



# MoWINS Employer Engagement Task Force Report

## ***Abstract***

***Employer Engagement is a core component of the MoWINS instructional & student support strategies. Data related to the extent and depth of college/employer engagement and employer satisfaction with engagement efforts are presented in this summary report. In addition, best practices, lessons learned, and recommendations for scaling employer engagement are presented.***

## Preface

To more fully explore best practices, lessons learned, and potential for scaling associated with MOWINS employer engagement, a Statewide Taskforce was developed. Cosgrove & Associates worked closely with the Taskforce to collect and analyze data related to the extent and depth of employer engagement and satisfaction with engagement efforts from college and employer partners. Cosgrove & Associates then partnered with the Taskforce chair to serve as the primary authors of this report.

### **Taskforce Membership**

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## **Missouri's Workforce Innovation Network: Strategies for Connecting Colleges & Employers**

Missouri Workforce Innovation Network (MoWINS) supports the development of innovative approaches to address current and future workforce needs in the health services/science and manufacturing industries. MoWINS consists of MoHealthWINS (MHW) and MoManufacturingWINS (MMW) and is funded by the Department of Labor funding for the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grants (TAACCCT). MoHealthWINS is made up of 12 community colleges and one technical college in the state of Missouri. MoManufacturingWINS is comprised of 9 of those colleges. MoWINS takes a collective, comprehensive approach to serving Missouri's Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) participants, in addition to low-skilled adults, veterans, unemployed and under-employed individuals.

Missouri's TAACCCT grant provides funds to expand and improve education and career training programs suited for workers who are eligible for training under the TAA for Workers program and prepare program participants for employment in high-wage, high-skill occupations. Through these multi-year grants, the Department of Labor is helping to ensure that institutions of higher education assist adults in acquiring the skills, degrees, and credentials needed for high-wage, high-skill employment while also meeting the needs of employers for skilled workers. The Department is implementing the TAACCCT program in partnership with the Department of Education. ([doleta.gov/taaccct](http://doleta.gov/taaccct))

To compete in today's economy, America's workforce must acquire new skills needed to meet the needs of industrial shifts and technological advances. Employers partnering with MoWINS colleges were surveyed and selected telephone interview were conducted to further explore this topic. Employers consistently have reported that they are finding it difficult to secure and keep employees with such skills. In addition, employers reported that college academic calendars and traditional term-based program structures are often not consistent with employer needs and expectations. This current skills gap when combined with the impending baby-boomer retirement place the U.S. a critical crossroads. MoWINS provides a transformative opportunity for Missouri's community colleges to more fully address this issue. Increased and improved college/employer engagement is a key component how colleges can capitalize on this opportunity.

### ***Employer Engagement As Defined In MoWINS***

Missouri community colleges have a rich history of working with employers through advisory committees to develop and support programs of study. Using MoWINS as a catalyst, colleges have and continue to create new and expanded college/industry partnerships. MoWINS relies on the dynamic involvement of employers and industry partners in each region of the state. The leveraged resources contributed by business/industry are evidence that Missouri's health care and manufacturing employers are interested in supporting grant activities. Employers have come to the table to work with colleges across the state to share their needs and expertise with consortium member institutions to expand existing methods of interaction and to develop new methods of collaboration. These new and expanded methods cut across curriculum development/modification, program implementation, creation of work-based learning opportunities, and pre-employment engagement with participants. Through MoWINS, colleges are reaching out to employers with the goal of developing strategic partnerships to transform the employer's role in designing, delivering and evaluating instructional programs.

### **What Has Been Accomplished**

Employer engagement covers a wide spectrum of activities/strategies. To more clearly define employer engagement, MoWINS grant leaders at each campus were asked to identify the activities/process which produced the most meaningful employer engagement. Figure 1 depicts employer engagement activities reported by MoHealthWINS colleges. The thirteen Missouri colleges reported 229 employers engaged in MoHealthWINS and the nine

MoManufacturingWINS colleges reported 152 employers engaged in grant activities. Colleges reported the activities/processes in Figures 1 and 2 as the most common roles of employers.

