EAB

Critical Disciplines to Grow **Employer Partnerships**

Critical Disciplines to
Grow Employer Partnerships

COE Forum

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Supporting Members in Best Practice Implementation

Resources Available Within Your Membership

This publication is only the beginning of our work to assist members in finding high-impact employer partners. Recognizing that ideas seldom speak for themselves, our ambition is to work actively with members of the COE Forum to decide which practices are most relevant for your organization, to accelerate consensus among key constituencies, and to save implementation time.

For additional information about any of the services below—or for an electronic version of this publication—please visit our website (eab.com), email your organization's dedicated advisor, or email research@eab.com with "COE Forum 'Critical Disciplines to Grow Employer Partnerships' Request" in the subject line.

Implementation Road Maps and Tools

Throughout the publication, this symbol will alert you of any corresponding tools and templates available in the Toolkit at the back of this book. These tools are also available on our website at eab.com.

Recorded and Private-Label Webconference Sessions

Our website includes recordings of two hour-long webconferences that walk you through the practices highlighted in this publication.

Forum experts are also available to conduct private webconferences with your team.

Unlimited Expert Troubleshooting

Members may contact the consultants who worked on any report to discuss the research, troubleshoot obstacles to implementation, or run deep on unique issues. Our staff conducts hundreds of telephone consultations every year.

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Our experts regularly visit campuses to lead half-day to daylong sessions focused on highlighting key insights for senior leaders or helping internal project teams select the most relevant practices and determine next steps.

All COE Forum resources are available to members in unlimited quantity.

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Executive Summary

Critical Disciplines to Grow Employer Partnerships

The Higher Education Sector Is Undergoing a Period of Financial Change

A decline in traditional demographics and decreased government support presents a two-pronged financial imperative. Thirty-six states are projected to see slower growth or declines in the high school graduation rate over the next 15 years, and only 10 states are currently producing the majority of high school graduates. This decline in traditional demographics is coupled with a similar decline in state funding. While states appropriated an average of $8,380 per student in 2008, this amount dropped to $6,954 by 2016.

Facing increasing pressure to find sustainable sources of revenue, universities turn to continuing and online education units. With traditional sources of revenue being unpredictable or nonexistent, universities are turning to Continuing and Online Education (COE) units and employer partnerships as a way to find new sources of enrollments and revenue. Counted among the most externally facing divisions on campus, COE units boast experience in serving mid-career professionals, delivery expertise in multiple modalities, and the ability to quickly innovate on program and credential design.

Despite obvious advantages, COE units currently provide an incomplete solution. COE units have historically struggled to find and sustain partnerships with the employers in their area. These units typically receive a mere 14% of revenue from employer tuition reimbursement, a figure that is down from 18% in 2012. Likewise, the average COE unit five-year growth rate currently sits at six percent (down from 18% in 2012).

Employer Partnerships in a B2B World Require a New Approach to Sales and Marketing

Potential failure paths litter the current COE approach to employer partnerships. As organizations become increasingly complex, today's search, decision, and buying cycles have become exponentially longer, presenting more opportunities for COE units to fall short. Three main setbacks keep universities from reaching best-fit partners during today's longer sales cycles: One, COE units adopt an overly reactive sales approach, waiting for inbound leads instead of prioritizing prospects. Two, Business to Business (B2B) sales staff often feel they don't have enough clout on campus to present a unified face to employers, often leading to the idea that their dream partners are out of reach. Last, COE units define partnership within very narrow parameters, ignoring the myriad ways a university might partner with local employers outside of traditional custom training.

Complex employer behavior renders the traditional funnel approach irrelevant. The B2B sales process involves numerous stakeholders, a long evaluation process, and a complex array of offerings and services. Focusing on identifying strategic partner prospects that can be expanded into sustainable relationships—a key feature of the flipped funnel approach—works best for COE units engaging in B2B marketing.

Critical Disciplines in Growing Corporate Training Revenue

Identify best-fit partners. Finding partners that match with university offerings is a critical first step of a successful B2B enterprise. However, most universities view partnerships through a narrow lens, only considering custom training engagements and the most attractive brands when determining best-fit partners.

> **Look beyond the traditional definition of partnership and mine internal data to build out a prioritized partner list.** Universities that seek to identify prospects can mine internal data to build out a list of employers that already seek university services. Expanding past the custom training engagements that traditionally define university/employer partnerships allows COE units to find novel ways to engage with businesses across campus.

> **Gather internal intelligence by bringing together disparate campus units.** Internal silos prevent B2B sales staff from identifying the full scope of employer engagement on campus. By creating a centralized council of externally facing units, universities can develop holistic employer-facing messaging and prioritize industries that align most with the institution as a whole.

Executive Summary (cont.)

Critical Disciplines to Grow Employer Partnerships

Speed decision in a consensus purchase. Once universities have identified prospective partners, their next challenge is twofold: they must develop a deep, nuanced understanding of employer needs, and then articulate how those needs match with university offerings. This remains a challenge among today's complex organizations, as the university must achieve buy-in from multiple functions within an organization—each with a potentially conflicting challenge.

> **Leverage nuanced industry insight to provide a unified vision of partnership.** COE units can move past surface level insights on employer needs by using advisory boards to pressure test and validate labor market data. Employer feedback allows the COE unit to define distinct, sector-specific talent challenges.

> **Prime prospects for commitment with a comprehensive engagement menu.** Universities that seek to provide a comprehensive vision of partnership can offer an engagement index that serves a dual purpose: One, it enables the institution to see the extent of an employer's relationship on campus, allowing staff to strategically target existing relationships. Two, it provides employer partners with a vision of the full scope of partnership opportunities on campus.

> **Proactively surface employers' needs.** Create a primer document that lays out all the information needed to create a high-quality custom training program, including an audience profile, detailed training-needs analysis, and delivery preferences. Entering the introductory calls with these insights in hand helps COE units effectively shorten the B2B sales cycle.

Communicate the distinct value of higher education. Today's training marketplace is crowded, and universities are typically not the cheapest or most flexible option available to employers. B2B representatives face the continual challenge not only of articulating the value of higher education but also of ensuring that the university is nimble in meeting employer needs.

> **Provide a single point of access via account-based managers.** Universities are seldom organized to facilitate ease of access on the part of the employer. Maintain a team of account managers to ensure that businesses are able to navigate internal bureaucracy and unlock the full value of a higher education partnership.

> **Embed personalized leadership development into current training partnerships.** Companies increasingly seek flexible and inexpensive online training solutions, but their employees find it much harder to access personalized guidance as part of their career development. Coaching aimed at mid-career professionals provides highly valued skills to employees at a low cost to the university.

> **Bring university services to employers to remove burden on human resources staff.** Integrate into the workflow of employers by creating an on-site customer service team to assist partner organizations' employees with enrollment, financial aid, technical, and instructional support during the onboarding process.

Advocate to turn customers into fans. The final challenges faced by COE units engaging in the B2B business cycle are renewal and sustainability. Successful B2B enterprises who cultivate strong and renewable partnerships reap the benefits of word-of-mouth messaging to create new business opportunities.

> **Amplify messages of partnership success through end-user networks.** Leverage the latent power of advisory councils by creating mixed-representation boards at different strategic levels. Impose term limits on board members to ensure the fresh perspectives for every program and industry.

A Guide to the Critical Disciplines

Key Questions Reveal Institutions' Partnership Model Maturity

1

Who do I
partner with?

- *"How do we find prospective partners who will respond to our outreach?"*

- *"Where do I start if we do not have corporate relationships on campus that I can leverage?"*

Go to Section 1, which starts on page 15.

2

How do I win over
stakeholders?

- *"It used to be easier to navigate partner organizations. Now, who do I even approach?"*

- *"How do I demonstrate our institution's value to a room of folks with different goals?"*

Go to Section 2, which starts on page 21.

3

Why is a university
the right partner?

- *"How can I make the case that our offerings are superior to cheap training modules employers can find online?"*

- *"What services are worth the cost to employer partners?"*

Go to Section 3, which starts on page 29.

