



Many Tables, Many Knocks

A Group Exercise to Diagnose Fragmented Industry Engagement

This exercise is best done as a regional team of workforce development programs, education and training institutions, economic development organizations and others whose work involves engaging with industry in their local communities.

Step 1: Journey-mapping the Employer Experience

As a group, discuss and brainstorm *all* the experiences (good and bad) that employers have with your programs, or with the public “system” generally. What do they say about us?

As individuals, take a few minutes to write down or draw the path a business person takes when working with your program(s): point of engagement, referrals, follow-through, what services exactly do they receive. Now think again about “what employers say about us,” and offer additional thoughts to the above brainstormed list.

Some real examples of what we think employers say about us: Didn't I just talk to you? Wait, who are you? There are so many of you. No communication, inefficient, waste of taxpayer dollars. Inconsistent. This is just a workforce thing. If I provided services like
Real examples of what we say about them: They are “employers” (i.e. we forget they are actually businesses first). Deep pockets and short arms. Unrealistic and unwilling. Bottom-line driven, not big picture. They don't know what they really want or need. They are afraid of us. Or on the flipside: Our programs only exist because of them, we owe them more. They can act as incredible partners and investors.

Now as a group, brainstorm *all* the experiences we have with them! What do we say about them, good and bad?

Step 2: Mapping the Many Tables

Identify the “tables” or groups, venues, and other gatherings where businesses are brought together in that industry. It might help to just pick one target sector to think through first.

These “tables” might be groups, boards, councils, forums, task forces or associations, convened by colleges, workforce boards, Chambers, economic development organizations, community based organizations, etc. Or maybe employers self-convene for a particular purpose.

- List them, or draw them out for your region or community.
- Try to answer: What is the purpose of each table? Is there overlap? Are there gaps? What types of businesses are involved? How well is each table serving its intended purpose?



Step 3: Mapping the Many Knocks

Now think about the many “knocks” that employers/businesses get from public or community organizations/programs. These are the points of individual engagement or outreach, some for business service purposes, others for job development purposes.

- Try to list them all out – who is doing this? What programs and positions or people?
- Try to answer: What’s the purpose of each engagement or outreach effort? Is there overlap? Gaps? Redundancy? Or a risk of employer fatigue?

Step 4: Imagine your Ideal Alternative

First, discuss what’s come up for you in mapping out the many tables and many knocks. What does that tell us about the ideal alternative in our region: is there a single point of contact, a common or shared table, a way to gain access to a critical mass of employers, streamlined information gathering, a true fitting-together of our services based on our individual strengths?

Paint the *ideal* picture in terms of *outcomes* for industry and for jobseekers or students you serve. Do not hold back! Shoot for the moon here.

Step 5: Create your Real Alternative

Now discuss what is *feasible*. What is the realistic alternative? Consider your region (is it one county, or five? Is it rural or metro?). What are the elements of an improved level of business outreach coordination? What are the manageable first steps to get there? What has come out of this conversation that hadn’t come up as a group before?