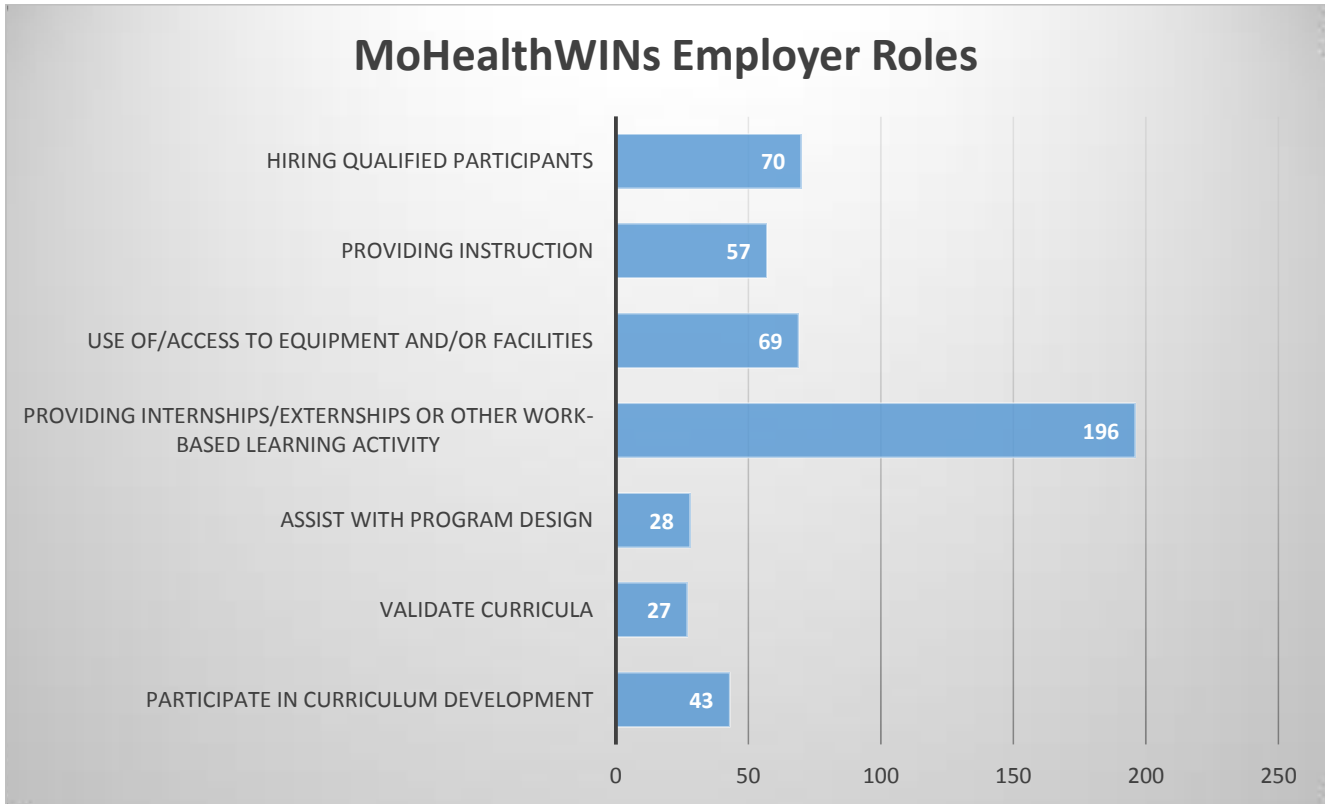


FIGURE 1

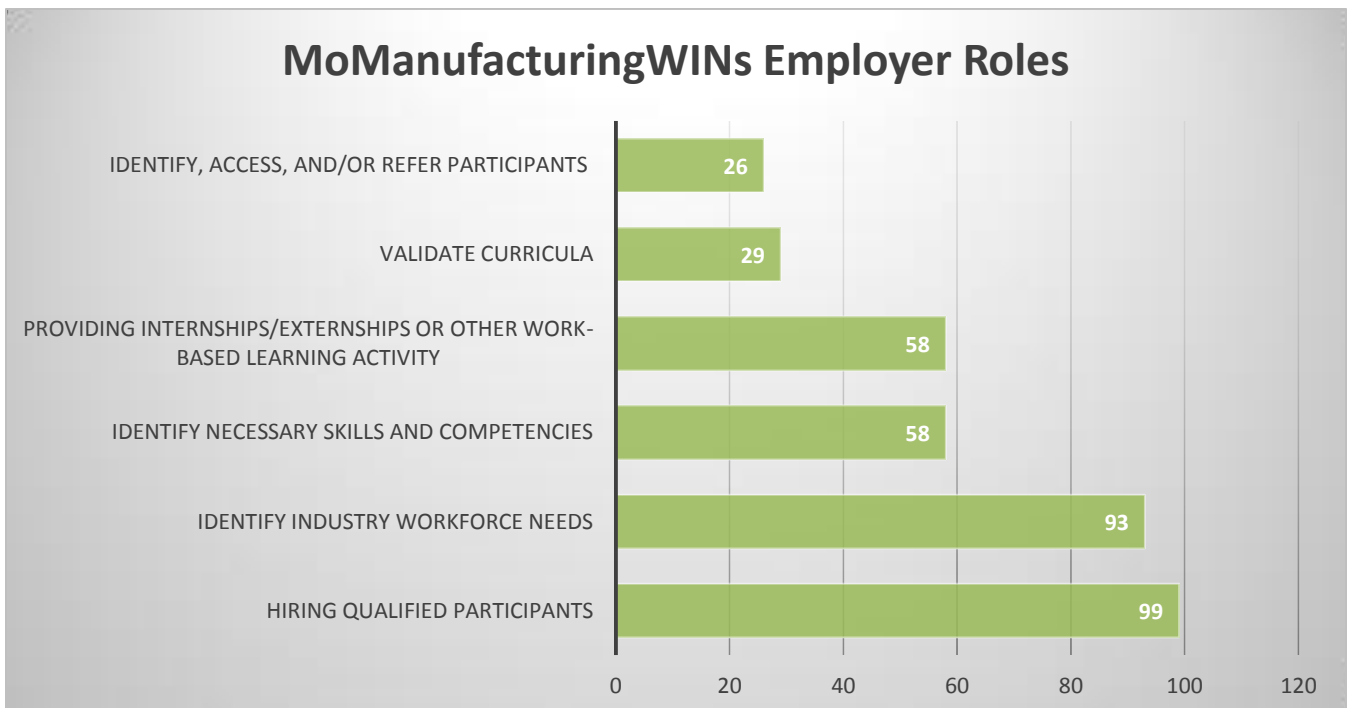


FIGURE 2

Campus leaders who partnered with employers to expand employer roles in program/curriculum development, participant recruitment, program support, and talent acquisition all reported a high degree of employer satisfaction with such processes. In addition, campus leaders indicated an increase in student success and satisfaction when employers were actively engaged in program design and delivery.

The MoWINS Consortia created an Employer Engagement Task Force to examine the potential impact associated with various employer roles, and identify share best practices/activities taking place across MoWINS' institutions. The Task Force analyzed data/information from each campus and reviewed grant quarterly progress reports. This analysis suggests that MoWINS colleges are using the following model to develop and support employer engagement, including securing continuous feedback from employers.