Understanding Your Partnership Maturity

The following questions have been designed to help you evaluate your current activities. Use them to determine which of the strategies presented are most relevant and needed for your transition.

1. New to Pursuing Partnerships with Industry	Yes	No
Do you have a list of prospective partner leads? *If you answered "No" to this question, please refer to pages 16 through 17.*		
Do you have employer leads and a strategy to prioritize them in collaboration with other units on campus? *If you answered "No" to this question, please refer to pages 18 through 19.*		

2. Unable to Convert Interest into Partnership Decision	Yes	No
Do you routinely use advisory board sessions to teach employers about workforce trends and learn about specific organizational needs? *If you answered "No" to this question, please refer to pages 22 through 24.*		
Do you maintain a range of engagement options to appeal to various leaders within an organization? *If you answered "No" to this question, please refer to page 25.*		
Do you routinely challenge employer-articulated problems to understand root-cause issues of talent and performance problems? *If you answered "No" to this question, please refer to pages 26 through 27.*		

3. Struggle to Compete with Nimble, Inexpensive Competition	Yes	No
Do you maintain staff to serve as a single point of access for partner institutions? *If you answered "No" to this question, please refer to page 30.*		
Do you include employee-centric services in partnerships to ensure employee engagement? *If you answered "No" to this question, please refer to page 31.*		
Do you provide tailored or customized service to partner employees? *If you answered "No" to this question, please refer to page 32.*		

Critical Disciplines to Grow Employer Partnerships

Partnerships a Growing Part of University Strategy

The higher education industry is in a period of significant financial stress. The demographic for college-aged students has plateaued, and state support for public institutions varies widely across state lines. As a result, universities are under increasing pressure to find and sustain alternative sources of revenue.

Faced with these challenges, universities increasingly rely on COE units to generate revenue to support mission-critical programs and offerings. However, this is currently an imperfect solution. COE units have struggled to fully capitalize on employer partnerships in a sustainable and profitable manner. For most COE units, less than 14% of revenue comes from tuition reimbursement, and the average COE unit five-year growth rate stands at a mere six percent.

The Challenge

Tuition Reimbursement

14% Proportion of COE revenue from employer tuition reimbursement, down from 18% in 2012

Revenue Growth

6% Average COE unit five-year growth rate, down from 18% in 2012

The Opportunity

1 Expertise in Serving Mid-Career Professionals

Experience working with adult learners across industries

2 Online, Hybrid, and Face-to-Face Options

Delivery expertise including combining methods to best augment eLearning with personal guidance

3 Flexible, Customizable, and Stackable Credentials

Program innovations that can meet individualized needs of managers across roles, functions, and industries

While faced with an admittedly daunting mandate, COE units boast features that provide an opportunity to capitalize on employer partnerships. For one, COE units maintain deep expertise in serving mid-career professionals, who comprise the largest unmet training need for most organizations. In addition, COE units can alter delivery modalities to suit learner needs, a boon to employers who seek development but require minimal time-lost from their workers. Finally, flexible and stackable credentials offer the benefit of appealing to both employers and employees, creating opportunities to sell partnerships and capitalize on student interest in re-enrollment.

Current Sales Approach Is Outdated

Common Failure Paths Illustrate Difficulty of Right-Fit Partnerships

While COE units boast expertise in the training services they offer, their current sales approach is outdated and littered with potential pitfalls. Interviews with B2B practitioners revealed three common failure paths that hold universities back from realizing the full benefits of industry partnerships.

Overly Reactive Approach to Sales

Institutions typically adopt an overly reactive sales approach, diverting their thinly stretched resources from pinpointing their strongest leads. In a digital age where the consumer demands instantaneous answers, staff time is apportioned to maximize responsiveness. In reality, this distracts universities from identifying the strongest or best-fit partners, as they continually scramble to respond to inquiries regardless of real interest or fit.

Dream Partners Out of Reach

B2B sales staff often feel unable to articulate their full offerings to dream employer partners. COE units can lack the internal clout on campus to leverage existing relationships with university advancement or alumni services. This leads to difficulty articulating the full benefits of a university partnership to a prospective partner. As a result, partners that could promise desired scale and revenue remain unattainable.

Narrow View of Partnerships

Finally, a narrow view of what a partnership entails artificially constrains the ability of B2B staff to meet the varied needs of industry partners. Custom training is seen as the gold standard of a partnership, but institutions can often meet employer needs with existing coursework or faculty expertise as well. Without buy-in from the institution at large, COE units will struggle to differentiate offerings from private trainers or online providers.

> **Reacting Leaves Little Margin for Error**
>
> "We had the opportunity to partner with a large petroleum corporation on a training contract. We flew across the globe and bent over backwards to meet their needs, and **by the end we had lost $200,000**."
>
> *COE Dean, Public Research University*

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Longer Search, Decision, and Buying Cycles

Partnerships Mimic B2C Trends, Reflect New Organizational Complexity

The increasingly long decision cycles that are present in today's organizations are a key impediment to universities that are sourcing partnerships with business and industry. As organizations become increasingly large and complex, key decisions around partnerships and purchases necessarily involve more people than ever.

Research on corporate decision-making suggests that the average purchase decision involves more than five people, which presents numerous opportunities for naysayers or doubters to derail a partnership opportunity. Navigating this complexity has led to a doubling of the time it takes to reach a consensus decision.

Current Employer Search Process More Protracted

Browse Websites	Trade Press, Conferences	Create RFP	Evaluate Proposals	Convene Committee	Purchase?

STOP — *Unlikely to find COE site in initial search*

STOP — *Limited COE presence at industry events*

STOP — *Difficulty assessing or explaining need*

STOP — *Reluctance to champion deal in favor of consensus*
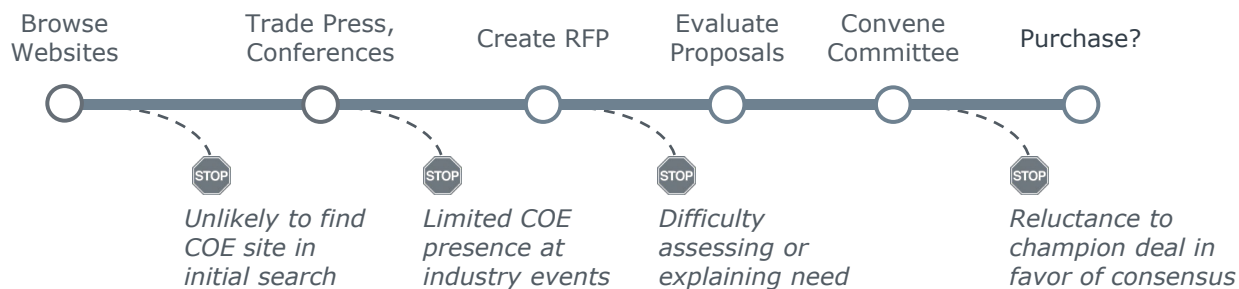
5.4 Average number of stakeholders involved in purchase decisions

97% Percentage of additional time needed to arrive at purchase decisions

The average sales cycle might include as many as five steps before a decision is reached: browsing website materials, attending trade conferences, creating a request for proposals, evaluating those proposals, and finally convening a committee to make the ultimate decision on purchase. This protracted process presents opportunities for failure at every step. Employers might overlook or misunderstand university offerings if COE units lack a substantive web presence. COE units might find difficulty differentiating themselves at industry events or trade shows, where they typically lack presence, and private training providers source many of their business opportunities. In this environment, how do COE units cut through the noise to engage with prospects, demonstrate value, and agree on scope of partnership?

B2B Changes in a Client-Empowered World

Complex Employer Purchasing Flips Traditional B2B Sales Processes

In recent years, marketing experts have sought to alter the typical approach to communicating the value of COE offerings to prospective partners. While the traditional funnel approach of building broad awareness, cultivating leads, and motivating enrollment has worked in Business to Consumer (B2C) marketing for open-enrollment programs, navigating B2B sales requires a different approach that can evolve to fit business demand. B2B sales typically involve numerous stakeholders, a long evaluation process, and a complex array of offerings and services.

