

ACHIEVING HIGH-PERFORMING ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Strategies to Improve, Green,
and Ensure Diversity, Equity
and Inclusion



National Green Jobs Advisory Council Advisory Committee Handbook (2024)

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Creating High Performing and Inclusive Advisory Committees for Legacy Crafts/ Trades Programs

National Green Jobs Advisory Committee Handbook

Funded by Lumina Foundation, the National Green Jobs Advisory Council is an initiative of the National Council for Workforce Education (NCWE). The National Green Jobs Advisory Council (NGJAC) is a consortium of community colleges and their industry partners. The purpose of NGJAC is to develop and facilitate the processes and technical assistance necessary to bring awareness and expand the opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and women to become trained and gainfully employed in the emerging green sector. The NGJAC team of Subject Matter Experts also works with our community colleges to integrate green skilled competencies into legacy trade academic and training frameworks.

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National Council for Workforce Education

As a workforce-focused nonprofit organization committed to equity and inclusion, the National Council for Workforce Education (NCWE) leads our members with innovative ideas and bold actions to drive economic advancement for all. Our vision is to build an inclusive network of workforce professionals that champion innovation, justice and economic opportunity through policy and practice. Working in partnership with business and industry, and national leaders, NCWE transforms workforce education programs to ensure student success and meet local labor market needs. Our focus as an organization is grounded in practitioner support.

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Activating Business and Industry Partners

NGJAC Introduction

Funded by the Lumina Foundation, the National Green Jobs Advisory Council (NGJAC) works to strengthen the role of community colleges in responding to proposed federal infrastructure funding and the workforce needs to support the emerging green economy. With an eye on equity and economic justice, NGJAC develops and facilitates the processes and technical assistance necessary to build a skilled and inclusive green infrastructure workforce.

Why Engage Employers

“Many stakeholders are important to the success of community colleges, but one stakeholder group is paramount: employers. In a thriving regional economy, the business and education communities share an understanding of the type, level, and quantity of skills and credentials needed by the workforce. Progressive institutions recognize that this alignment can only be achieved by truly engaging employers as strategic partners in postsecondary planning and action.” (Parker, 2015)

The success of community colleges in delivering effective, high-quality workforce education and training programs relies on their ability to partner effectively with employers. The success of economic development agencies in bringing new employers to a community depends on the community's ability to provide the new employer with a skilled workforce. Thus, employer/community college partnerships must be symbiotic; both the college and the employer make a commitment with a mutual understanding as to how to effectively engage and agree on metrics of success. Colleges benefit and achieve important goals when they effectively and strategically engage with employers.



VALUE TO THE COLLEGE

I. Curriculum and Programs are Improved

Engaged and active colleges better understand their local employers' skills gaps. Employers validate and ensure curriculum currency that meets both accreditation requirements and business needs. This guarantees that the program meets local labor market demand, and if not, helps colleges determine what they need to do to meet employer demands. Effective engagement provides the college with a "Credibility Factor" – signaling a higher level of program quality to both employers and students. Finally, employers often have program materials and/or equipment they could share with the college.

II. Strong Relationships Ensure that Students Get Jobs

When employers are effectively engaged, there is a stronger link between the training program and student employment. Employer partnerships create a pipeline where workers can move from recruitment to training programs, and into quality jobs supported by employer partners. Strong partnerships also lead to an increased willingness of employers to offer internships and work-based learning opportunities. When HR staff are involved, the company is more likely to work with career center staff to post job openings and engage in career center events and activities.

III. Corporate Philanthropy is Improved

Improving connections between employers and the college can enhance equipment donations, material donations, donations to capital campaigns, and scholarship funds.

IV. College/Community Relations Are Improved

Strong employer/college partnerships prove to employers that the college is truly committed to the economic well-being of the community. When the relationship is strong and reciprocal, these partnerships lead to employers advocating for the college with the legislature.

Most employers do want to contribute to their local community or technical college as part of their commitment to the community. But, if you don't ask, you don't know what they are willing to do for the college. However, employers providing one-time feedback on curricula are less involved than employers participating in program design which includes feedback at multiple points and multiple aspects. Building and maintaining partnerships takes time and effort but provides payoff for the college in numerous ways.



What Do Employers Think – Start with an External Scan

If you don't ask, you don't know. Community college professionals are notorious for telling employers what they can do for them instead of asking them what they need. Building effective partnerships begins with asking and listening.