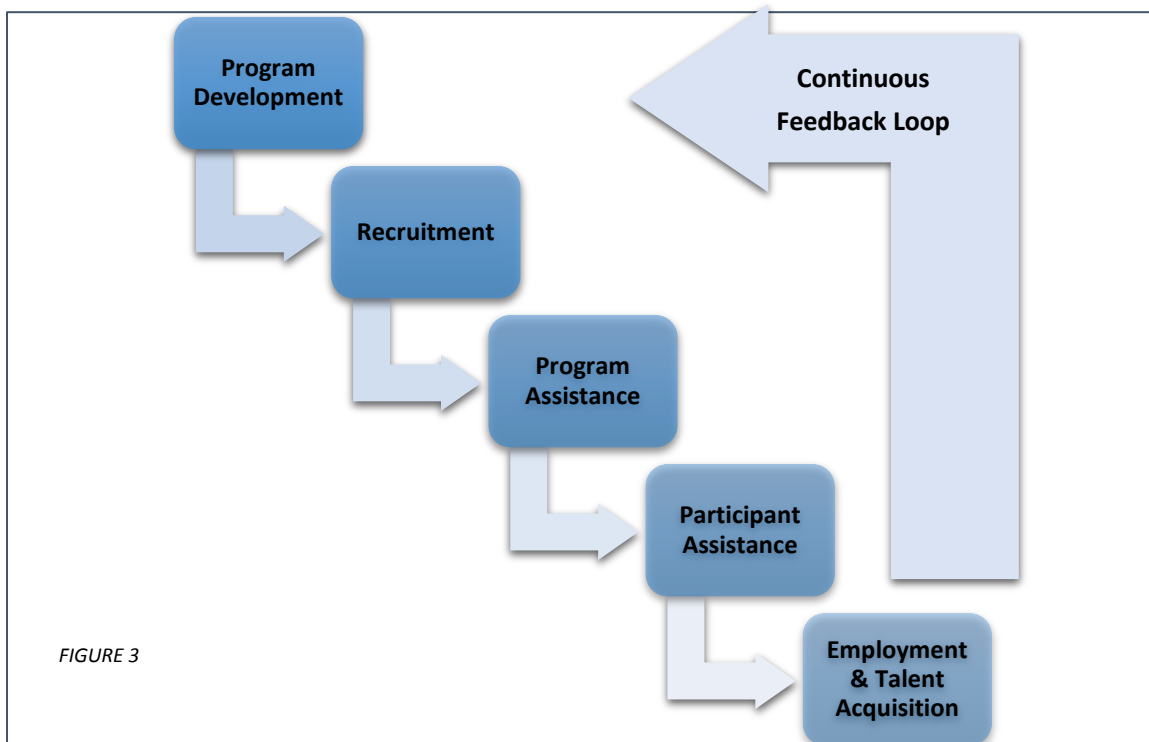


FIGURE 3

Employer needs and cultures are not all the same, nor are college cultures and organizational processes. Thus the model presented in Figure 3 is meant to serve as a general approach and one would expect individual colleges and employers to implement the model in a manner which best their needs. Further evidence of the need for a customized approach is presented in Figure 9 on page 5.

Employer participation in developing, designing and re-designing programs of study generally followed the categories listed in Figure 4. In general, both colleges and employers paid attention to the context of the regional economy, State mandated curriculum, local labor market, and national policies including health care reform. Examples of

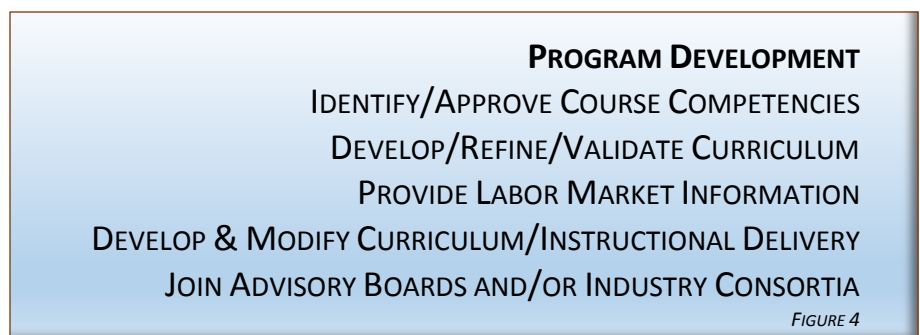
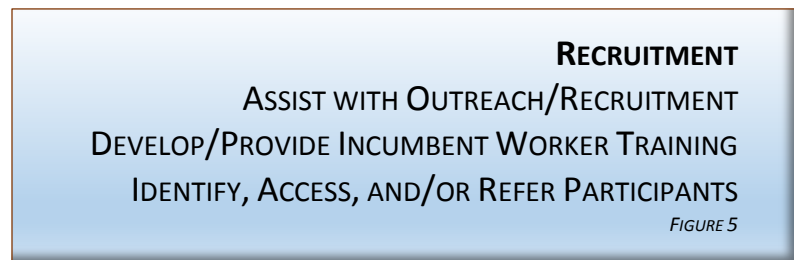


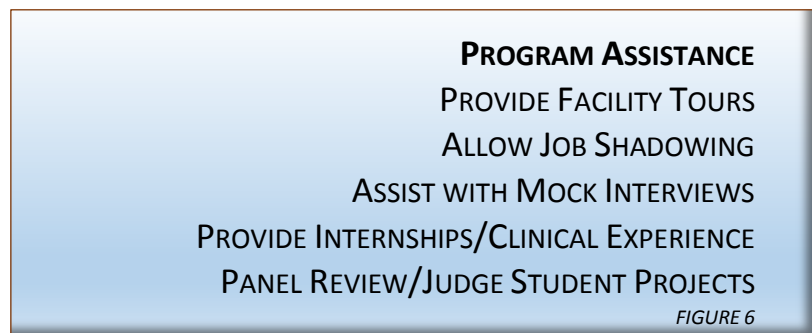
FIGURE 4

employer involvement in program development are found in the Industry Specific Consortia developed by Metropolitan, Mineral Area, Ozarks Technical, and Jefferson community colleges.