Awareness

Consideration

Transaction

Identify

Expand

Engage

Advocate
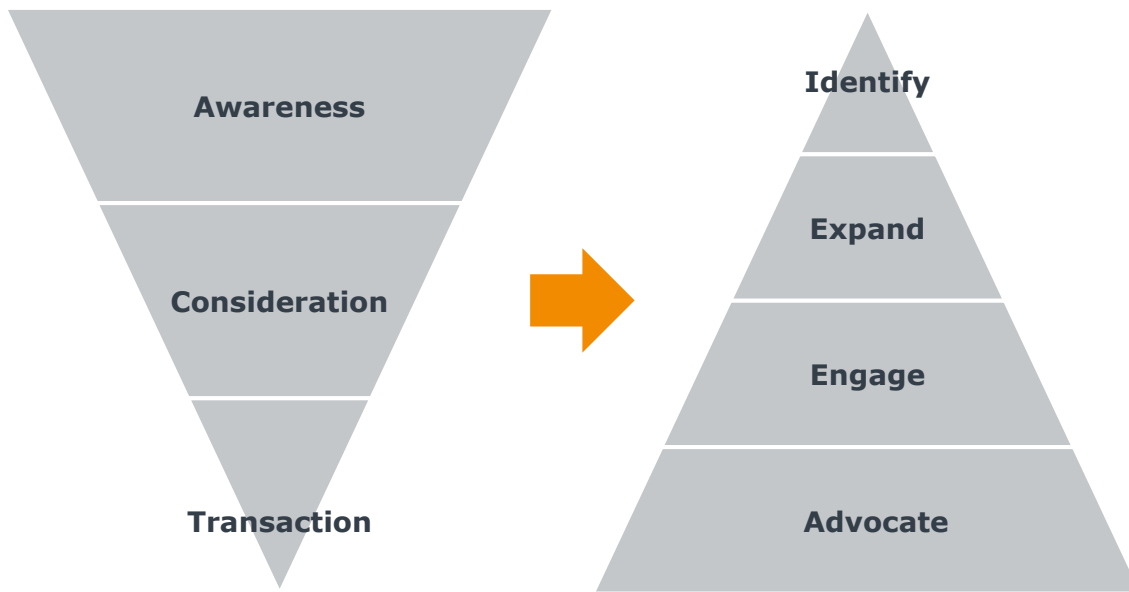
The flipped funnel approach works for B2B marketers because it allows them to focus their outreach efforts on strategic partner prospects. Broad-based models of outreach simply do not work for organizations continuously inundated with approaches from unknown suppliers. Instead, colleges and universities can find success by first identifying the types of organizations that have been successful partners in the past. Those without a history of partnership success can create a profile of partners based on desired outcomes and services offered.

Once target partners have been identified, the B2B marketer expands to multiple individuals within the organization, understanding their role-based goals and needs. Only then can B2B marketers begin to engage with their prospects on potential scope of a partnership.

New Disciplines in Securing Best-Fit Partnerships

Identify Best-Fit Partners

1. Mine internal data to identify prospective partners
2. Advance a mission-centered, coordinated approach

Speed Decision in a Consensus Purchase

3. Leverage labor intelligence to identify and motivate partners
4. Provide a unified vision of partnership that addresses multiple influencers
5. Hardwire needs-assessment into partnership development

Communicate the Distinct Value of Higher Ed

6. Create a single point of access to university network
7. Embed employee-centered services to increase engagement
8. Offer on-site customer services to reduce coordinating costs and increase employee results

Advocate to Turn Customers into Fans

9. Amplify messages of partnership success through end-user networks

EAB

Identify Best-Fit Partners

1

- Discipline 1: Mine internal data to identify prospective partners
- Discipline 2: Advance a mission-centered, coordinated approach

Assessing Partnership Fit

Institutions Overemphasize Attractive Partners

When considering potential partners, COE units often find themselves wasting a considerable amount of resources chasing hard-to-access, attractive brands. While evaluating a potential partner involves measuring both attractiveness and fit, institutions tend to over-value attractiveness because determining fit can be subjective and opaque.

Typical Evaluation Process Over-Values Partner Attractiveness
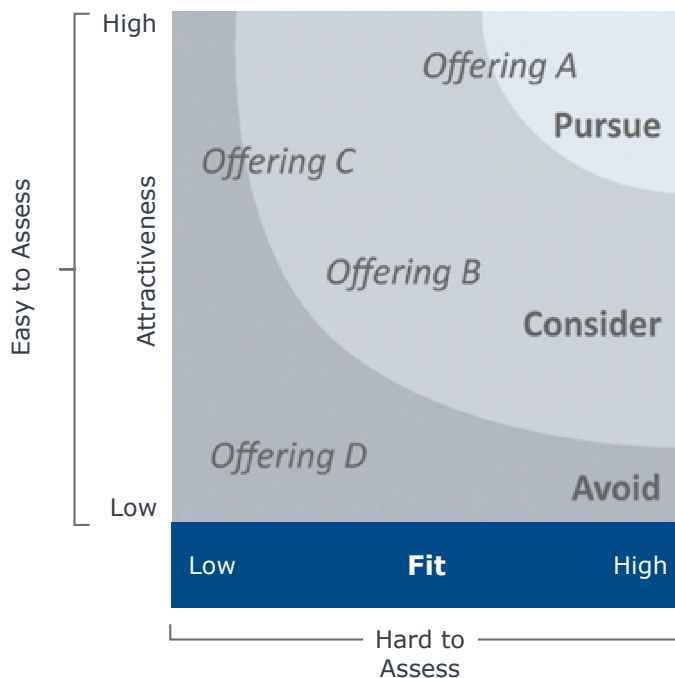
The Problem of Leading with Yes

> "When I first came to campus, I spent some time reviewing our B2B strategy and processes. I was shocked by the lack of rigor or any sort of metrics in the process. **We were spending huge amounts of time on developing programs, without ever really considering whether working with these partners was worth the effort."**
>
> *COE Dean, Private Master's University*

In lieu of a viable way to determine "best-fit," universities blindly lead with "yes," waiting for inbound leads from companies and spending little time evaluating prospective partners. This approach is problematic for several reasons. Some COE deans report wasting resources and time while building programs that turn out to be one-off engagements. Others find it difficult to match current offerings with employer needs. Further, since universities are often left reacting to queries, they only help perpetuate the belief that higher education is out of step with business needs.

Throughout our conversations with COE units, contacts reported that cold-calling leads is a time-intensive exercise that demonstrates little to no return. The message is clear: institutions need a smarter way to proactively identify and prioritize warm leads.

Curating a Homegrown Warm Leads List

Louisiana State University builds a warm leads list of prioritized prospective partners by mining their open enrollment data. After noticing that companies were enrolling employees in disparate courses without considering how LSU could more holistically serve their needs, LSU staff began to routinely survey noncredit students.

LSU uses publicly available location and employee information about company prospects and combines it with key metrics gained from the open enrollment survey, including the number of employees any given company sends to training, their primary reason for enrollment, popular courses attended, the financial assistance rate, and company training spend. This corporate intelligence is then used to create customized sales pitches for the prioritized partners. Building a leads list from data mining took just 10 hours of labor, but it resulted in a 10 percent increase in revenue in LSU's first year of mining data.

Mine Internal COE Data for Quick-Win Leads

LSU | Continuing Education

Assemble **internal intelligence** based upon open enrollment student information form

Employer	Most Popular Course	Company Training Spend
Johnson Construction	Project Management	$18,500
Lafayette Credit Union	Strategic and Organizational Planning	$14,000

Key Data Fields for Collection

- Total employer training spend
- Most popular courses
- Authorizing agents

Warm Leads Offer Quick Boost to Training Revenue

10%
Increase in training revenue in first year of data mining

<10
Hours of total staff time for data mining and consolidation

The **University of Delaware** takes a similar approach by referencing current employer engagement to identify warm leads. Business development staff created a one-page document outlining various ways corporate partners can engage with the institution, from executive education to technology products and career services. Staff at Delaware looked beyond what many institutions would classify as partnership activities, and were able to identify more than 400 employers with existing relationships to the institution. The vast majority of those employers had limited engagements with the college, which presented strong opportunities to upsell and expand the existing partnership.