1. Do current employers believe there is alignment between the college's programs and employer needs?
2. Do employers consider the college's programmatic and training schedules to be effective at meeting employers' needs?
3. Do employers think the college is missing critical employers in the community in the college's engagement strategies and/or advisory committees?
4. What strategies should the college adopt to maintain/repair relationships with employers who have expressed negative opinions or experiences with the college?
5. Does the college have in place strategies to recognize and promote employers?

Qualities of Successful Employer Partners

Effective employer engagement starts through mutually beneficial partnerships. This mutually beneficial partnership is such that partners agree to cooperate to advance their mutual interests, increase the likelihood of each achieving their mission, and oftentimes, amplifying both organizations' outreach into the community. The central belief of effective partnerships is that we are better off working together than going it alone. And, to better serve our communities, we want to be partners, not competitors. Five qualities define successful employer partnerships.

CONTINUOUS

- Be thoughtful from the beginning as to how to cultivate and maintain a long-term relationship.
- Eliminate short-term transactions and don't just engage with your employer partners on an as-needed basis.

STRATEGIC

- Identify stakeholders and determine their goals and needs.
- Identify and define end-outcomes or desired results.
- Identify and engage employers through a number of channels including industry or professional associations, chambers of commerce, labor-management training partnerships, economic development authorities, etc.

COMPREHENSIVE AND IN-DEPTH

- Engage employers in a variety of issues and activities.
- Engage employers substantively, moving the conversations from a high level ("we need higher-skilled candidates") to in-depth and frequent dialogue about specific skill sets, long-term economic needs, etc.


MUTUALLY VALUABLE

- Solve problems and create value for both sides of the labor market—employers (the demand side) and education/training providers and learners (the supply side).
- Participation involves time. What is the return on investment of time? Are partners’ voices not only heard, but respected and valued?
- Collaborative mindset: see across boundaries, seeing connections and possibilities where others might see barriers and limitations.

EMPOWERING

- Encourage and celebrate employers; acknowledge joint accomplishments.
- Encourage employers to develop and assume leadership roles. Many are willing to serve in an additional capacity but are never asked!

The employer engagement ladder reflects a continuum of activities that support effective partnerships, with each level involving deeper engagement, activation, and integration of employers into the work.



	New Relationship		Working Relationship		Strategic Partnership
	LEVEL I	LEVEL II	LEVEL III	LEVEL IV	LEVEL V
Key Employer Role	Advising	Capacity-building	Co-designing	Convening	Leading
Stage of Relationship	Initial contact / new relationship	Establishing trust and credibility	Working relationship	Trusted provider and collaborator	Full strategic partner
Activity Examples	Discuss hiring needs, skills, competencies, advise on curriculum, contract training, hire graduates.	Job site tours; speakers; mock interviews, internships, loan/donate equipment, recruiting	Curriculum and pathway development, adjunct faculty	College-employer, sectorial, partnerships Multi-employer/multi-college partnerships	Multi-employer/multi-college partnerships

Adapted from Wilson, R., 2015

Strategies to Create More Inclusive Advisory Committees

Commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Now more than ever there is an urgent need to address our environmental challenges by educating our students and our current and future workforce to create solutions for a more sustainable future. Investing in a green economy has been identified, as evidenced by President Biden's Build Back Better, as a strategic area of intervention to both respond to a climate crisis and to build jobs to support a green economy and economic recovery. However, the infrastructure sector is facing a "silver tsunami" of retirements as its aging workforce approaches the end of their working years. For example, energy workers are aging out and there is also a paucity of diversity among energy workers/electricians (Rewiring America, 2023). Yet, according to US Census Bureau, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023 approximately 70% of the electricians and green energy sector workers are comprised of white males. The additional jobs created by recent federal infrastructure investments intensifies the demand for trained workers. Meeting this demand while working to create an inclusive economy means that we need to intentionally open the door to millions of workers who want to train for a new career in infrastructure and clean energy— particularly workers of color, and women, who have long been underrepresented in these sectors.

Despite some progress, women and BIPOC communities still face structural and cultural barriers to education and employment in the green economy. More work is also needed to connect disengaged youth to family-wage, green jobs. There are also over four million young people between the ages of 16-24 who are not working and not in school. Gaps in equity and opportunity impact youth of color: Black, Indigenous, and Latino youth experience higher rates of disconnection from school and work than white and Asian youth (Lewis, K., 2020). These equity gaps are impeding youth of color from engaging in infrastructure and green jobs.

DEFINING EQUITY

Equity is the condition and the process together that would be achieved if the identities assigned to historically oppressed groups no longer act as the most powerful predictor of how one fares. We achieve equity when we eliminate the root causes of inequities that reinforce or fail to eliminate disproportional outcomes including policies and practices, harmful narratives, attitudes, and harmful cultural messages (Sandra Grace LLC, 2023).

