Engage and Stay Connected

Billing workflows, advising systems, and data practices do not often appear in strategic plans, but they are the practices through which institutions can demonstrate, one interaction at a time, whether their commitment to working learners and the employers who support them is real. They are the small processes and details that can lead to large returns or cause real damage. They are often where trust is built or lost.

For many institutions, especially community colleges and regional comprehensives working with limited resources and high community need, doing this well is already the aspiration. This guide is meant to help close the distance between that aspiration and day-to-day practice.

Where to Begin

Not every institution will be starting from the same place. Some will have strong employer relationship infrastructure but limited academic flexibility. Others will have invested deeply in working learner support but never examined the operational side of their billing or data practices. The self-assessment tool is designed to help leadership teams identify where friction is highest and where early action is most likely to build momentum. The assessment is backed up by detailed insights across each domain and focus area.

We recommend beginning with the Foundational domain regardless of where operational gaps are concentrated. These conditions: clarity of purpose, leadership commitment, shared definitions of success, are what make operational progress in every other domain possible.

An Invitation

This guide is accompanied by an array of resources and tools that can help colleges and universities take action, including deeper dives into specific practice areas, and tools and templates that translate recommendations into immediate institutional actions.

We are also actively seeking higher education leaders who want to engage with this work directly to test these frameworks in their own institutions, share what they are learning, and help us understand where the guidance needs to be sharper, more nuanced, or more honest about the barriers involved. If that describes you, we invite you to share and connect with us through our Employer-Friendly Practices survey.

The employers who participated in this research did so because they want these partnerships to work. So do we. And so, we believe, do the leaders and practitioners who will read this guide. We look forward to working with you.

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