Identify Partnerships Beyond the Obvious

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE   LERNER COLLEGE OF BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

Executive Education

Corporate Associate Programs

Typical extent of partnership definition

+

Undergraduate Mentoring

MBA Enrollments

Student IT Projects

Broadened Partner Definition Grows Prospect Pool

400+
Existing Lerner College Partners

9%
Of current partners maintain multiple engagements

LSU and the University of Delaware both challenge the typical definition of partnership and approach employers with the necessary knowledge of how they were already benefiting from university programs and services, making a partnership pitch more likely to succeed.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Create a Single View of the Corporate Client

While identifying warm leads is the first step to finding and engaging with best-fit partners, prioritizing among those leads is the next hurdle that institutions face. B2B marketers encounter difficulty in prioritizing among leads due to the high level of institutional support and coordination necessary to determine which partners are best fit for the university as a whole. Without this critical knowledge, COE units lack the building blocks needed to create a comprehensive outreach strategy that engages corporations at multiple touch points.

To break through institutional barriers, **Rochester Institute of Technology** created a Partnership Management Council (PMC) that brings together disparate campus units to create a holistic corporate outreach strategy.

Partnership Management Council Aggregates Critical Data Assets

$R \cdot I \cdot T$
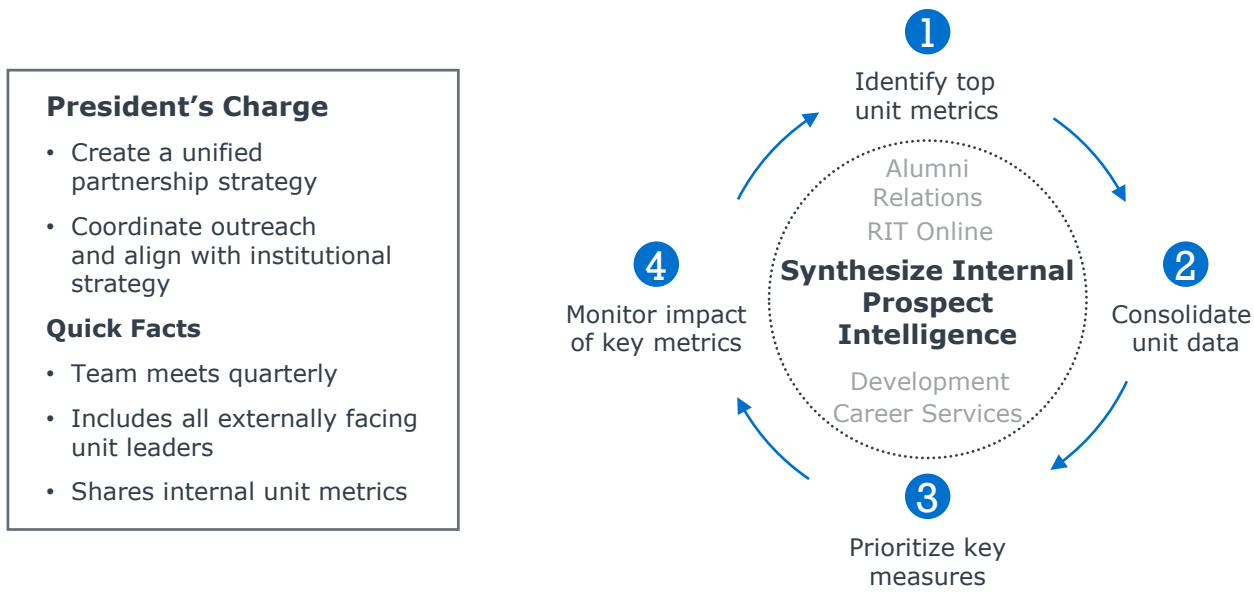
President's Charge

- Create a unified partnership strategy
- Coordinate outreach and align with institutional strategy

Quick Facts

- Team meets quarterly
- Includes all externally facing unit leaders
- Shares internal unit metrics

① Identify top unit metrics

② Consolidate unit data

③ Prioritize key measures

④ Monitor impact of key metrics

Alumni Relations
RIT Online

Synthesize Internal Prospect Intelligence

Development
Career Services

Keys to Success

Accountability from senior leaders

Transparency of data and relationship ownership

Institutional focus rather than unit-level focus

Conceived through a president's charge, the PMC involves all externally facing unit leaders and holds quarterly data-sharing meetings. Once data has been shared, representatives from various campus units are able to identify relationship "owners" and strategize next steps. In the process, the PMC prioritizes some unit metrics over others, recognizing that the institution's goals are not always in lockstep with unit goals.

By focusing on accountability from senior leaders, transparency of data and relationship ownership, and institutional over unit-level focus, the cooperative structure of the PMC effectively allayed unit fears about sharing data and owning existing relationships.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Embed Data and Goals into Account Planning

The key to success at RIT is the analytical approach they take to measuring the data gathered by the PMC.

Once data has been aggregated, the PMC analyzes the fit of each partner with key metrics, including the number of internships an employer is providing to RIT students, research dollars granted, gifts or discounts in kind, number of employed alumni, and custom training purchase value.

The PMC uses the scores from each metric to develop an outreach strategy for contacting prioritized leads. This allows campus units to coordinate their message and avoid making simultaneous asks of employers. In addition, unit leaders can be designated "relationship owners," indicating their unit is the primary existing link between the institution and an employer.

Meeting Agenda Items

1. Aggregate unit data
2. Analyze employer fit scores
3. Prioritize leads for outreach
4. Coordinate message and determine lead owners

Outcomes

⬆ Focus on Silicon Valley partners

⬆ Scope of existing employer partners

Prospect Name: Advanced Technology Inc.

Metric	Value	Fit Score	Sponsor	2017 Goal
Number of Internships	5	+1	VP of Workforce Development, Jay Hill	Grow by 10%
Research Dollars	$250,000	+2	CEO, Martin Johnson	Sustain
Gifts or Discounts in Kind	$100,000	+1	CIO, Jay Figari	Sustain
Number of Employed Alumni	17	+4	CHRO, Ruth Snead	Sustain
Custom Training Purchase Value	$35,000	+3	VP of L&D, Mary McGonigle	Grow by 10%

Next Step: VP of Innovation set up lunch with Mary McGonigle

The data-driven, coordinated outreach approach made possible by the PMC allowed RIT to expand the scope of current employer partnerships. A standout example is their prioritization of Silicon Valley partnerships. Through their strategic focus in this area, they've been able to build a mutually beneficial relationship with an information technology vendor that encompasses faculty research and consulting, a strengthened talent pipeline, and preferred access to software products. These partnerships expanded employment opportunities for graduates and provided new research revenue and advancement funds for the institution.

Please see the "Lead Scoring" toolkit item on page 40 of this publication for further guidance.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

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EAB

Speed Decision in a Consensus Purchase

- Discipline 3: Leverage labor intelligence to identify and motivate partners
- Discipline 4: Provide a unified vision of partnership that addresses multiple influencers
- Discipline 5: Hardwire needs-assessment into partnership development

Customer Insights Surface Common Ground

Successful B2B Sellers Drill Deeply for Contextual Information

Most institutions that engage in B2B sales understand the importance of discrete contextual customer intelligence in tailoring their sales approach, but few are able to move beyond the superficial understanding of a sector that is gained through public market information.

B2B marketers typically rely on a combination of segment insights (including industry reports and press releases), as well as market and public information (including office locations and company websites) to build their sales pitch. These sources of intelligence are key building blocks required to develop a contextual sales strategy, but they often fail to move past a baseline understanding of employer needs.