Racial equity is the condition achieved if one's racial and ethnic identity no longer predicts how one fares. To achieve racial justice, we need to eliminate policies, practices, cultural messages, and harmful narratives that perpetuate, uphold, or fail to eliminate racism.

WHAT IS ALLYSHIP

An Ally is a person with privilege who makes the commitment and effort to recognize their privilege (based on gender, class, race, sexual identity, etc.). An ally intentionally and authentically works in solidarity with oppressed/marginalized groups to take down the systems that challenge the group's basic rights and equal access. Allyship is an action, not an identity.

To be an ally, one must understand:

- The historical and current impact of systemic racism on communities of color.
- How racism manifests (shows up) in organizations, interactions, policies and conversations.
- How talent systems have been used to exclude people of color intentionally.

EMPLOYERS AND ADVISORY COMMITTEES AS ALLIES

Employers impact and influence hiring and employment opportunities; wages and benefits; local economic development; community development; policy and legislation at the local and state level; and their employer peers. Thus, to provide access and opportunity to BIPOC individuals and women in the green economy, colleges must work with their employer partners and advisory committees to become allies.

Working with Employers on Equity and Allyship

This is not easy work. Becoming an ally and intentionally committing to equity, diversity, and inclusion takes time and tenacity. Carefully read and digest the following steps to a) determine if you and your college are ready to engage with employers as allies, and b) do you have the relationships necessary to have difficult and intense conversations with employer partners.



Adapted from Workforce Development and Racial Equity Organizational Self-Assessment Tool used by Sandra Grace, LLC., September 2022

Step 1: Assess the college's readiness to do the hard work with employers

To determine your and your college's readiness, think about the following seven questions. (Adapted from ABC's 10 Essential Questions)

1. Is the college committed to, and taking action to, improve equity, inclusion, and diversity for its own employees and students?
2. Has the college conducted a "workplace culture assessment" to better understand the college culture around diversity, equity, and inclusion?
3. Are the faculty in the program ready to work with employers on equity, inclusion, and diversity?
4. Do you have commitment from your supervisor and the college as a whole to work with employers on allyship?
5. Does your supervisor and/or the college president realize that when you go down this path, you may ask some employers to leave the advisory committee?
6. Does the college work with employer partners to address institutional barriers for students of color who participate in education and training programs?
7. Does the college seek to understand the workplace/organizational culture of its employer partners?

Step 2: Analyze the diversity and structure of each advisory committee

Representation matters! Is the committee diverse with regards to types of employers (large, medium, small, urban, rural, etc.)? Is the committee gender-balanced, particularly in gender-normed occupations? Is the committee diverse with regards to racial and ethnic identity or do we have the “token” person of color? If you answer no to any of these questions, put into place a strategic plan to remedy the shortfalls. Work with your current “high road” employers to identify peers in the community who are committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Begin to engage with these employers through college events. As you get to know these employers better, put in place a process to recruit them for serving on programmatic advisory committees. Consider the following activities as you recruit new employers. These are also great steps to take with current employer partners to help ascertain if their commitment is real.

- Visit your employer partner’s place of business to assess the culture in the workplace.
- Conduct workplace culture assessments for your employer partners.
- Review the organization’s employment practices and see if they are aligned with your college values.

Step 3: Assess your employer partners and Advisory Committee (AC) members’ commitment to equity

Before diving into the hard-to-ask questions, start with an internal analysis. Does the AC have a statement that articulates the value of diversity and the AC’s commitment to an inclusive environment? In past practice, when searching for new AC members, do we discuss diversity? Have we cast a wider net to specifically find a diverse candidate or look for individuals with a different perspective?

Provide your employer partners and your AC members with data. Provide data regarding the racial and ethnic make-up of the community, and data regarding the racial and ethnic make-up of the college’s program.

Ask your AC members to share the following with their peers as a way of showcasing their personal and professional commitment.

- Their organization’s value statements that have equity and inclusion stated as a value.
- Recruitment, attraction, hiring and advancement criteria or policies explicitly designed to impact racially disparate outcomes.
- Examples of how the organization’s culture supports and encourages the upward mobility of BIPOC or ethnic minorities, English language learners or immigrants, gender in gender-normed occupations, and LGBTQ+.

Make sure you avoid tokenism. No board member wants to fill a quota, and no one is able to represent an entire subsection of the population. One person of color does not speak for the entire community! Consider creating a member self-assessments for ACs around DEI. Use the results of these assessments to identify areas of growth and learning.

