
Finalist interviews	Employers interview finalists with program staff for final stage of selection. This may also serve as a place for employers to welcome incoming participants.	Opportunity to find out more about who the trainees are and what motivates them. Provides a sense of true partnership.	1-2 days per cohort		

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JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT | TOOL 4.2

PRIORITIZING THE RIGHT SOFT SKILLS

TOOL 4.2

Program participants often arrive with limited “soft skills,” yet these skills are often near the top of a long list of skills, experience, and personal qualities that employers seek in their new employees. Because soft skills can be hard to define, difficult to teach, and challenging to measure, programs need to make sure they devote their limited time to those skills that potential employers value most.

Because many employers embrace the opportunity to talk about what they want in their employees, asking them to share is an easy and productive way to engage them. This will also provide insight into which soft skills are most important at individual companies. You can aggregate these responses to uncover the common needs across the industry.

Provide this worksheet to your employer partners so you can better understand which soft skills are most important to your program. Use their responses as a check against several program elements, specifically:

- > Whether your curriculum teaches all of the soft skills employers want
- > How you talk to employers about the benefit of your program
- > What you tell students about why it is important to learn these skills

WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOL

Employer supervisors of potential new hires

Company Name: _____

Name and Title: _____

IDENTIFYING THE SOFT SKILLS THAT MATTER TO YOU

We would like your input so we can refine our curriculum, properly emphasize the importance of soft skills in our training, and better screen and refer candidates for internships and jobs at your company.

Please help us understand the relative importance of soft skills and attributes for employment at your company. The 28 skills included in this worksheet were included in the U.S. Department of Education's Employability Skills Framework as general skills that are necessary for success in the labor market at all employment levels and in all sectors. We would like to target our training to match your specific needs within these potential skills.

For each of the traits or skills below, choose the option that best reflects that item's importance for entry-level employees at your firm. You may find it useful to review the entire list before beginning to assign scores.

(1) Nice to Have **(2)** Helpful **(3)** Important **(4)** Absolutely Essential

SKILL	1	2	3	4	SKILL	1	2	3	4
Responsibility					Managing Time and Other Resources				
Self-discipline					Understanding, Evaluating, and Using a Variety of Information				
Flexibility					Communicating Effectively in Multiple Formats				
Integrity					Understanding Relationships Among System Components				
Initiative					Applying IT Appropriately/ Effectively				
Professionalism					Reading				
Self-worth					Writing				
Willingness to Learn					Applied Math				
Acceptance of Responsibility for Growth					Applied Science				
Can Work Independently or on Team					Analytical Skills				
Communicate Effectively					Reasoning Skills				
Positive Attitude					Planning Skills				
Contributes to overall goals of workplace					Organizing Skills				
Problem Solving					Making Sound Decisions				

Please describe any other soft skills critical to your company: _____

We would enjoy discussing your responses in person. Thank you for your interest.

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EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT | TOOL 4.3

FINDING SKILLS IN LMI RESOURCES

TOOL 4.3

Curriculum is developed and improved in response to a wide variety of factors, such as learning styles, student literacy and skill levels, and access to facilities and technology. In terms of occupational skills, the specific needs of your employers should drive your curriculum. This tool is a starting point to help you develop curriculum that is likely to appeal to employers in your sector using O*NET, an online federal resource, as well as sources of real-time labor market information (LMI). Use the table within this tool to track the key occupational training elements in your program. In addition to informing your instruction, you can use O*NET's job skills data and other LMI sources to check your industry assumptions with employers.

WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOL

Program managers, curriculum development staff

LEARNING FROM O*NET AND OTHER SOURCES

O*NET is a tool for analyzing job requirements and career pathways. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, O*NET is a go-to source for education, training, experience, and skill attainment information for jobs across the entire country.

Frame your search. Before O*NET can help you, you need to know what you're looking for. Come up with a list of words or phrases that capture key elements of your program. This could be the **occupations** or **industry** that you'd like to place workers in, particular **specialty areas** such as "green" or "weatherization," **certifications** that your employers have requested, or other **skills** that are central to your training program.