Institutions that want a more nuanced understanding of industry needs must add context to their sales approach through an examination of labor market data, competitor analysis, and primary and secondary research.

Segment Insights

Gather insights needed to commence customer-specific research

- Industry reports, news accounts, conference speeches

CEB
WHAT THE BEST COMPANIES DO

Market and Public Information

Assemble basic customer knowledge

- Key executive biographies, office locations, number of employees

Typical Practice

Breakthrough Practice

Contextual Customer Information

Capture a tailored view of the customer's ecosystem

- Labor data on skill needs, open job postings, and competitor analysis

Primary and Secondary Research

Understand business model and strategic goals

- Regular communication with key stakeholders

This data is available through our labor intelligence service in the COE Forum, which can provide granular information on which jobs employers are hiring for and what skills current graduates might lack to fill those jobs.

Engaging Key Influencers Increasingly Complex

Knowing who to contact within an organization is one of the biggest obstacles that institutions face when engaging in B2B sales. Research into corporate decision-making shows that the likelihood of a sale decreases as more people become involved in making a decision. Given the complexity of today's organizations, it is a rarity that just one person will have the ability to sign a deal.

More People, Fewer Decisions

Purchase Probability by Size of Buyer Group
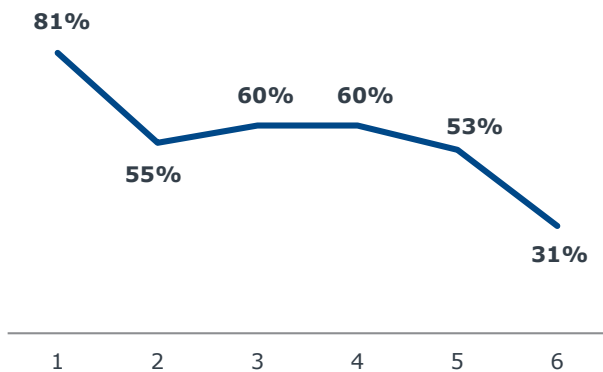
HR Officers Offer Varying Perspectives

Chief L&D Officer   VP, Workforce Development

Chief HR Officer   Benefits Manager
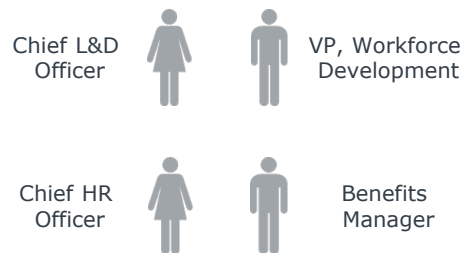
Non-HR Officers Further Cloud the Picture

Chief Technology Officer   Employee

CEO   Business Unit Leader
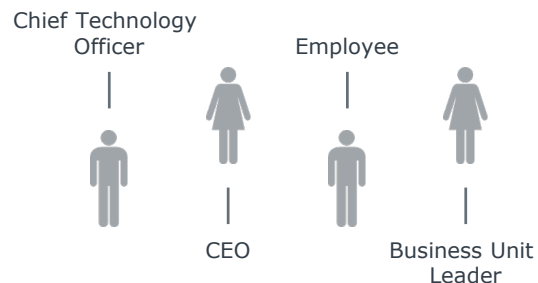
A typical university approach may be to reach out to the human resources department within an organization. However, even within the HR function, different positions will offer varying perspectives that are specific to their subunit goals. For example, the Chief Learning and Development Officer might prioritize training for a skill directly correlated to core business performance, but a benefits manager might prioritize keeping costs low, possibly to the detriment of future training agreements.

Decision-making becomes more complicated when universities also consider the buy-in of other leaders within an organization. Finding consensus between executive buy-in and manager-level design input is key to ensuring that training programs provide maximum utility.

Labor Intel Guides, Motivates Advisory Boards

NOVA Catalyzes Shared Understanding of Strategic Training Needs

In order to gain understanding of the complexity of organizational needs, **Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA)** selected the largest employers in local industries to participate in advisory boards. NOVA found that traditional, national labor market data sets may not capture the unique characteristics of regional employer demand. They decided to turn to their clients—employers—in order to validate data.

Once per quarter, NOVA's workforce development division conducts labor market analysis on Burning Glass and open sources for general employer needs while simultaneously recording inbound training needs. They use this data to identify the employers that account for more than 60% of jobs in a particular field and invite them to sit on advisory boards. Feedback gathered from the advisory boards is used to validate labor market data and create a shared understanding of training needs.

Talent Pool Expertise

Employer Skill Needs

Advisory Boards

Skills Analysis by Segment

- Analyze Burning Glass and other open-source labor market databases

- Conduct data analysis once per quarter to determine segment trends

- Use market data to identify high-priority employer partners

Defined Talent Challenges

- Present long-term, segment-specific employee skill requirements

- Offer feedback on quantitative analysis through actual experience

- Suggest areas for future labor market analysis

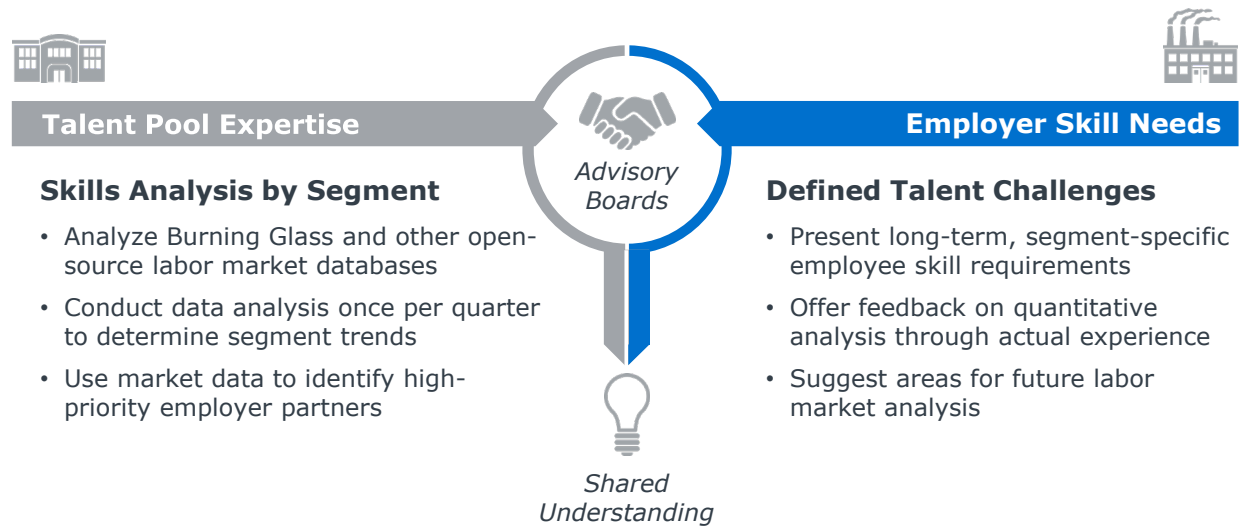*Shared Understanding*

Key Elements to Successful Meeting

Right Audience
Invite VPs of Talent Development or HR

Prepared Agenda
Lead conversation with most high-demand skill

Idea Exchange
Facilitate discussion around data gaps

By keeping their focus on the largest employers in their immediate area, NOVA's staff can tailor their messaging to the few leads of highest-value. Furthermore, the advisory boards focus not only on a specific industry but also on a specific training need to ensure that marketing messages stand out. As a result, NOVA gains credibility as a partner while gathering valuable intelligence to inform future partnership pitches and program development opportunities.

Even when institutions gather deep sector and skill-specific intelligence to bolster their sales messaging to employers, few are able to articulate the myriad ways that employers can find value within a university. Universities offer potential for multiple points of engagement that can solve numerous talent and business problems for partner employers. Without a way to map services not only to business needs but also to discrete goals and outcomes, institutions fall short of engaging prospective partners.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

eab.com

A Comprehensive Vision of Partnership

In light of this challenge, the **University of Delaware** created an engagement menu that primes prospective partners for relationships with the institution.

