

INDIANA PARTNERSHIP PENTAGON

Meeting 5 | Employer Engagement & Workforce Alignment



ENGAGING INDUSTRIES AND EMPLOYERS IN ATTAINMENT EFFORTS

MODERATOR

✉ [Dan Peterson](#), Vice President, Industry and Government | Cook Group, Inc.

RESOURCE EXPERTS

✉ [De'Niece Harrison-Hudson](#), Community Affairs Director | OneAmerica Financial

✉ [Heather Jackson](#), CEO | iXplore

KEY TAKEAWAYS & CONSIDERATIONS

- *Paying students for work-based learning opportunities can aid in breaking down barriers to access to internships and apprenticeships.*
 - Students in the OneAmerica Financial Pathways program are paid for their work there. Treating students like employees, not only by paying them, but also in their work at a business, will help them develop soft and transferable skills for their future in the workforce.
- *Utilizing technology and networks that students are already accustomed to, like virtual reality, can increase their interest in career pathways.*
 - iXplore utilizes virtual reality headsets to allow students to explore career pathways of several different industries. These virtual reality headsets are also available in non-English languages to increase accessibility. It is iXplore's goal to have all 16 "career clusters" represented in headsets stationed at schools by 2025.
 - For underserved students especially, it can be difficult to identify internship opportunities that they might be eligible for. Leveraging students' networks and community organizations to communicate work-based learning opportunities can be an effective recruitment tool.
- *In order to make connections with higher education attainment efforts, employers must take actionable steps to reach potential students.*
 - For example, creating a narrative around their industry that entices students will help them in visualizing a pathway for themselves in that business or industry. This narrative approach can also apply to engaging with adult learners and incarcerated students.
 - Employers can also leverage connections with faith-based and community organizations to recruit students and garner interest. Doing so will help pour value back into the community by fostering a sense of collaboration.

RESOURCES

- [Connect-iX](#) | iXplore™ began planning and prototyping the Connect-iX Career Exploration concept nearly three years ago. They heard directly from thousands of Indiana students, counselors, & community stakeholders about how this approach and technology can close the gaps in understanding career options. They are now working with industry partners to expand the program & roadshow for fall 2025 and beyond.
- [OneAmerica Financial Pathways Program](#) | This initiative by OneAmerica Financial, an Indianapolis-based organization, provides local talent with financial internship opportunities, one-on-one mentoring and career coaching, and resources for financial literacy. The Pathways Program awards about \$25,000 in scholarships monthly and has over 60 graduates from its programs.
- [Boeing & Thurgood Marshall College Fund \(TCMF\) Partnership](#) | This collaboration between Boeing and TCMF supports programming at HBCUs that are TCMF members that connect students with entry-level jobs and internships and provide students with the opportunity to explore career pathways at Boeing.

Commented [GU1]: OneAmerica recently re-branded to OneAmerica Financial. Can you update throughout?

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UNDERSTANDING HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE NEEDS

MODERATOR

✉ [Josh Garrison](#), Senior Associate Commissioner and Chief of Staff | Indiana Commission for Higher Education

RESOURCE EXPERTS

✉ [Molly Dodge](#), Senior Vice President, Workforce and Careers | Ivy Tech Community College

✉ [Jason Bearce](#), Vice President, Education and Workforce Development | Indiana Chamber of Commerce

KEY TAKEAWAYS & CONSIDERATIONS

- *Ensuring that higher education curriculum aligns with workforce and employer needs will allow students to have the skills they need to be employed immediately after graduation.*
 - In Ivy Tech Community College's strategic plan, [Higher Education at the Speed of Life](#), they outline a need for program expansion and implementation to be in response to current employer needs. This can be done through establishing trusted partnerships with agencies & regional workforce boards and being flexible with academic programming.
- *According to this [annual survey](#) from the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, employers report a large number of underqualified candidates for vacant positions.*
 - In 2023, 67% of jobs were left open due to underqualified applicants and 51% of employers are leaving vacant positions open.
 - Employers also reported that their biggest workforce challenge is attracting/recruiting workers.
 - To solve this problem, employers must be "all hands on deck" to be collaborators and establish "grow your own" programs to foster growth with their own employees.
- *Concerted efforts are needed to foster employer-higher education connections in rural communities.*
 - In rural areas, there are typically a thinner employer base that consists of mostly small and medium-sized businesses that do not have the same capacity as large companies to think about their employment pipeline.
 - Leaning on third party organizations to bridge the gap between employers and higher education is paramount in these communities.
- *Engaging students as early as middle school in making workforce connections helps foster thought and planning in their postsecondary future.*
 - For many students, the only information they receive about postsecondary options comes from school counselors, who primarily provide information on institutions on higher education and not on workforce pathways.
 - Being intentional about having courses in high school being informed by employers and higher education will help correct misconceptions about students' interests and aptitudes.

RESOURCES

- [Achieve Your Degree Program \(Ivy Tech Community College\)](#) | This initiative is a collaborative effort between Ivy Tech Community College and nearly 300 Indiana employers. If a student's employer is part of this partnership, they can earn an associate degree or credential in a discipline approved by their employer for minimal or no up-front cost.
- [Next Level Jobs Workforce Ready Grant](#) | The Indiana Commission for Higher Education (IN-CHE) offers the Next Level Jobs Workforce Ready grant for Indiana residents who have completed their high school diploma but have not attained a postsecondary degree or credential. The grant covers the tuition and fees for students participating in eligible high-value certificate programs at select institutions of higher education. The grant is available for students for two years and covers the certificate program's course credit requirements.

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- [BlueSky Tennessee Institute](#) | This program involves Blue Cross Blue Shield and East Tennessee State University developing an accelerated curriculum to offer bachelor's degrees in two years. While not in Indiana, this partnership reflects the purpose of aligning curriculum with workforce needs. Programs like BlueSky Tennessee Institute engage students in the relevant coursework quickly to help them secure employment with Blue Cross Blue Shield afterward.