Identify occupations. Visit <http://www.onetonline.org/find/> and plug your keywords and phrases into the search box. O*NET will return a list of occupations that overlap with your key identifiers. They are organized by Standard Occupational Codes, which have been developed by the U.S. Department of Labor. Review the list and select those occupations that best match your program.

Get details. **Click on each of your selected occupations** to generate a detailed list of relevant information. The tasks, detailed work activities, and tools and technology provide a few perspectives on what skills are most useful to your participants.

Explore current, local, in-demand skills and competencies. Using the same list of occupations researched in O*NET, use real-time labor market information as a cross reference to pull information on basic skills, specialized skills, and certifications.

While traditional resources such as O*NET provide robust occupational descriptions, O*NET's collection methodology includes long periods of time between updates, and the information is not regionally specific. In a fast paced, dynamic economy where globalization and technology innovation are redefining the nature of work, monitoring occupational trends requires gathering information from multiple resources, including conversations with employers and emerging LMI resources.

Real-time LMI technology aggregates Internet job postings from local, regional and national job boards including company websites. Software such as Burning Glass Labor/Insight offers powerful artificial intelligence-based parsing tools through which details about education and training requirements, certifications, skills and licensing may be extracted from the text of Internet job postings. The resulting database of job postings can serve as a valuable complement to O*Net's database of occupational knowledge, skills, and abilities by helping to identify emerging trends in job classifications and in-demand professional and specialized skills.

INFORM CURRICULUM

Work with instructors to compare the information from O*NET and other sources to the skills already taught in your program. Capture this comparison in the table below, and use the results as a guide to curriculum elements key to your industry and to technologies that you should use in class.

What's missing from your program that appears in O*NET and other sources? Do you teach any skills that aren't listed in O*NET and these other sources? If so, describe why they are important to the curriculum and consider what sources (an employer, another training provider) you used to establish their value to the industry. Then review the table to determine if there are curriculum elements that you should add or remove.

PREPARE FOR EMPLOYER OUTREACH

Ultimately, you need to meet the needs of local employers, not O*NET or other LMI sources. Use the comparison of your LMI research findings to your curriculum as the starting point for discussions with employer partners. Be prepared to further refine your curriculum based on their thoughts.

Real-time LMI resources can help enhance employer engagement by helping to identify employers from different industries hiring a particular occupation, as well as providing them with specific data points/agenda items to enliven your conversations.

O*NET/REAL-TIME LMI REVIEW OF YOUR CURRICULUM

O*NET LIST FOR: (OCCUPATION NAME)	IN YOUR PROGRAM? YES OR NO	IF YES, DESCRIBE HOW
Tasks 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10.		
Work Activities 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10.		

O*NET LIST FOR: (OCCUPATION NAME)	IN YOUR PROGRAM? YES OR NO	IF YES, DESCRIBE HOW
Tools/Technology 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10.		
Basic/Workforce Readiness Skills		
In-Demand Skills/Industry Recognized Certificates		
Existing Technical training elements not reflected in O*NET 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.		

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JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT | TOOL 4.4

TEACHING INDUSTRY SKILLS AND CREDENTIALS

TOOL 4.4

Training programs can align the industry skills they teach with what businesses need by engaging employers in two roles: 1) helping identify and vet the skills and credentials covered by your curriculum; and 2) helping with instruction. By asking for the curriculum support, regardless of whether the employer partners are able to participate in instruction, programs demonstrate that they are interested in teaching the right skills, that their trainees are being taught by skilled practitioners, and that the instruction results in an industry-recognized credential. Use this worksheet to develop and track employer feedback and participation in each of the industry skills your program teaches and the resulting credentials for program graduates.

WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOL

Curriculum developers, lead instructors, program managers

EMPLOYER FEEDBACK ON INDUSTRY SKILLS AND CREDENTIALS

Every occupation has a list of “hard skills” critical to success in a job or career. Your ability to effectively teach the right hard skills will be a key factor in whether an employer chooses to become involved with your program. This means you want employers to think that you are teaching the industry skills they need.