While most partnerships rely on discrete, engagement-specific relationships, Delaware's engagement index allows the university to understand the broader scope of the employer's relationship. With this context, Delaware is able to strategically target existing relationships to offer expanded engagements.

Engagement Menu Primes C-Suite for Expansive Commitment

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE.   LERNER COLLEGE OF BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

"The idea is to **give every contact a way to engage**. Even if we take a meeting and they have no interest in training, I can get them involved with the institution.

George Irvine, Director of Corporate Programs and Partnerships

Chief Information Officer

Sponsor student work to access cutting-edge technology and cost-conscious labor

Learning and Development Officer

Contract for custom executive education to provide evidence-based training to company leaders

Recruiter

Partner with college to host graduate-level interns to augment talent pipeline

Collegiate Partnerships
Global Enterprise Technology
MIS Projects
Joint Research Projects
Mentoring
MBA & Graduate Degrees
Recruitment
Executive Education
Corporate Associate

ENGAGE WITH LERNER

The "9 Means of Engagement" is a comprehensive document that outlines the different ways departments within a company could engage with the business school. Staff members bring the document to sales meetings to enrich conversations on engagement. If they are meeting with an L&D officer, they might emphasize executive education or custom training, since this position is primarily interested in employee skill development. In contrast, they could promote graduate student technology projects to a Chief Information Officer as a low-cost means to address existing IT challenges.

By leveraging this document, Delaware ensures that there are partnership options for functions across an organization to engage with the institution. This allows Delaware to move past the limits that come with a singular view of "partnership."

Hard to Separate Signal from Noise

Employers Inaccurately or Unhelpfully Self-Assess Talent Problems

Getting in front of the right people and offering a comprehensive set of solutions are critical steps in a successful B2B enterprise—yet institutions still struggle to connect their solutions to employer-articulated problems. Much of this disconnect stems from the fact that officers of a corporate board might articulate the same key business program in vastly different ways; a technology officer might advocate for increased IT investment, while an HR officer would shift focus to deficiencies in corporate culture. The reality is that employers themselves do not always understand their own needs clearly.
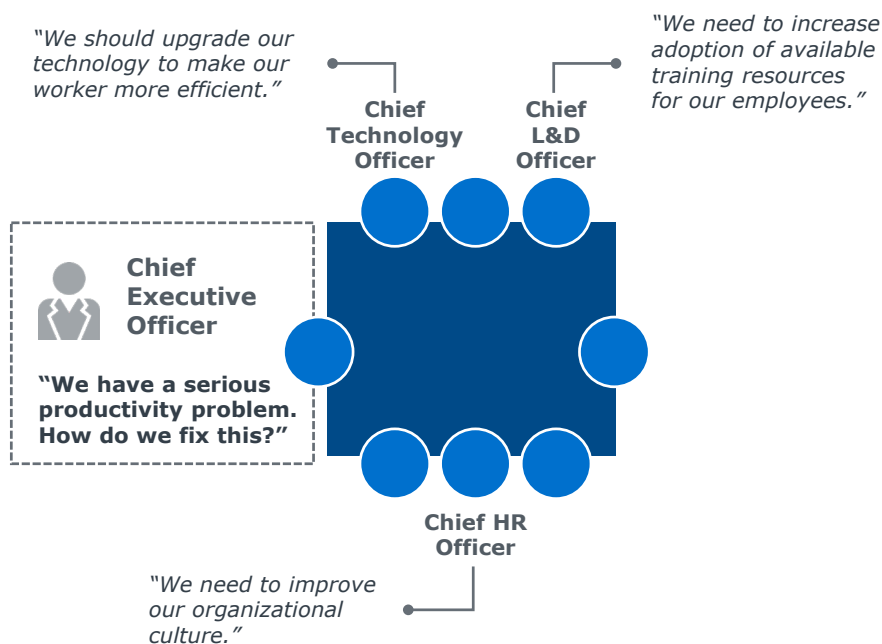
Articulated Needs Neither Comprehensive Nor Specific

"We should upgrade our technology to make our worker more efficient."

"We need to increase adoption of available training resources for our employees."

Chief Technology Officer

Chief L&D Officer

Chief Executive Officer

"We have a serious productivity problem. How do we fix this?"

Chief HR Officer

"We need to improve our organizational culture."

Critical Details Missing to Support COE Response

Names of **key influencers**

Competencies of audience for best-fit training

Current performance levels

Motivational impediments to training success

As a result, institutions that rely on the employer-articulated definition of a problem often lack the critical details needed to build a high-quality partnership engagement and solution. Misidentified problems can lead to poor program design and low employee engagement. In turn, this impedes an institution's ability to renew on one-off training engagements.

Institutions seeking to correctly identify employer challenges must ensure that they gain knowledge of critical details, including performance levels, key influencers, competencies of audiences, and motivational impediments.
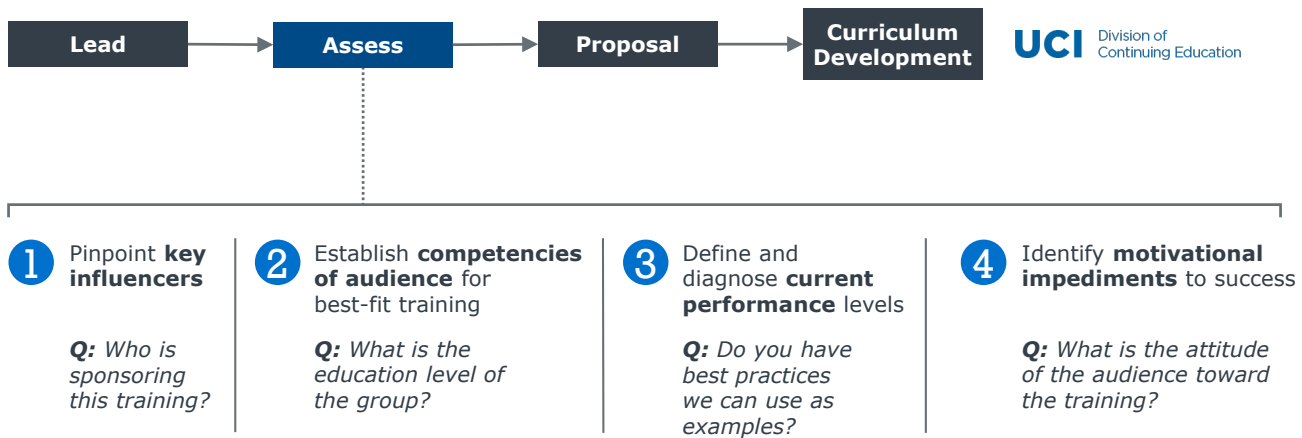
Please see the "Differentiation Brainstorming Guide" toolkit item on page 38, "Corporate Buyer Archetypes" toolkit item on page 45, and "Marketing Strategies for Multiple Influencers" toolkit item on page 47 of this publication for further guidance.

Proactively Surface Influencers' Needs

UC Irvine's HR Pre-assessment Primes Employers for Internal Coordination

Recognizing that initial sales meetings are often unproductive, as HR representatives are typically far removed from the business managers who hold critical context on training needs, the **University of California – Irvine** created a primer assessment that is circulated to prospective partners ahead of an introductory call.

The document lays out all the necessary information UC Irvine needs to create a high-quality custom training program, including basic company information, a detailed analysis of training needs, audience profile, and delivery preferences. It also frames the necessary information for the HR manager, who, while often in charge of liaising with the university, is rarely the person who initiates the training.

Lead	→	**Assess**	→	Proposal	→	**Curriculum Development**	**UCI** Division of Continuing Education

① Pinpoint **key influencers**

Q: Who is sponsoring this training?

② Establish **competencies of audience** for best-fit training

Q: What is the education level of the group?

③ Define and diagnose **current performance** levels

Q: Do you have best practices we can use as examples?

④ Identify **motivational impediments** to success

Q: What is the attitude of the audience toward the training?

