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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[1]. 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.

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.

[1] 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 Repor*t. (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	☐	☐
Work-based learning (*some type)	☐	☐
Grants for equipment	☐	☐
Dual Enrollment	☐	☐
BA pathway (**some type)	☐	☐
Updated curriculum aligned with jobs	☐	☐
Regionally aligned, developed programs /courses, and programs aligned with local workforce needs	☐	☐
Industry advisory boards	☐	☐
School/program job fairs and related events, program reverse job fairs, or online matching with employers	☐	☐
SOME CASE STUDY COLLEGES DO...		
Club/maker space	☐	☐
Credit for prior learning/prior learning assessments	☐	☐
Short-term training/bootcamp (<1 yr)	☐	☐
Noncredit-to-credit pathway	☐	☐
National credentialing/ industry certification	☐	☐
Community job fair/ expo	☐	☐
Hire majority of program faculty from industry	☐	☐
Visits with employers on site	☐	☐

BUSINESS SUPPORT

ALL CASE STUDY COLLEGES DO...		
Incumbent worker/ customized training	☐	☐
SOME CASE STUDY COLLEGES DO...		
Small business incubator/ assistance	☐	☐
Entrepreneurship training	☐	☐
Establishment of facilities for use by local companies	☐	☐
Tech transfer or applied research	☐	☐

REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT

ALL CASE STUDY COLLEGES DO		
Participate in local economic planning/policymaking	☐	☐
SOME CASE STUDY COLLEGES DO...		
Conduct economic scans	☐	☐
Lead/coordinate other colleges on industry needs	☐	☐
Lead regional organizations or convene regional stakeholders	☐	☐
Participate in state/regional boards	☐	☐
Assist in attracting employers to region	☐	☐

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.

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