Step 4: Work together to build trust by having those difficult conversations

Starting the conversation about diversity and equity is not easy. Adapted from “Respect Differences? Challenging the Common Guidelines in Social Justice Education,” by Robin DiAngelo and Özlem Sensoy, these examples provide individuals who might be afraid of saying the wrong thing, tools as to how make statements or ask questions.

- I’m really nervous/scared/uncomfortable to say [X], but . . .
- From my experience/perspective as [identity], . . .
- I’m afraid I may offend someone, and please let me know if I do, but . . .
- It feels risky to say [X], but . . .
- This perspective is new to me, but I’m wondering if it is accurate to say that . . . ?

Make it a practice of having regular conversations about what a “diverse” Advisory Committee means. Lead thoughtful discussions with ACs to consider how you, the college, and the employer partners will benefit from diversity. Share and discuss resources related to equity, diversity, and inclusion. All of the above will help move your employer partnerships and ACs from transactional to transformational.

Step 5: Maintain and grow together and periodically, reassess

This is a journey – not a race. Ultimately, the goal is to improve opportunities for learners and members of the community. Working together, colleges and their employer partners can work to identify and mitigate the causes of inequities so that a student or employee’s racial and/or ethnic identity, or their gender, or their physical ability/disability does not predict their success. Together, you are building a movement through relationships and allyship with your employer partners and ACs. This movement has the potential to influence your partner’s peers to benefit all learners and all members of your community.



Greening and Improving Advisory Committees

“Greening” Advisory Committees

The majority of green economy jobs exist in legacy infrastructure sectors. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the nation will need at least one million new clean energy workers by 2030. The transportation sector is also changing rapidly and experiencing a lack of skilled workers. The number of jobs in battery electric vehicles increased by 27% from 2021-2022 accounting for the fastest energy technology growth. The non-fossil fuel vehicle technology sector is also growing rapidly. School buses, farming equipment, semi-tractor trailer trucks, small aircraft and others are becoming electrified or are utilizing hydrogen-electric technology. Hydrogen fuel cell vehicles increased by 25% from 2021-2022. And power plants are moving from traditional fossil fuel generated electricity to hydrogen fuel cell stationary power. All of these new and emerging technologies must be infused into traditional community college skilled crafts/trades training programs.

Thus, community colleges need to “future-proof” existing legacy skilled crafts programs and curriculum. A well-trained electrician is an electrician with skills to future-proof their career if they are also trained for solar EV and wind technology. A well-trained HVAC technician’s career is future-proofed if they are trained on emerging air-source heat pumps and geothermal technology. Future-proofing diesel mechanic programs mean infusing curriculum and training in high voltage electric and combustion hydrogen technology.

Infusing future-proofing curriculum into traditional legacy crafts programs can only be accomplished by recruiting “green” technology employers to be active members of advisory committees. Colleges should work with current advisory committee members, local workforce boards, and nonprofits to identify new members who are utilizing green technology in their workplace or for their customers.

Improving Advisory Committees

Strong and effective advisory committees (AC) lead to program success, ensure program currency, and ensure that students attain employment upon completion.

STRUCTURE

Ensure that committee members are the “proper fit” – they have the knowledge, passion, and time to be committee members. What is their title and area of responsibility within their organization? Does their level of responsibility and knowledge strategically support your advisory committee goals? Always seek to find board representation that is different, representatives who see things through a different lens, and those willing to challenge the status quo.

Ensure that the committee is diverse regarding company size and type. Cast a wide net with regards to job title and responsibility within an organization. A Human Resource representative can assist students in applying for jobs. HR representation is also important in helping companies develop job descriptions and job postings not

necessarily based on degrees, but rather on skills and competencies. Front-line supervisors are best at defining the knowledge, skills and competencies required for success on the job. CEOs and senior staff assist in keeping the committee knowledgeable about other employers in the community and with looking to the future with regards to changes in the industry.

ORIENTATION

As new individuals join the AC, provide a comprehensive orientation to the program. Do a meet and greet with the program chair, dean, and faculty. Take new members on tour of not just the program, but the entire college. Provide new members with a “welcome pack” containing a welcome letter, contact information of all committee members, minutes of prior meetings, and other helpful information. Consider including a college organizational chart so they understand the role of the program chair or dean. Most importantly, nurture the relationship from the first meeting by asking them to share a bit about their organization.

Higher education and business and industry speak in lingo and acronyms. Too often we talk in alphabet soup, confusing newcomers, and non-academics. Create a document for new members of acronyms and terms. Explain an FTE. Explain the difference between credit programs and noncredit workforce training programs. What is PLA? What is FAFSA, etc.?