Before you approach employers for advice on your curriculum, develop a list of the skills and industry-recognized credentials you teach that reflect the industry. You can build this skills list using O*NET and real-time LMI (see *Tool 4.3*), through a task analysis of the jobs targeted by your program, with the advice of your employer committee or other trusted partners, or based on the curricula of other successful training programs in the same field. Ask employers whether your set of skills matches what they think should be taught.

Job training will be most helpful if it leads to industry-recognized credentials that signal to employers that program graduates have the expertise that they value. Ask employers which credentials make a difference in their hiring and promotion decisions or that they otherwise factor into their workforce decisions. Feedback from employers on which credentials they respect and how they use them can help you make sure that the credentials within your program are, in fact, industry-recognized.

Asking employers to teach part of the curriculum is a good way to open this conversation. You can also ask if these skills and credentials match the criteria they use when hiring a new worker. When gathering feedback, ask about not only the skills and credentials on your list, but also what is missing.

EMPLOYERS AS TEACHERS

Employers will trust your program graduates more if they have been taught by knowledgeable and experienced instructors. Some of the best teachers of industry-specific hard skills are not traditional teachers, but are current practitioners at local businesses. Many of these employers make themselves available to help teach industry-specific hard skills. Their employees serve as presenters, instructors, coaches, curriculum developers, and “train-the-trainer” teachers. As an added benefit, this support is often provided for free to training programs.

Ask employers which of the industry skills they can help deliver, and try to get employers involved in as much of the curriculum as possible.

Use the worksheet on the next page to track both employer feedback on the industry skills in your curriculum and employer support in instructional delivery.

TRACKING EMPLOYER SUPPORT IN INSTRUCTION

Targeted occupations: _____

Describe how you identified these skills and credentials as critical to the curriculum: _____

INDUSTRY SKILL OR CREDENTIAL	COMPANY AND EMPLOYEE	COMMITMENT TO TEACH	COMMITMENT TO ASSIST	FEEDBACK
Skills				
Industry-Recognized Credentials				
Other skills or credentials recommended by employers				

SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Targeted occupations: Solar Photovoltaic Installation Technician

Describe how you identified these skills as critical to the curriculum: Taken from NABCEP PV Installation Professional Job Task Analysis

INDUSTRY SKILL OR CREDENTIAL	COMPANY AND EMPLOYEE	COMMITMENT TO TEACH	COMMITMENT TO ASSIST	FEEDBACK
Skills				
Verify client needs <i>Confirm location of equipment; Address aesthetic concerns</i>	Solar Contracting Company, Samantha R.		Contracting	
Review site survey <i>Evaluate roof condition; Evaluate desired array locations; Locate solar equipment; Locate conduit paths; Evaluate roof structure; Determine obstructions; Conduct site hazard assessment; Identify staging/lifting/access</i>	PV Firm, Maria L.	All skills in this section		PV Firm, Maria L. All skills in this section
Confirm system sizing <i>Arrange modules in mounting area</i>				
Review storage system design	Storage Solutions Inc, Henry F.			This is the most important skill for new hires—hard to find
Confirm string size calculations				
Review component selection <i>Confirm component compatibility</i>				
Review wiring/conduit calculations <i>Confirm conductor ampacity calcs; Confirm conduit fill calculations; Confirm conductor run distance; Confirm appropriate insulation type</i>	Storage Solutions Inc., Greg D.			Less important in new hire, already many with this skill
Review overcurrent protection				

INDUSTRY SKILL OR CREDENTIAL	COMPANY AND EMPLOYEE	COMMITMENT TO TEACH	COMMITMENT TO ASSIST	FEEDBACK
Skills (continued)				
Review fastener selection <i>Confirm fastener selection;</i> <i>Confirm env. conditions assessment;</i> <i>Confirm compatibility of fasteners;</i> <i>Confirm fastener types;</i> <i>Confirm pilot hole specs;</i> <i>Confirm fastener assembly</i>	Anna B.	Can teach any or all-available for 1/2 day		
Review plan sets				
Industry-Recognized Credentials				
NABCEP PV Installation Professional	John D., Susie R.			Main credential that they seek
Other skills recommended by employers:				

