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# Activities Checklist for Community Colleges in Economic Development

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Community colleges play many roles. Among these, their role in filling knowledge and coordination gaps in regional economic development is often overlooked. They seek to balance competing demands from multiple stakeholders—students seeking economic mobility, employers needing trained workers, regional industries requiring innovation partners, and communities striving for prosperity. Yet, practitioners often lack clear guidance on implementing activities to best balance these needs in a way that is aligned with economic development efforts.

Through a series of case studies with eight leading community colleges across different regions in Arizona, Florida, Ohio, and Wisconsin, EERC examined how colleges approach these activities<sup>1</sup>. Based on this research, this brief provides a practical checklist of activities implemented by eight leading community colleges, all national leaders in community college technical education. By highlighting which activities were adopted universally and which were implemented based on regional context, this resource helps practitioners make strategic decisions about where to focus their resources to maximize regional impact.

## Education & Training



## Business Support



## Regional Engagement



Community colleges blend the types of activities they engage in across their work; further, education and training activities, including workforce-oriented programs, act as a productive anchor for organizing community college engagement in regional economic development ecosystems and for embedding colleges in regional networks.

<sup>1</sup> For a complete discussion of the research study and its methods, see the full report: *The Hidden Innovation Infrastructure Project: Understanding the Economic Development Role of Technician Education in the Changing Future of Work Final Report*. (October 2025). <https://sites.rutgers.edu/eerc-hii/publications>

## CHECKLIST FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE ENGAGEMENT IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT :

What follows is a checklist of the activities the eight community colleges in our sample—all national leaders in administering technician education programs—implemented, organized by type of activity and whether all or some colleges implemented the activity.



### EDUCATION AND TRAINING

#### ALL CASE STUDY COLLEGES DO...

	Yes, we do this too!	No, we don't do this currently.
Hands on learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work-based learning (*some type)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grants for equipment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dual Enrollment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BA pathway (**some type)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Updated curriculum aligned with jobs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regionally aligned, developed programs /courses, and programs aligned with local workforce needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Industry advisory boards	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
School/program job fairs and related events, program reverse job fairs, or online matching with employers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### SOME CASE STUDY COLLEGES DO...

Club/maker space	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Credit for prior learning/prior learning assessments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Short-term training/bootcamp (<1 yr)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Noncredit-to-credit pathway	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
National credentialing/ industry certification	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community job fair/ expo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hire majority of program faculty from industry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visits with employers on site	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



### BUSINESS SUPPORT

#### ALL CASE STUDY COLLEGES DO...

Incumbent worker/ customized training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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#### SOME CASE STUDY COLLEGES DO...

Small business incubator/ assistance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Entrepreneurship training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Establishment of facilities for use by local companies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tech transfer or applied research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



### REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT

#### ALL CASE STUDY COLLEGES DO

Participate in local economic planning/policymaking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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#### SOME CASE STUDY COLLEGES DO...

Conduct economic scans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lead/coordinate other colleges on industry needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lead regional organizations or convene regional stakeholders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participate in state/regional boards	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assist in attracting employers to region	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## NOTE ON WORK-BASED LEARNING TYPES

Work-based learning is a vital component of successful technical education programs. All colleges implemented some form of work-based learning. The specific advantages and disadvantages of the different types of work-based learning is an opportunity for future research.

1 | Learn-and-earn models  
(4 colleges)

2 | Paid internships/co-ops as  
program requirements (2 colleges)

3 | Apprenticeships  
(5 colleges)

## DATA SOURCES

These findings are based on a four-year study conducted by the Rutgers University Education and Employment Research Center in partnership with the National Science Foundation. As part of that study, the EERC team:

*Selected*

**8**

Best-in-class  
community colleges  
for intensive study.

*Conducted*

**79**

Interviews with college  
administrators, faculty,  
and staff.

*Conducted*

**31**

Interviews with  
colleges' employer &  
regional ED partners.

*Surveyed*

**84**

Regional ED partners of  
the colleges, with a 37%  
response rate.

## About the Authors

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## The Education and Employment Research Center

Rutgers' Education and Employment Research Center (EERC) is housed within the School of Management and Labor Relations. EERC conducts research and evaluation on programs and policies at the intersection of education and employment. Our work strives to improve policy and practice so that institutions may provide educational programs and pathways that ensure individuals obtain the education needed for success in the workplace, and employers have a skilled workforce to meet their human resource needs. For more information on our mission and current research, visit [smlr.rutgers.edu/eerc](http://smlr.rutgers.edu/eerc).

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Community College  
Innovation



Student Choices  
and Pathways



STEM and Technician  
Education



Noncredit Education and  
Non-Degree Credentials



Education and Labor  
Market Connections



## Rutgers' School of Management and Labor Relations

Rutgers' School of Management and Labor Relations (SMLR) is the leading source of expertise on the world of work, building effective and sustainable organizations, and the changing employment relationship. The school consists of two departments—one focused on all aspects of strategic human resource management and the other dedicated to the social science specialties related to labor studies and employment relations. In addition, SMLR provides many continuing education and certificate programs taught by world-class researchers and expert practitioners. For more information, visit [smlr.rutgers.edu](http://smlr.rutgers.edu).

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