BUILD TRUST

Ensure from the get-go that the relationship is collaborative. Respect what each partner brings to the table. Listen to and acknowledge multiple perspectives. When AC members can communicate openly and honestly, they are more likely to engage. And when everyone contributes, everyone is part of the success.

When an AC member makes a suggestion, acknowledge the suggestion. If it is not doable because of structure, or college policy, or any other reason, take the time to recognize the good suggestion and then explain why it is not feasible.

VALUE THE EMPLOYER’S TIME

Make sure that all AC meetings start and end on time. Schedule the meetings far enough in advance so that folks can adequately plan. Be creative with meeting times and locations. Can meetings be held over Zoom or be held hybrid? What time works best for the employer? Remember time is money and employers are worried about their time and their bottom line. Are breakfast meetings prior to employers starting their day the ultimate time to meet?

Engage with employers in their environment. Strive to have meeting locations rotated among employers and not always on the college campus.

LEADERSHIP AND MECHANICS

The chair of the Advisory Committee absolutely must be an employer and not faculty or college administration. Having an industry member as chair adds credibility to the committee as well as signals to employer partners that the college truly values their input and wants industry partners to be convening and leading, not just advising.

Colleges can assist the chair’s success through several supportive strategies:

1. Create an agenda template. Meet with the chair prior to the meeting to determine the components of the agenda. The college takes responsibility for distributing the agenda to committee members.
2. Create a template for notetaking. Have a faculty member or dean serve as note-takers. The college takes responsibility for compiling the notes and distributing them to committee members.

3. Work with the chair to set goals and benchmarks. Determine up front how you will address failures or missteps.
4. Create a set of rules or guidelines for meetings and member participation.
5. Assist the chair if there are ever issues or concerns with a committee member. Work with the chair to define “small problem” vs. “big problem” and strategies to address the big problem.

MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

Meetings should be opportunities and not a show-and-tell of information. Meetings should be time for collaborative discussion and proactive problem-solving examining critical issues: curriculum redesign, key labor market data, student outcomes, skill needs and gaps, etc.

EMPLOYERS AS ADVISORS	EMPLOYERS AS STRATEGIC PARTNERS
Employers attend Advisory Committee meetings and “sign off” on curriculum changes	Employers are deeply engaged in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying critical competencies • Developing curriculum and determining assessments • Identifying future workforce needs and curriculum changes • Offering work-based learning • Providing adjunct faculty • Providing equipment and materials • Participating in classroom design
Employers provide their “point of view”	Employers become active “problem solvers”
Employers respond to surveys and occasional data requests	Employers help design, implement, and interpret surveys

Adapted from Wilson, R., 2015

Ask the employers meaningful questions that gets them actively engaged. For example,

- What keeps you up at night?
- What contributes to your company’s productivity and growth?
- What are your current labor market needs? Future needs?
- How can the college help in addressing your challenges?

No Rubber Stamping! Don’t ask employers to simply rubber stamp decisions that have already been made. They will recognize this is happening! Make sure you are listening to questions, concerns, and recommendations, and are responding in a timely manner. If you ask for advice, be prepared to implement their recommendations.

Meaningful engagement moves employers from “advisors” to “strategic partners.”

EMPLOYER LED ACTIVITIES

Employer-led activities signal to employers that the college is serious about being a good partner. Employer-led activities validates the employers’ knowledge and expertise. This is another reason why the chair of the AC should always be an industry member.

Break AC meetings into small groups to encourage more participation. Create a focus group with AC member’s colleagues to share information, gather information or problem solve. Have AC members chair or facilitate these focus groups. This also has the potential of bringing new members to the committee.

CONTINUOUS ENGAGEMENT

Communicate, communicate, and communicate more. Create communication channels to maintain interest and involvement between meetings. Send employers a one-page summary of key activities and accomplishments at the college. Add them to the email lists to receive college publications and announcements.

Engage members beyond the meetings. Invite them to college events. Ask them to publicly advocate for programs by testifying at the legislature or presenting on programs to local service organizations (Kiwanis, Rotary, etc.) Ask employers to participate in fundraising campaigns for student scholarships.

Finally, periodically have the members do a self-assessment of their committee. Share this self-assessment with the entire committee and engage employers in strategies as to how to improve. Again, this moves employers from “advisory” to “convening and leading.”

SAY THANK YOU

Saying “Thank You” in a public manner goes a long way to ensuring long-term commitment and partnership. Some examples of ways to say acknowledge and appreciate employers include:

- College president invites employers to join them at college events.
- Recognize employer contributions in college newsletters and publications.
- Feature an employer in the course schedule.
- Social media posting thanking employers.
- Advisory Committee celebrations.



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