Case in Brief

- UC Irvine account managers hold **introductory phone call with prospect**
- **Follow up with assessment** to ease burden on employer and uncover insights for training design
- Insights **accelerate sales cycle and improve training design**

By arming partner stakeholders with key questions, UC Irvine staff enter introductory calls with detailed insights on the employer's needs and the programs that could meet them. As a result, fewer calls and meetings are required to agree on a scope of partnership, effectively shortening the B2B sales cycle. They're also able to lay out clear expectations, leading to higher satisfaction and renewability. The benefits on campus are substantial: 70% of corporate training revenue comes from repeat business.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Communicate the Distinct Value of Higher Education

- Discipline 6: Create a single point of access to university network
- Discipline 7: Embed employee-centered service to increase engagement
- Discipline 8: Offer on-site customer services to reduce coordinating costs and increase employee results

eab.com

Account-Based Management Comes to Higher Ed

UC Irvine's Hybrid Account Managers Break Cost-Quality Trade-Offs

B2B representatives face the continual challenge of articulating the value of the university as a training partner. Employer skepticism is not unfounded: universities are typically not the cheapest or most flexible option available in today's crowded training market. While universities offer a broad array of subject expertise, teaching talent, and research infrastructure that few private providers can compete with, these benefits are lost on employers, who often struggle to navigate the complexity of higher education. Universities are simply not organized to facilitate easy access on the part of an employer.

In light of this challenge, the **University of California – Irvine** maintains a team of account managers who ensure that businesses are able to navigate internal bureaucracy to unlock the full value of a higher education partnership. These staff members handle the client relationship across its entire life span, driving deep relationships and renewed business while facilitating connections on campus for their industry partners.

Hybrid Account Managers Solve for Two Common Challenges

1 Overpromising

"They promised full customization, but once I signed the contract they didn't seem able to fulfill that."

—*Employer*

Hybrid role for account managers ensures **dual responsibility for sales and training delivery**

2 No Skin in the Game

"My staff focus on closing sales, often at the cost of developing sustainable partnerships with employers."

—*COE Dean*

Account managers work with employers over the entire life of partnership, **developing relationships that drive renewals**

Account Manager Profile

- Corporate Account Manager (4 FTEs)
- **Mid- to early-career professionals**, skilled in professional communication, business contracting, and navigating institutional bureaucracy
- **Provide guidance to employers in navigating university silos**; connect partners with right contacts internally

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70%

UCIRVINE

Proportion of corporate training revenue from repeat business

"**Our role is to provide access to the institution.** I hire people who are skilled at customer service because that is incredibly valuable to employers."

Brian Breen
Director of Corporate Training

Account managers are hardly a recent innovation, but their role at UC Irvine is structured to mitigate two common challenges. For one, UC Irvine's account managers maintain a dual responsibility for sales and training delivery. Many salespeople might promise anything to sign an industry partner, but these account managers promise only what they can deliver since they are responsible for delivering the final product as well. Account managers also work with employers throughout the lifecycle of a partnership. As a result, they have an incentive to take a long-term approach to nurturing relationships. They close sales only when an employer's needs are best served by contract training and not simply to maximize short-term revenue returns.

Since implementing this practice, UC Irvine has seen the proportion of corporate training revenue from repeat business reach 70%. Moreover, they have successfully avoided the high salaries required for experienced industry professionals by hiring for the communication and customer service skills of lower-wage, early- to mid-career account managers.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Personalized Leadership Development

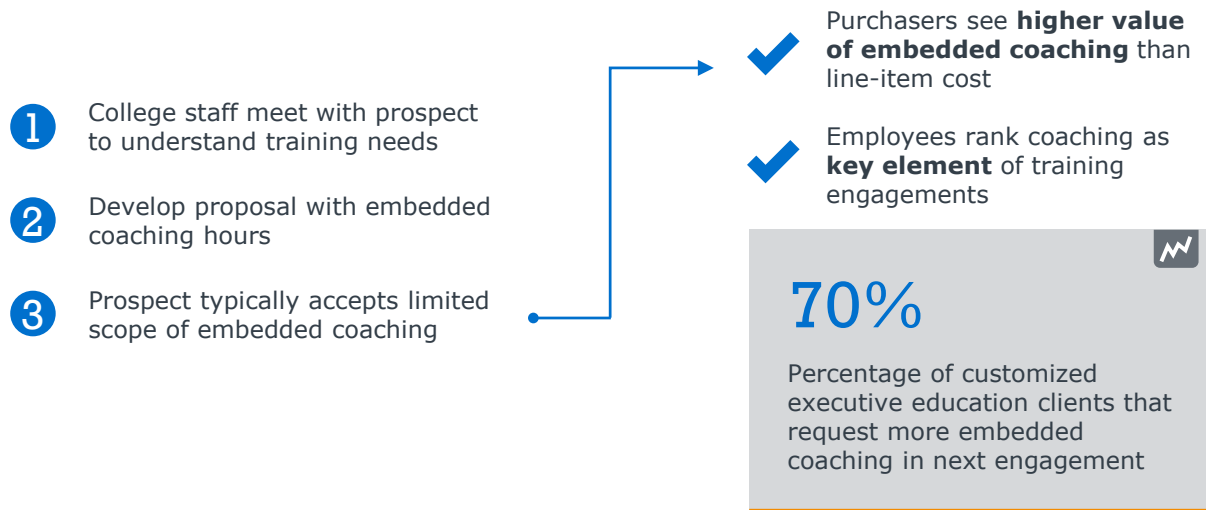## UD Coaching Service Differentiates Business School Training

Companies increasingly seek flexible and inexpensive online training solutions, but their employees find it much harder to access personalized guidance as part of their career development. At the **University of Delaware**, business development staff members proactively include one-on-one coaching as part of proposals presented to employers for custom training programs.

Any corporate training proposal at the Lerner College of Business comes embedded with two or three hours of personalized coaching per employee. This presents a significant increase of cost per employee, but employers often accept at least a limited scope of the service because they're able to see the embedded value rather than judge it as a line-item cost.

Coaching Shifts from Executive Perk to Mid-Level Benefit

- Provide leadership development and practical skill-building to mid-career professionals
- Typically cost upwards of $200/hour for individual engagements
- Coaches are ICF-certified[1] (or similar)

① College staff meet with prospect to understand training needs

② Develop proposal with embedded coaching hours

③ Prospect typically accepts limited scope of embedded coaching

✓ Purchasers see **higher value of embedded coaching** than line-item cost

✓ Employees rank coaching as **key element** of training engagements

70%

Percentage of customized executive education clients that request more embedded coaching in next engagement

While coaching is typically viewed as an executive-level perk, Delaware positions this service as a benefit for mid-career professionals. Coaching gives employees the chance to reflect on performance and receive individual feedback. Coaches typically build out a leadership development plan that extends beyond the existing training engagement with employee career goals in mind.

Even with a single hour of coaching, employees consistently rank their coaching hours as the most beneficial element of the training process. Employers themselves are so satisfied with the impact of coaching that 70% of repeat training requests include more coaching hours in the subsequent proposal.

Coaching enables the institution to tout personalization not common in the training market. Delaware is able to embed coaching services with only a single certified coach among full-time staff—making this a cost-effective solution with outsized benefits.

1) International Coach Federation Certification.
http://www.coachfederation.org/program/landing.
cfm?ItemNumber=2151&navItemNumber=3354

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Bringing University Services to Work

Rowan University's On-site Customer Service Team

Rowan University takes personalized service in another direction by sending a team of institutional representatives to assist partner organizations' employees with enrollment, financial aid, technical, and instructional support during the onboarding process.

Rowan's Global Learning and Partnerships unit charges $500 per employee to bring support services on-site to their partner organization. By doing this, Rowan is able to remove a considerable work stream burden from HR staff. The convenience of having these supports on-site allows employees to better integrate their academic efforts with their day-to-day work. Most importantly, these on-site teams include academic support staff who can work with employees to ensure they stay on track in their courses.