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JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT | TOOL 4.5

WORK-BASED EXPERIENCE

TOOL 4.5

Workforce development programs always face a tricky challenge. Employers often won't hire people who don't have any experience, but training participants can't get experience because employers won't hire them. Resolving this dilemma requires that your program includes some meaningful experience in the workplace, and that program design is not possible without employer hosts. Reach out to your employer partners and discuss this issue with them. Note the potential benefits of work-based experience to employers—such as the opportunity to get to know potential employees—and find out if they feel this would help their business. Ask what kinds of on-the-job opportunities they would consider providing and what they need to feel comfortable committing. Use this tool to begin that process and to organize your planning as you implement work-based experience in your program.

WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOL

Curriculum development staff, job developers

As you plan to integrate work-based experiences into your program, compare the possibilities of different options and map out which action steps are required to implement them. Success requires the commitment of your employer partners, so listen to their interests and concerns. In particular, consider the work-based experiences that work the best for them and listen to their hesitations or needs in hosting your participants.

TYPES OF WORK-BASED EXPERIENCES

- > **Paid and unpaid Internships:** Employers define a brief job or project that requires the intern to use and improve specific skills under the guidance of a supervisor. Learning goals and achievement goals are set by the employer and the experience is formally incorporated into the training curriculum. When the internships are paid stipends are set and paid by the employer unless funds are available from the training program. Remember that unpaid internships must comply with the Fair Labor Standards Act.
- > **Temporary employment:** Employers “hire” the employee for a set duration to perform duties similar to those in the jobs participants are training for. Often, this occurs through a temporary employment agency. Temporary employment can be more easily incorporated into a training program if work is part-time so that participants can spend roughly half their program time working and half in training and skills classes.
- > **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act On-the-Job Training:** Employers provide short-term, structured training as part of their workers’ job responsibilities. The public workforce system reimburses the employer, generally up to 50 percent of the participant’s wages, for the costs of training and supervision. This can help incentivize businesses to hire new workers who still require some occupational training to succeed in their new job.
- > **Ask employers** for other options such as apprenticeships that work for them for trainees to gain real job experience at their company during training.

EMPLOYER NEEDS

Even when employers are interested in hosting your participants during training, they may have concerns about what is required to play this role. Ask them what the potential barriers to participation are and how you can address them. Potential topics to discuss include:

- > **Training first:** Your participants may need to learn certain skills before joining the workplace, so you can discuss how to align your curriculum with the work-based experiences.
- > **Assistance for supervisors:** Supervisors on the worksite may not be prepared to mentor your participants or may be worried about the time that it would take to manage them.
- > **Paperwork:** Employers have limited time and don’t want to deal with extra bureaucracy. Do what you can to minimize the paperwork they have to complete when they host your participants.
- > **Liability:** Be clear about legal liability for your participants when they are on a job site. Employers may not be willing to take on your participants if it requires assuming liability.

The [Jobs to Careers Work-Based Learning Toolkit](http://www.jff.org/publications/work-based-learning-toolkit-resources-jobs-careers) provides additional resources to incorporate work-based learning into your programs. <http://www.jff.org/publications/work-based-learning-toolkit-resources-jobs-careers>

TYPE OF WORK-BASED EXPERIENCE	EMPLOYERS INTERESTED	EMPLOYER NEEDS	TIMELINE	STAFF RESPONSIBLE	NEXT STEPS
Internship, OJT, etc.	List employers who are open to hosting	Summarize what the interested employers require from you to host	Target date to begin work-based experience	Lead within your organization	Action items to begin work-based opportunities
Paid Internship					
Unpaid Internship					
Temporary Employment					
WIOA On-the-Job Training					