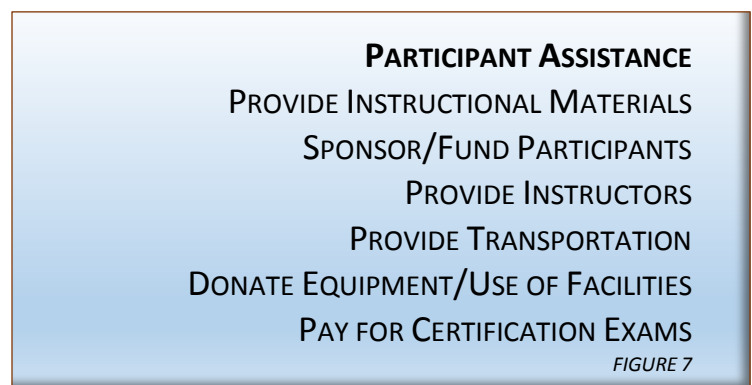
Figure 5 identifies the various methods employers assisted colleges in recruiting participants for the MoWInS projects. The collaboration between St. Charles Community College and the auto industry one example of pre-employment training where employees were hired with the provision that they complete training provided by a team of employer and St. Charles instructors.



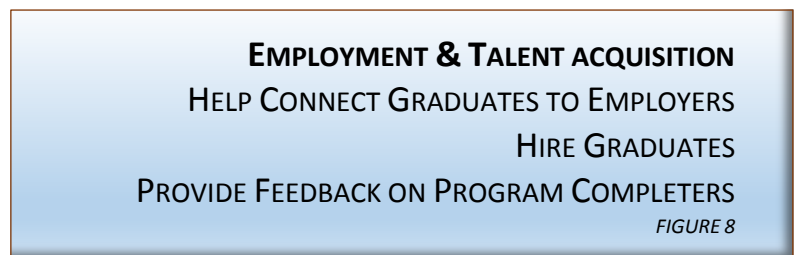
Employer engagement continued to develop and evolve with programs of study. Employer participation in soft-skill development and enriching participants' experience is outlined in Figure 6. Many of the MoHealthWInS programs require clinical rotations. Colleges used the grant as a vehicle to expand their relationships with employers and to develop new relationships as they worked together to monitor participants through clinicals. In MoManufacturingWInS, the CIMM program at Metropolitan Community College includes a paid internship with members of the industry consortium.



Employers also provided colleges and participants with substantive assistance as outlined in Figure 7. Nearly all of the colleges hired adjunct faculty from local industry. Particularly in rural areas, colleges did not have full-time teaching faculty to cover increased capacity. Many times, the instructors who came from industry served as conduits for information exchange between industry and the colleges. As a result, several colleges were able to more quickly adjust curriculum to meet workforce needs.



Employers also hired program completers and provided on-going feedback to colleges regarding strategies to improve and adapt programs and instructional modes that would enrich the participants' experiences.



# Where Colleges and Employers Meet



FIGURE 9

### **What Have Missouri Colleges and Employers Learned?**

Relationship building and partnership development are the keys to employer engagement. As with any relationship/partnership, it is important to identify and cultivate activities that are beneficial to both parties. MoWINS member institutions and employers recognize that both formal and informal relationships are required to ensure that expectations from both sectors are clearly defined and met. Formal relationships are defined as written agreements that include Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) that detail both parties' roles and responsibilities. Informal relationships are those that emerge during engagement and often aid in strengthening partnerships. Campus leaders identified the following areas as key lessons learned which can aid in the development of formal and informal partnerships.

1. Passionate advocates at both employer partners and college are needed.
2. College need to demonstrate that they are listening to employers.
3. Program completers are successful employees at partner organizations.
4. Be Patient, yet persistent. Partnership building takes time.
5. Use existing contacts and relationships as a basis for new partnerships.
6. Start early.
7. Leverage community, chamber, and economic development relationships to build engagement.
8. Treat employers like customers; be responsive.
9. Create a culture of collaboration within the college and between the college and industry /community partners.
10. Recognize the importance of knowledge management. Colleges must maintain and share information across the institution.

### **Where Do We Go From Here: Suggestions for Scaling**

As Missouri's community colleges continue to pursue greater employer engagement, they are encouraged to keep the following concepts at the forefront of such efforts.

- Employer Engagement efforts should be organization-wide.
- Responsiveness is a central feature of increased engagement.
- Employer Engagement should be on-going.
- Employer Engagement should be mutually beneficial to employers and colleges.

To continue to share best practices and support institutional and statewide scaling efforts related to employer engagement, MoWINS colleges should seek opportunities to sustain and scale the best practices within their institutions and MCCA should create an Statewide Employer Engagement Taskforce/Network consisting of representatives from colleges, MoWINS programs, business/industry/labor, statewide education leaders (DHE and DESE) and other interested key community partners.