On-site Team Removes Logistical Impediments to Enrollment

Onboarding Assistance

- **Removes onboarding responsibilities** from HR department

Academic Support

- **Teaching Assistant on-site at least once weekly**
- Remedial courses available

Convenience

- **Flexible scheduling** allows employees to navigate unpredictable workflow

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Case in Brief

GLOBAL LEARNING & PARTNERSHIPS OF ROWAN UNIVERSITY

On-site customer service team brings full breadth of university services to employee

Services include:

- Academic advising
- IT support
- Enrollment troubleshooting
- Financial aid counseling
- Academic support tutors

Programs Included

RN — BSN

MSN — Nursing

MS — Computer Science

Graduate Certificate — Data Analytics

Service Ensures Additional Revenue and Employee Retention

$12,500

Potential additional revenue per course from a cohort of 25 students

90%+

Employee retention rate while enrolled in program

For Rowan, the surcharge can raise additional revenue, sometimes totaling thousands of dollars for small cohorts of students. They also boast a 90% retention rate in training cohorts that take advantage of the customer service team. As an added benefit, this practice allows Rowan to structure partnerships around existing degree programs, rather than relying on heavy customization of content for training.

Advocate to Turn Customers into Fans

4

- Discipline 9: Amplify messages of partnership success through end-user networks
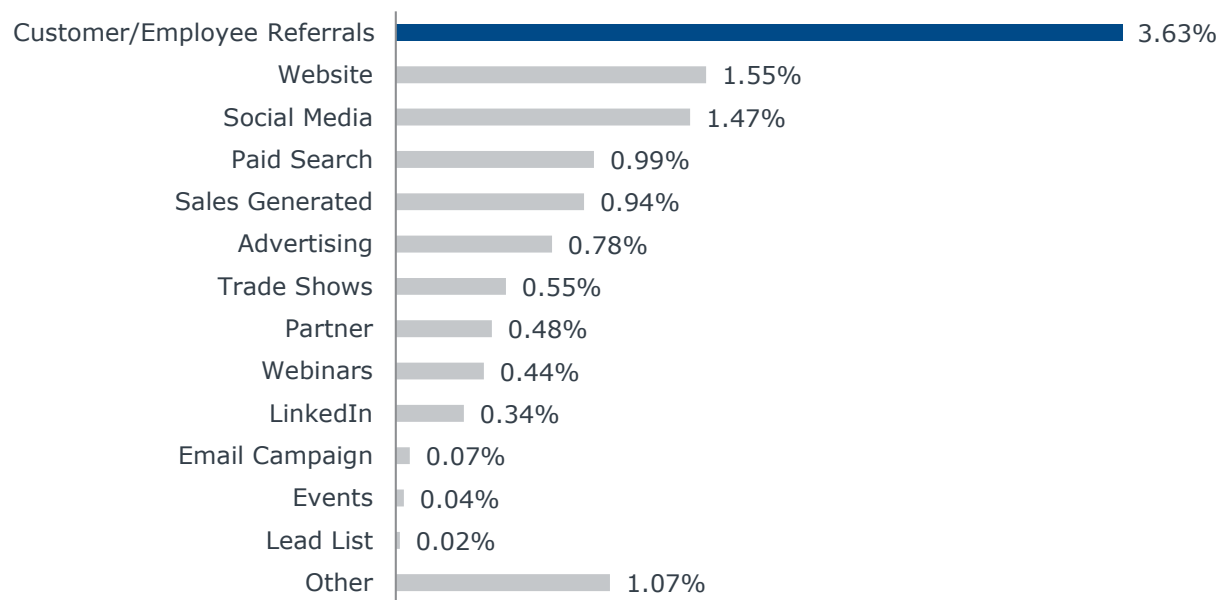
Power of B2B Word of Mouth Underestimated

Potential Clients Rely on Peer Networks to Judge Purchases

Despite the obstacles discussed in the previous sections of this publication, many universities are able to successfully develop partnerships with employers in their area. Their next challenge is twofold: they must ensure that the engagements sustain long term, and they must replicate this success with other partners.

Successful B2B enterprises who cultivate strong and renewable partnerships reap the benefits of word-of-mouth messaging to create new business opportunities. Customer and employee referrals boast higher lead-to-deal conversion rates than other channels, including web presence, social media outreach, and traditional advertising.

Word of Mouth Out-Performs Other B2B Channels

Percentage of US B2B Lead-to-Deal Conversion Rate by Channel[1]

Channel	Rate
Customer/Employee Referrals	3.63%
Website	1.55%
Social Media	1.47%
Paid Search	0.99%
Sales Generated	0.94%
Advertising	0.78%
Trade Shows	0.55%
Partner	0.48%
Webinars	0.44%
LinkedIn	0.34%
Email Campaign	0.07%
Events	0.04%
Lead List	0.02%
Other	1.07%

For the best results, B2B marketers should cultivate their existing relationships and gain referrals through warm leads. Referrals equip marketers to approach a university partnership pitch with a greater sense of trust and value than cold leads offer.

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1) Survey conducted by Implisit drew upon CRM data from 500 of their clients.

Source: Neely P, "Why Word of Mouth Should Be a B2B Marketer's Top Priority," Act-On, 2016; EAB interviews and analysis.

Creating Cross-Industry Advocates

Advisory Boards Create Platform for Program Innovation and Marketing

Progressive institutions rely on their carefully cultivated network and the power of word-of-mouth marketing to grow their footprint. Word-of-mouth marketing is a key feature at the **Georgia Institute of Technology**, where strategic, multilevel advisory boards inform curricular innovation and partnership sourcing.

Georgia Tech dominated headlines with their 2014 launch of an online computer science master's program that was supported in part by a three million-dollar gift from AT&T. Behind the headlines, however, this was a partnership in name only. AT&T's gift came with no strings attached for the university, and while numerous AT&T employees did enroll, the vast majority of students came from partner employers who did not invest in the program. This outsized success came in large part from Georgia Tech's targeted and structured use of advisory boards at all levels of engagement.

Online MS in Computer Science

- Launched in 2014 with support from a $3M gift from AT&T
- Delivered at much lower cost to students of $7k
- Designed as 3 years to complete part-time
- **3,800+ students enrolled**
- **76% of OMSCS students from companies other than AT&T**

"Georgia Tech may have discovered a whole new market for higher education, one that could change the way we think about the problem of college costs."

"An Online Education Breakthrough? A Master's Degree for a Mere $7,000"
—*The New York Times*

Behind the Headlines: Industry Advisory Boards Replicate Georgia Tech's Success

Georgia Tech | Professional Education

1 Mixed Representation
Boards comprise current partners and aspirational prospects

2 Segment-Level Guidance
Members move beyond curricular revision to advise on program-industry alignment

3 Term Limits
Members move boards every few years, ensuring fresh perspectives without compromising existing relationships

4 Government Alignment
Top-level advisory board represents institution in government and economic development efforts

"When we walk into a company, **we want as many doors open as possible, whether they be research, philanthropy, or education**. Those relationships are the foundation for how we leverage advisory boards on campus."

Nelson Baker
Dean of Professional Education

90%

Proportion of Georgia Tech COE enrollments sponsored by employers

The key to Georgia Tech's success in fully leveraging the latent power of advisory boards lies in a few simple principles. Maintaining mixed representation on boards ensures that current partners and aspirational targets can regularly interact and trade ideas. Holding advisory boards at different strategic levels (e.g., programmatic, industry, institution) creates opportunities for sharing of unique insights. Most importantly, board members face term limits, ensuring the rotation of fresh perspectives for every program or industry.

Maintaining these strict principles of advisory engagement ensures that Georgia Tech has a seat at the table at key government and economic development efforts, effectively continuing the growth of their network. The data tells a similar story: 90% of the university's COE enrollments are sponsored by employers.

Sources: "An Online Education Breakthrough? A Master's Degree for a Mere $7,000," *The New York Times*, 2016; Goodman, Melkers, and Pallais, "Can Online Delivery Increase Access to Education?" Harvard Kennedy School Working Paper Series, 2016; EAB interviews and analysis.

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